Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Conversion is defined as the process of changing something from one thing to another. And so, caterpillars convert into butterflies. And that’s stunning to watch, isn’t it, boys and girls! And there are companies that specialise in converting left hand drive cars into right hand drive cars. The steering wheel, the pedals, the dashboard, and lots of wires and hoses have to be changed for the full conversion to be complete.

Well our topic this afternoon is conversion as it relates to us humans. The Bible describes conversion as a process whereby the spiritual condition of a human being is changed from one thing into another. And there are two parts to this conversion:

1. The first part is what is called **initial** conversion. Jesus spoke about this as ‘being born again by the Holy Spirit.’ It is the moment that a person first repents and believes. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*.”
   1. Now, some can identify the exact date that this happened for them, while others cannot pinpoint an exact moment, which is fine, but there was a moment when every believer was converted.
2. But everyone here today who has experienced this initial conversion, who is a believer, will know that they did not become instantly perfect and sin free. What happens instead is that the lifelong process of being made holy begins. And one way to describe this process is *daily* conversion; each day we must turn away from sin and toward good. And that is what we are going to focus on today – daily conversion.

And our approach to this topic will be a little different than usual. One of the parts of sermons that we all like is **illustrations**. When we hear an example or a story that illustrates the point being made, it can really help us to understand the point.

1. So what we are going to do today is to begin with our text. And it is a simple text; it won’t take long for it to be explained.
2. Then we are going to read our Lord’s Day and we will see that it basically repeats our text; it uses the same language as we see in Colossians 3.
3. And once we have done that, we will look at two illustrations from Scripture – an Old Testament illustration and a New Testament illustration – to help us see daily conversion in action.

And hopefully all of that will help each of us to assess our own understanding of and commitment to daily conversion.

1. So let’s begin by reading **Colossians 3:1-17**.
   1. Now, notice that verse 1 is addressed to people who “*have been raised with Christ*.” These are those who have gone through initial conversion. They *are* new creations. They *have been* united with Jesus Christ. They *have* the forgiveness of sins. They *have* eternal life. And they also *have* the Spirit of Christ living within them.
      1. And this is really important, because everything that follows can only be done by those who have the Holy Spirit living within them. It is the Spirit who converts a person by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.
      2. This is why **Galatians 5** will use expressions like keep in step with the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, walk with the Spirit, live by the Spirit. It is a Spirit-led process.
   2. But this is **not something we are passive in**; something that just happens to us without any effort on our part. And we see this with the **second half of verse 1**: “*Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*.” So this is what we are to do. So what does this look like?
      1. Well, there once was a little boy who had been told by his mother to come inside and to help with some chores. But it was a sunny day and he was lying outside on the lawn, watching the clouds roll by. So after a while, his Mum went out to him and said to him, “What do you think you are doing?” And he replied, “I am setting my mind on things above.” But while that sounds holy, it is not what verses 1-3 are about; they are not a command to lie back & look up at the sky ☺
      2. The way we set our minds on things above is described down in verse 16: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*.” And the word of Christ is the Bible. So we listen to sermons, we participate in Bible studies, we read the Bible at home, praying always for understanding, and we consciously choose to think about what the word of Christ says about every aspect of our lives. This is what setting your mind on things above looks like. And that is because the word of Christ is what the Holy Spirit uses to convert us.
   3. But from **verse 5** onwards, we see what we are to do with what we read in God’s word. And there are two parts to the process of daily conversion:
      1. First: “***Put to death*** *therefore what is earthly in you* …”
         1. And this language makes clear that this is a serious business.
            1. It’s not particularly pleasant to talk about, but perhaps you have seen movies or documentaries where an animal like a bear or a tiger sees a hunter and starts racing toward them. And the hunter knows that he better have his rifle loaded, with big enough ammunition, and a good aim, because if he gets any of this wrong, he will die and not the bear or the tiger.
            2. One old time preacher named **John Owen** said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” Those are the only two options. You cannot play around with sin; it must be put to death.
         2. And the sorts of things that must be put to death are “*sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*.” And there are many lists like this in the New Testament letters.
         3. And in **verse 7**, Paul says, “*In these you too once walked, when you were living in the*m.” So before initial conversion, these behaviours and desires are the default; they are how a person naturally functions when they do not have the Holy Spirit living within them.
         4. And Paul adds “*anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk*” and lying “*to one another*” to the list. These are more things that must be put to death.
      2. But then in **verse 10**, we see the second part of daily conversion: “***Put on the new self****, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*.” Ephesians 4 uses the same language: “*Put off your old self … and … put on the new self.*”
         1. And these are **not two separate activities**; you can’t do one week of putting to death and then one week of putting on. In fact, the way you put to death is by putting on!
            1. It is not a perfect illustration, but one of my **skin cancer spots** is going to be put off when my name gets to the top of the waiting list. It will just be sliced off. But this other one was dealt with by me putting on a cream, every second day, for about two months. But as I put on that cream, the skin cancer disappeared. And it is gone!
            2. Or think of the **caterpillar-butterfly illustration** of conversion that we used at the beginning of the sermon. Is it becoming a butterfly or is it stopping being a caterpillar? It’s both, isn’t it.
            3. And in the same way, we put to death what is evil by putting on what is good.
         2. And what this looks like is further explained in **verse 12**: “*Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved*, *compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another … forgiving each other … love …* [and] *the peace of Christ*.”
            1. Sometimes when I wake up and it is dark and I still feel tired, the thought of getting dressed is tiring. It would be really nice if the clothes just flew out of the cupboard and wrapped themselves around me, all by themselves. But that hasn’t happened yet. I have to put my clothes on.
            2. And in the same way, no one becomes less angry or less sexually immoral and more patient or more compassionate without effort. You have to work at putting on your new self.
         3. And as we said earlier, this happens as we “*let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly,*” and as we “*teach and admonish each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*.” So as part of a church family, in worship, in Bible study, and in our private devotions, the Holy Spirit will use the Bible to convert us every day. As we hear it and read it, He will reveal godly ways of thinking and speaking and behaving to us. And as we try to put them into practice, always wrapped up in prayer, it will help us put to death ungodly ways of thinking and speaking and behaving.

So daily conversion is us putting to death the old self and putting on the new self. And this happens as the Spirit of Christ uses the word of Christ to convert us. This is how he makes us more like Christ.

1. Well, with that in mind, let’s now read **Lord’s Day 33**.
   1. It really is Colossians 3 summarized, isn’t it! It uses the same language/same ideas, expressed simply and clearly. So genuine repentance or conversion is putting to death – being genuinely sorry for sin, hating it more and more, and running away from it – and putting on – “a wholehearted joy in God through Christ, and a delight to do every kind of good.”
2. So let’s finish with **two illustrations** of daily conversion from the Bible.
   1. And our first one comes from **2 Chronicles 34** (p. 384).
      1. And some of you boys and girls will know this story well and like it because it is about a very young king! Look at **verse 1**: “*Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left*.” So that is the summary of Josiah’s life; he was a godly king.
      2. Let’s continue: “*For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images.*” So at just 16 years of age, Josiah wanted to serve the Lord faithfully. And four years later, at age 20, he began a program of removing all idolatry in Israel, which is described in verses 3-7! It is quite incredible.
      3. And alongside this putting off of what is evil, as we come to **verse 8**, we see Josiah, who is now 26 years old, putting on what is good. And we see this in that he ordered the repair of the temple. Because money and material had been going to the idol temples, the temple of the Lord had been neglected. So Josiah began a massive renovation project. Removing false worship was not enough; true worship needed to be restored.
      4. Now, we could read on as there are more instances of ‘daily conversion’ as the account of Josiah’s reign continues. But what we have seen from this very young believer already is a good illustration of what it means to put off what is evil and to put on what is good.
      5. Sadly though, Josiah himself was not perfect. And he two kings before him were wicked men and the four kings after him were wicked men. So before anything else, Josiah points us to Jesus as the great and perfect King that we need. It is only Jesus who can truly convert the hearts of people.
   2. So let’s turn to our New Testament illustration of daily conversion, which we find in **Acts 19** (p. 928).
      1. I will summarize verses 1-16.
         1. As the chapter begins, we are told that Paul came to Ephesus.
         2. And in **verses 2-7** we read an account of initial conversion; Paul preached the gospel and 12 men repented and believe.
         3. And for the next two years Paul remained and preached in Ephesus, and both Jews and Greeks were converted, as we see in **verse 10**.
         4. And then in **verses 11-16** there is an account of many miraculous healings. And some Jewish exorcists who were watching this noticed that the Apostles healed these people in the name of Jesus. So the Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of Jesus on those who were possessed by evil spirits. But the exorcists did not have faith; they used Jesus’ name as just another magic formula. And **verse 16** explains that the result was that one demon possessed man beat them up!
      2. Well, this made a *huge* impression on the locals and on the believers. Look at **verse 17**: “*And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.*
      3. But it also made a huge impression on **those who were already believers**! Look at verse 18: “*Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices*.”
         1. So this encounter with the power of Jesus’ name and healings and demon possession made it clear to them that sin was not something to be enjoyed alongside following Jesus. They were put off what was evil. They were genuinely sorry for sin, and to hate it more and more, and to be eager to run away from their sin. And it seems it led to a public confession of sin as people acknowledged sins that they had been clinging on to.
         2. And we see one particular example of this in **verse 19**: “*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*.”
            1. In Greek it is **50,000** drachmas. And one drachma was the daily wage. So if we take $45,000 as an average income, that amounts to $123 per day. And 123 times 50,000 = $6.15 million worth of books in today’s money!
            2. And in a few minutes, it all went up in smoke! But this type of costly and drastic action was what these believers now recognized was necessary to put to death what is earthly.

And so, by way of conclusion, boys and girls, young people, middle-aged, and seniors, as believers, as new creations, as sons and daughters of God, as those in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells, are you committed to daily conversion?

* Are there things that you need to confess and divulge?
  + Jesus said, “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*.” For any and every sin, there is forgiveness in Jesus. Go to Him in confession and you shall find rest for your souls!
  + But it may also be that we need to confess sin to someone else. Some believers are able to put a particular sin to death, such as alcoholism, or a pornography or drug or food addiction, or losing their temper, by the Spirit, instantly and comprehensively. But most need the help of fellow believers. Most will benefit from having another believer who knows their struggle and who can give encouragement and pray for them and hold them accountable. And my friend, you are not weak if you ask someone to help you – God has placed you in a community of recovering sinners, which is what we all are! You are just inviting someone to walk with you as you walk with the Spirit.
* And what about putting to death what is earthly? Are there things or behaviours or desires in your life that need to be torn down or ripped out or burned? Remember John Owen’s words: “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” Don’t fool around with sin. Put it to death.
* And are you putting on the new self? Are you letting “*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*”? Are you making the most of word input opportunities in church and at home, which is what the Holy Spirit uses to convert us? Are you delighting to do every kind of God that God wants you to do?

And none of us should see this as a burden! Back in our Colossians passage, it says that believers “*have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*.” Daily conversion is the process whereby the Holy Spirit is making us more and more like Jesus. Is it hard? Yes. Will we stumble along the way? Yes. But you know the promise of Jesus: His grace is sufficient for you. His power is made perfect in your weakness! Praise the Lord that you have the opportunity to be the Holy Spirit’s very junior partner in the work of daily conversion. Amen.