The Doctrine of Conversion

Cases of Fake Conversion

- Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed (Acts 8:13).
- Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. (Acts 8:22).
- Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people … for he himself knew what was in man (John 2:23-25).
- Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away (Mark 4:5-6).
- By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (1Tim 1:19-20).
- For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica (2Tim 4:10).
- For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Heb 6:4-6).
- They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us (1John 2:19).
- ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’ (Mt 7:21).

Definition of Conversion (Repentance + Faith = Conversion)

Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation. The word conversion itself means ‘turning’—it is a turning from sin to Christ. The turning from sin is called ‘repentance’ and the turning to Christ is called ‘faith.’

Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.

(a) For genuine repentance there has to be an intellectual assent that sin is wrong and that you have sinned. ‘David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord’” (2 Sam 12:13).
(b) For genuine repentance to take place there has to be an emotional response of sorrow for sin and hatred of sin. ‘As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death’ (2Cor 7:9-10).
(c) You must make a personal decision to actively turn from it in your actions. ‘And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver’ (Acts 19:19).

Faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God

(a) For genuine faith there has to be an intellectual assent to certain facts of who Christ is and what he has done. ‘How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?’ (Rom 10:14)
(b) For genuine faith knowledge and intellectual assent are not enough. ‘You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!’ (James 2:19)
(c) For genuine faith I must decide to depend on Jesus alone to save me personally. ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in [εἰς into] him should not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16).
The following are eight essential characteristics of true biblical repentance:

• change of mind
• sorrow for sin
• personal acknowledgment and confession of sin
• turning away from sin
• renunciation of self-righteousness or good works
• turning to God
• practical obedience
• continuing and deepening work of repentance

Repentance, therefore, involves a radical change in a person’s perception of things or in his view of reality. In the Scriptures, this change of mind is never confined to the intellect but has an equally radical effect on the emotions and will. In summary, genuine repentance begins with a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the sinner, whereby He regenerates the heart, illumines the mind, and exposes error by a revelation of divine truth. Because of this divine work, the sinner’s mind is changed and his view of reality is radically altered—especially with regard to God, self, sin, and the way of salvation.

The Scriptures teach that prior to conversion, a man is darkened in his understanding and walks in the futility of his mind. Furthermore, his mind is hostile toward God, suppresses the truth of God, and cannot subject itself to the law of God. Consequently, the unconverted person has a completely distorted view of reality, and it is not an exaggeration to say that he is wrong about everything that truly matters. He knows something of the one true God and His majesty, but he does not think it necessary to honour Him as God or give thanks. He is filled with self and sees the promotion of self as the end of all things. The laws of God are written on his heart, but he does not think it necessary or advantageous to follow their dictates. Instead, he fights against his conscience and seeks to suppress what he knows to be true. He knows that all who commit evil deeds are worthy of death, but he does not think it necessary to fear. He not only does the same things but also gives hearty approval to those who practice them. His own mortality confronts him as death swallows up everyone around him, but he does not think the plague will ever reach his doorstep. To put it simply, the unconverted person is wrong and yet arrogantly continues to do what is right in his own eyes. He is on a way that seems right to him, but its end is the way of death.

However, at the moment of conversion, the Spirit of God regenerates a person’s heart, and the truth enlightens his darkened mind. Then, as a blind man given sight or a sleeper awakened from a dream, he is made aware that his entire life has been governed by his own delusions and that he has been wrong about everything. For the first time in his life, he sees and acknowledges what is true. His wrong and even blasphemous thoughts about God are replaced by a meagre yet accurate understanding of the one true God. His vain opinions of his own virtue and merit are replaced by an awareness of the depravity of his nature and the utter wretchedness of his deeds. His arrogance, self-confidence, and independence are replaced by genuine humility, mistrust of self, brokenness over sin, and dependence upon God, to whom he looks for pardon. He then casts himself upon the mercies of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ and sets himself to doing the will of God. Thus, his mind has been changed and his life transformed. He has repented.