

The Versus Series - Part 1

Conversion Vs. Salvation

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord..." —Acts 3:19

These two words are closely related synonyms, but in a biblical context have subtle differences in meaning. Our Acts 3:19 text reveals the premise of both words. This word study may seem a little academic, but there are important spiritual principles to glean from it. I'll start with this statement: I often hear a person say, "I think I'm saved, but I'm not sure." So, our first takeaway is that there are many people who have been converted but have not been truly saved. That is a strong, even controversial statement, but please follow with me as I explain.

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." —Matthew 18:3

Conversion: To convert something is to change it from one character or type to another. Biblical conversion is the initial response to the calling God puts in every heart, as well as the determination to "deal with" the conviction of sin brought through the Holy Spirit. By the way, God is the only one who can guide a person through the process of conversion; He is always working to draw a person to Himself; we can say "yes" to Him, but we cannot convert ourselves. However, we are still accountable to answer His call by yielding and surrendering our will.

Here is the crux and another polarizing statement: A person cannot be truly converted unless there is a realization that sin is a barrier separating him or her from God. Many good people skirt the sin issue and think they are converted but are not—if your sin does not "move" you to the cross with godly sorrow, then how can you have a change of heart about it or *why would you need to have a change of heart about it?* This question is at the very center of genuine, scripture-based conversion and salvation. In other words, you become "converted" when you make an about-face and answer God's call to come to Him so He can save you from your sin problem.

"For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death." —2 Corinthians 7:10

Usually, there is a lot going on in the mind and heart of a person as he or she is being drawn by the Lord, while weighing his or her sin predicament. That is why some call this time a "gestation" period because it can take months or years to come to the realization that sin is a barrier to knowing God and to acknowledge that he or she "needs" God to save them. In the end, this change of mind and direction, coupled with surrender, defines another biblical concept called repentance.

Here is the "good news." Coming face to face with the sin in our lives sets up the most momentous event any human can experience. When we admit our helplessness apart from Jesus, we are ready to surrender our will and embrace Him as Savior and Lord. Godly sorrow for our sins creates humility, enabling us to confess our sin and turn away from it. Conversion is manifested as we continue to seek His ways, creating an entirely new perspective. Put differently, when we are truly converted, we grow to a place where we hate sin and the destruction it brings to ourselves and others. This is the good news that tells us how God exchanges our old sin nature to the new nature that Christ provides. 2 Corinthians defines conversion this way, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

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“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (sozo).” —Romans 10:13



Salvation: The term Salvation embodies the result of conversion—you cannot experience salvation unless you have been converted. When you study the scriptures concerning salvation, you will see an interesting truth about the full meaning of salvation—it’s an overarching, ongoing and all-encompassing phenomenon. Make note each time you read about salvation and you will find references explaining that those who are “in Christ” (1) *are saved*, (2) *are being saved* and (3) *will be saved*.

The Bible uses the term “saved” or “salvation” to describe the entirety of God’s desire to heal our brokenness. We know this because the English word “saved” is translated from the Greek word *sozo* (pronounced, *sode-zo*). Many times, Jesus used the word *sozo* when speaking to a person He had healed, “*Your faith has made you whole.*” When we receive Jesus as our Lord, the only hope of salvation, we are “saved” and step into God’s design for wholeness. Therefore, *sozo* defines God’s desire to rescue “whosoever will” to walk in wholeness, so he or she can diligently pursue Him higher, ever higher. According to Scripture, that diligent pursuit leads each person directly into the unique plan and purpose that God has for him or her. *Sozo* tells us that Jesus came to set us free to be whom God designed us and calls us to be.

To summarize: The Greek word *sozo* is all-encompassing, meaning that God not only wants to rescue us from our sin problem, but He wants to restore us and make us whole. In other words, *sozo* means much more than just being converted. *Sozo* says that we are redeemed, progressively healed (in mind, emotions and body), restored and secured for eternal salvation. *Sozo* defines the abundant life that Jesus came to give us. John 10:10 says it this way, “*The thief’s [Satan] purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My [Jesus] purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*”

Sozo tells us that God doesn’t just offer to save us and then leave us alone to wander around directionless. From a biblical perspective, God ultimately wants to restore us to the former glory that Adam enjoyed with Him before the fall. When we are adopted by God through conversion and salvation, and then submit to His restoration process, the Bible refers to this as being made complete in Him.

Why is *sozo* so important? Because Satan wants us in a spiral of misery and defeat. However, 1 John 3:8 tells us “*The Son of God entered the scene to abolish the Devil’s ways.*” God says that He came to give us Life by seeking and saving the lost. Luke 4:18 describes how Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted and set the captives free. Jesus came to give us His abundant life through *sozo*. —Ω

 Information and Revelation
 Transformation

Heavenly Father, thank You for drawing me, guiding me and loving me into a relationship with You. Thank You for helping me come to my senses by seeing my sin for what it is—a barrier that separates us! Thank You for instilling in me a life-giving perspective that sees Your goodness and mercy and sees sin for what it is—sin wants to destroy me and people, especially the people I love. Because of Your love, You rescued me from sin and the hold it had on me, now I can live for You and dwell in Your house forever. In Jesus, I have become a new creation where the old things have passed away and I am a new creation in Christ.

*Thank You for saving me and securing me with a future and a hope of restoration, so I can become complete to walk in fullness and step into the destiny You have uniquely prepared for me. LORD, I submit to Your plans as You bring me ever closer to You, knowing that Your salvation in an ongoing process where I am being continually saved even to the very end. LORD, help me yield to Your hand as You desire to shape me and mold me through restoration to be made complete in You. I so much want to glorify You by showing forth Your goodness by being an instrument in Your hands to show forth Your life to the people I know and meet. Help me shed abroad the abundant life You came to give us through *sozo*. —I receive Your peace that You provide for me. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

By *David E. McFadden*, excerpted from, “*Whosoever Will*,” a Deeper Life Series tribute to Charles H. Spurgeon.