

Regeneration vs. Conversion

This essay is taken from a letter that was written to a friend explaining the difference between regeneration and conversion.

In this letter, I am going to focus on the topic of regeneration and conversion and how they are related. The following is a list of the points that I want to bring forth. I decided to number them so that I can make my points and build on them. I will just list them first and then do my best to prove each one with scripture. What I intend to do in this letter is:

- 1) Define the terms: what do the terms “conversion”, “regeneration”, and their synonyms mean?
- 2) Show how the Bible defines regeneration and what it says about it.
- 3) Show how the Bible defines conversion and what it says about it.
- 4) Show that regeneration and conversion do not necessarily happen at the same time or sometimes not even close to the same time.
- 5) Show that a person can be regenerate and converted, but afterwards fall into unbelief and become de-converted and unbelieving, but remain regenerate.
- 6) Show that based on points 4 and 5, it is possible for a regenerate person to not believe the gospel and not be converted.

Even if you don't agree with some or all of the points listed above, I hope that you will at least read my arguments for each of them. Here we go...

1) Defining the terms (All definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary).

Regeneration - 1. a. The action of regenerating; the process or fact of being regenerated; re-creation, re-formation, etc.

Regenerate - 1. a. *trans.* In religious use: To cause to be born again in a spiritual sense; to invest with a new and higher spiritual nature. Also *refl.*

Born-again - 1. Of, pertaining to, or characterized by (an experience of) new birth in Christ or spiritual renewal; of a Christian: placing special emphasis on this experience as a basis for all one's actions, evangelical.

Quicken *v* - 1. a. To give or restore life to; to make alive; to vivify or revive; to animate (as the soul the body).

Conversion- I. Turning in position, direction, destination. 1. The action of turning round or revolving; revolution, rotation.

Convert *v.* - I. To turn in position or direction. 1. a. *trans.* To turn (a thing or oneself) about, to give a different (or specific) direction to. *refl.* = To turn (*intr.*).

2) What the Bible has to say about regeneration

Now that we have the definitions in front of us, we can see that the terms “regeneration” and “conversion” are not synonymous. To be regenerated, born again, and quickened are three terms the Bible uses for the same thing: the act of God when he causes the spirit of a man to pass from death unto life. The Bible describes man in his natural state as spiritually dead:

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;" (Col 2:13)

"And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" (Eph 2:1)

"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)" (Eph 2:5)

When the Bible says that men are by nature dead in sins, it means that they are just that: dead.

Dead - 1. That has ceased to live; deprived of life; in that state in which the vital functions and powers have come to an end, and are incapable of being restored: a. of men and animals.

Since man is spiritually dead in sin *by nature* (Eph 2:3), having inherited Adam's sin nature (Rom 5:12-19), and having absolutely no power within themselves to restore themselves to spiritual life, God has to quicken (make alive) their spirits (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13) and invest them with a new spiritual nature. This act of God is referred to as “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost” in Tit 3:5. As the definitions have shown, this is also called being born again or being born of the Spirit (Joh 3:3-8), for, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing” (Joh 6:63). The act of regenerating a person is completely and wholly the work of the Spirit of God; man's will, resolve, faith, works, or anything else has no bearing on it whatsoever. The reason for this is because the natural man, otherwise called the carnal man, is spiritually dead at the time the Spirit quickens him, and therefore incapable of doing anything including seeking after God (Rom 3:11), fearing God (Rom 3:18), being subject to the law of God (Rom 8:7), pleasing God (Rom 8:8), hearing the word of God (Joh 8:47), believing the gospel (Joh 10:26), or understanding the gospel and the things of the Spirit of God (1Co 1:18; 2:14).

The natural man has as much to do with being regenerated, born again, or quickened as Lazarus did in coming back to life from the grave. Lazarus was brought from physical death to physical life by the same exact means as spiritually dead sinners are brought from spiritual death to spiritual life: by the voice of the Son of God. Remember that

Lazarus was resurrected from the dead by Jesus simply using His voice to call Lazarus back to life, “And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. 44) And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” (Joh 11:43-44). It is by the same means that a person is brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (Joh 5:25). Just as Lazarus passively came back to life at the voice of Jesus Christ, so do those who are dead in trespasses and sins when they are called to spiritual life by the voice of Jesus Christ. This verse is not talking about the resurrection of the body, but rather of the spirit; the resurrection of the body is spoken of a few verses later in (Joh 5:28-29). This verse is also not referring to *the gospel* (the written or preached word of Jesus Christ) which is covered in Joh 5:24, but is rather speaking of *the voice* of Jesus Christ. The dead in verse 25 *shall hear* Jesus' voice and they *shall live* -- this cannot be said of the gospel, but it can be said of the effectual call by the voice of Jesus Christ which causes the spiritually dead to live.

In summary, notice the characteristics of regeneration: 1) God is the sole operator and cause of it, 2) the sinner is totally passive in the act and his will, faith, obedience, or cognizance of it play no part in it, and 3) it is a one-time and instantaneous occurrence, not a process.

3) What the Bible has to say about conversion

Unlike regeneration, which is a one-time and instantaneous action that is accomplished by the act and will of God alone, apart from the sinners will or works, conversion is a process in which a sinner turns in position and direction, turns from a life of unbelief and sin to a life of belief and keeping the commandments of Jesus Christ and being added to a church.

The word “conversion” is actually only used once in the entire Bible, that being in Act 15:3 -- “And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” By looking back though the previous chapters of the book of Acts, we will be able to see just exactly what the conversion of the Gentiles consisted of. The conversion of the Gentiles spoken of in Acts 15:3 refers to the Gentiles who were converted by the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, in Acts 13 and 14 in Antioch in Pisidia (Act 13:14), in Iconium (Act 14:1), and in Lystra (Act 14:6), since it was they (Barnabas and Paul) who were declaring it to the brethren in Phenice and Samaria; but in this group we can also include Cornelius and his family, who were the first Gentiles to be converted in Acts 10. Since this is the only place the word “conversion” is used in the Bible and it is used to describe what happened to specific groups of Gentiles, the account of which is given in detail in the previous chapters, we simply need to examine what the Bible says happened to those Gentiles, and we can see what conversion is according to the scripture.

Let's start with Cornelius in Acts 10, who was the first Gentile to whom the gospel was taken. I will save going into too much detail about the conversion of Cornelius until the next section (#4). For now, let's look at the things that were part of the conversion of Cornelius and his house. As you know, Cornelius was a Roman centurion (Act 10:1), who was of course a Gentile. He had a vision where an angel told him to send for a man named Peter to tell him what he should do (Act 10:3-6). Peter ends up coming to his house and preaching the gospel to them (Act 10:34-43), after which time they repented (Act 11:18) and were baptized (Act 10:47-48). We know from comparing scripture with scripture that in order for one to be baptized, he must repent (Act 2:38) and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Act 8:36-38). So here we have the elements of their conversion: 1) receiving the word of God (Act 11:1), 2) repenting (Act 10:47-48 c/w Act 2:38; Act 11:18), and 3) being baptized (Act 10:47-48). From this we see that conversion includes hearing, believing, repenting, and being baptized.

Now let's look at the other examples of the conversion of the Gentiles, which is what Act 15:3 is specifically speaking of. In Act 13:14, Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch in Pisidia and went into the synagogue there and preached Jesus to the Jews. When the Jews left, the Gentiles wanted to hear more of the gospel on the next sabbath (Act 13:42). On the next sabbath day, nearly the whole city showed up to hear the word of God and when the Jews saw it, "they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Act 13:45). It was at that time that Paul said that he was turning to the Gentiles (Act 13:46), after which time we read that the Gentiles heard the word of God and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed (Act 13:48). Notice the elements involved in this second account of Gentiles being converted: 1) they heard the word of God and were glad (Act 13:48), and 2) they believed the gospel (Act 13:48). So here we see that conversion includes hearing, believing, and also being baptized and added to a church which will be proved in the next paragraph.

Next Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium and preached the gospel there and some Gentiles believed (Act 14:1). After that they went and preached the gospel in Lystra (Act 14:6), and after being stoned there and going to Derbe (Act 14:19-20), they went back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Act 14:21). What they did next is very important: they went back to those cities and, 1) confirmed the souls of the disciples (believers) to whom they had just previously preached (Act 14:22), 2) exhorted them to continue in the faith (Act 14:22), 3) told them they must though much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (the church) (Act 14:22), and 4) ordained elders in the churches that they had formed in those cities (Act 14:23). The fact that churches were started in those cities is the proof that the Gentiles who believed in those cities repented, were baptized, and were added to the church according to the pattern set forth in (Act 2:37-42,47) where the people who heard the word of God were pricked in their hearts, repented, believed the gospel, were baptized, and were added to the church the same day. So we see that the conversion of the Gentiles that Paul and Barnabas declared in Act 15:3 consisted of Gentiles hearing the word of God, repenting, believing the gospel, being baptized, and being added to the churches that were formed in those cities.

So we can see now from the testimony of the scriptures that regeneration is the one-time, instantaneous act of God causing a person to pass from spiritual death unto spiritual life, wherein the person is totally passive, his will or works playing no part in it. On the other hand, conversion is the process by which a person hears, believes, repents, is baptized, and is added to a church as we have seen from Acts 13-15. In conversion, the person is very involved in the process, and his will, submission, and works all play a role.

Now that we have seen the Bible's definition of regeneration and conversion, and that they are two different and distinct things, we will now look at the relationship that they have with each other.

4) Regeneration and conversion do not necessarily happen at the same time.

It is commonly believed that 1) God uses the gospel as the means of regenerating someone, or 2) that regeneration and conversion happen simultaneously -- that is, when God quickens a person, they instantaneously (or within a very short time) hear and believe the gospel. The idea in case number 1 would be that a person would be dead in trespasses and sins until they heard the gospel and believed it and at that instant the person would be regenerated by the Spirit of God, passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. In case number 2, a person would be dead in trespasses and sins and God in his providence would quicken the person just prior to them hearing the gospel so that they were able to hear, understand, and believe it, and they would without fail believe it.

There is a third case as well -- that being that God regenerates a person, putting a new spirit within him at some time prior to him hearing and believing the gospel, the timing of which is determined by God's sovereign will and could be as early as when a child is in his mother's womb, such as John the Baptist, of whom it was said, "he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luk 1:15). This case is the truth, which will be shown presently.

Case 1: Regeneration at the instant of belief.

Let's eliminate case number 1 right off the bat, that case being that God quickens someone at the instant they hear and believe the gospel. As was already shown in Section 2, a man who is dead in trespasses and sins cannot hear the gospel (Joh 8:47), nor understand the gospel (1Co 1:18; 1Co 2:14), nor believe the gospel (Joh 10:26-28), nor say that Jesus is Lord (1Co 12:3); so the idea that a man who is in a condition such as that could somehow hear, understand, and believe the gospel prior to God creating in him a new spirit is scripturally impossible.

In addition to that, the Bible teaches that if someone hears Jesus' word and believes on the Father who sent Him, he already has passed from death unto life before hearing and believing. Read Joh 5:24 carefully and pay close attention to the verb tenses. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that *heareth* my word, and *believeth* on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed* from death unto

life.” “Hearth” and “believeth” are present tense, meaning that the person is presently hearing and believing. “Hath” is also present tense, meaning that the person who presently hears and believes presently has everlasting life. “Is passed” is present-perfect tense, which describes an action that was completed in the past and the effect continues into the present. Putting this all together, Jesus was stating that if a person presently hears and presently believes, he already has passed from death unto life at some time prior to the present.

Another verse that says the same thing is 1Jo 5:1 -- “Whosoever *believeth* that Jesus is the Christ *is born* of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.” Once again the grammar of the verse teaches that if a person believeth (present tense) that Jesus is the Christ, he *is born* (passive voice past participle), of God (not *gets born* of God), meaning that a person who believes that Jesus is the Christ was already born of God at some point in the past prior to believing.

One more proof text to show that regeneration comes at some point prior to belief is 1Jo 4:15 -- “Whosoever *shall confess* that Jesus is the Son of God, God *dwelleth* in him, and he in God.” In this case it is even more obvious because *shall confess* is future tense and *dwelleth* is present tense, meaning that God already dwells in the person who will confess that Jesus is the Son of God at some time in the future. The fact that man in his natural state of death in trespasses in sins cannot hear with understanding, nor believe the gospel, along with the biblical proof texts that state that a person who believes the gospel already had eternal life prior to belief, proves that case number 1 (God regenerating a person at the instant they believe the gospel) is not true.

Case 2: Regeneration must occur nearly simultaneous with, or very shortly before, belief and conversion.

The belief that regeneration happens almost simultaneously with conversion, or very shortly before it, could be true in some instances; that is, it is biblically possible for God to quicken a person minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc. before they first hear the gospel and believe it. This belief is not in contradiction with the above cited verses that state that passing from death unto life (being born of God) happens before a person believes. The problem with this belief is when one holds that regeneration *must* occur almost simultaneously belief, or a very short time before it, because the Bible gives examples of people that were regenerated long before they believed and were converted.

Example 1: Cornelius

Based on what the Bible says about Cornelius prior to Peter preaching the gospel unto him, it is clear that Cornelius was a born-again, regenerate child of God before he ever heard the gospel. Consider what the Bible says about Cornelius in Act 10:2 -- it was said of him that he was, “A devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” First of all it says he was a devout man.

Devout - 1. Devoted to divine worship or service; solemn and reverential in religious exercises; pious, religious.

As the definition states, a devout man is a man who is devoted to the worship of God. Therefore, Cornelius was a man devoted to the worship of God, albeit he worshiped God in ignorance, not knowing of Jesus Christ, in whom “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9), and who is “God manifest in the flesh” (1Ti 3:16).

Secondly, we read that Cornelius was *one that feared God*. One of the characteristics of the natural, carnal, and spiritually dead men is that, “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18). If a man truly fears God, such as Cornelius did, then he has the evidence within himself that he is not a natural man under sin, but a man whom God has worked grace within.

Thirdly, it was said that Cornelius *prayed to God always*. The fact that Cornelius prayed to God always does not necessarily mean that he was a child of God, but God’s receptiveness of his prayers does. God heard Cornelius’ prayers favorably, which is evident from the message that God sent to him by an angel who told him, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God” (Act 10:4). The significance of this is that God does not hear the prayers of the wicked, but rather only of the righteous. Consider the following verses:

"The LORD *is* far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous." (Pro 15:29)

"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." (Joh 9:31)

"For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil." (1Pe 3:12)

"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer *shall be* abomination." (Pro 28:9)

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear." (Isa 59:2)

It should be abundantly clear that God does not hear the prayers of wicked people, but He does hear and answer the prayers of the righteous, which shows that Cornelius was a righteous man, even though he had not yet heard the gospel and been converted. The question could be posed, “How then did Cornelius become righteous”? Very simple: by the faith and the obedience *of* Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22 c/w Rom 5:19).

If the fact that Cornelius was a devout and God fearing man whose prayers God heard and answered is not enough proof that he was blood-bought child of God, then the

testimony of God himself should be. When Peter fell into the trance and saw a vision of a great sheet coming down from heaven with unclean animals on it, God told him to kill and eat, but Peter responded, "Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." (Act 10:14) The reply from heaven was, "What God hath cleansed, that call no thou common." (Act 10:15) God was not merely speaking of the Jewish dietary laws being reformed, but rather he was speaking of the Gentiles, and specifically of the one that Peter was soon to go and preach the gospel to, as is evident by Peter's words when he later said, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." (Act 10:28) Peter further proves that Cornelius was a righteous man who was accepted with God prior to hearing the gospel and being converted when he opened up his short sermon to them by saying, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35) But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Act 10:34-35) Cornelius had already at some point in his life experienced the new birth -- that "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit 3:5) which created in him a new spirit capable of fearing God and praying prayers that God heard and answered. All he lacked was knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ his Savior, which God so graciously supplied in time by sending a gospel minister to preach the gospel to him.

The idea that Cornelius was regenerate before ever hearing the gospel and being converted may sound new; and it would even be at odds with most forms of Calvinism which teach that belief and conversion occur simultaneously with regeneration; but John Calvin himself recognized the fact that Cornelius was indeed regenerate before hearing the gospel, as he indicated in the following quote from his famous book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

"The case of Paul we admit, but we hold that they are in error as to Cornelius; for it appears that he was already enlightened and regenerated, so that all which he wanted was a clear revelation of the Gospel."
(Institutes of the Christian Religion, B3.24.10:1)

Example 2: Gentiles who have the law written in their hearts

A second example of people who the Bible teaches were regenerate, but yet unconverted, are the Gentiles spoken of in Romans chapter two.

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15) Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;" (Rom 2:14-15)

As has been previously proved, men are sinners by nature as Paul so plainly states in Eph 2:1-3:

"And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (Eph 2:1-3)

Paul says that the description here given is, "the course (*the line along which anything runs or travels; the path or way taken by a moving body*) of this world" and that "we all had our conversation in times past" living this course by nature. This is a vivid description of the natural man under sin, who "is not subject to the law of God, neither can be" (Rom 8:7). If this is the condition of the natural man apart from grace, how then do these Gentiles that Paul refers to in Romans chapter two "which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law" (Rom 2:14)? It's obvious, in that Paul simply stated it, that these Gentiles had never heard the law of God, whether that be the Old Testament law, or the New Testament "perfect law of liberty" (Jam 1:25), but somehow they were doing the things contained in the law nevertheless. How could this be? The answer is in the text: they had the "law written in their hearts" (Rom 2:15). This is the very language of the new covenant that was brought in by the death of Jesus Christ:

"For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: 11) And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. 12) For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. 13) In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is* ready to vanish away." (Heb 8:10-13)

These Gentiles were the partakers of the new covenant, the covenant that God had made with His elect to take away their sins by the blood of Christ. These Gentiles no longer had the heart of stone that man has by nature, but rather a new heart of flesh of which the prophet Ezekiel spoke, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: 20) That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." (Eze 11:19-20) Notice how perfectly these Gentiles fit into this verse: God gave them a new spirit and a new heart of flesh, to the end that they would walk in his statutes and keep his ordinances. Although they had not the written law of Moses, nor had yet heard the gospel of Jesus Christ which would have given them a more perfect understanding of God, yet they had the law of God "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." (2Co 3:3)

Just like Cornelius, these Gentiles, having already been regenerated by the Spirit of God, needed only someone to come along and preach the gospel to them so that they could know their Lord that saved them. In the case of Cornelius, we know that God sent someone to preach the gospel to him; but as for these Gentiles in Romans chapter two, we don't know for certain if or when they heard the gospel, but we do know of a certainty that they were born-again, quickened, regenerate children of God, although yet unconverted. The Bible gives several other examples of such people, but these two examples will suffice. (See sermon series on [Unconverted Elect](#).)

Case 1 and 2 have been eliminated by the scripture, and by the same method, case 3 has been proven to be the truth: that being that God regenerates a person, putting a new spirit within him at some time prior to him hearing and believing the gospel, the timing of which is determined by God's sovereign will. This could possibly happen shortly before a person hears and believes the gospel and becomes converted, or it could happen as early as a short time after conception as was the case with John the Baptist (Luk 1:15). In scripture, the new birth is likened unto the wind blowing, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:8). Just like you can't actually see the wind blowing and you can't really tell where exactly it is coming from or where it is going, but you can see the *effects and evidence* of it when you see the leaves rustling in the trees, so is everyone that is born of the spirit: you can't pinpoint an exact time that a person was born again, but when you see the *effects and evidence* of it, such as belief and repentance, you can know that at some point in the past that person had been born of the Spirit.

5) A person can be regenerate and converted, but later fall into unbelief and still remain regenerate.

The idea of an elect, regenerate, believing child of God falling into unbelief, and even possibly dying in unbelief, does not sit well with most Arminians, and most Calvinists for that matter, but let's consider what the Bible has to say concerning this topic. Section 4 dealt with what has been termed by some as the "unconverted elect", meaning that a person can be one of God's elect, but not yet be converted as was Cornelius and the Gentiles who had not the law, but had the law written in their hearts. If a term had to be chosen for people who fit the criteria for Section 5, one might call them "de-converted elect", meaning that they were elect, regenerate, converted children of God, but due to sin fell back into their unconverted and unbelieving state, but yet remaining the regenerate elect of God all along.

Example 1: The Israelites who died in the wilderness in unbelief

Before getting started, let it be understood that not all the members of the nation of Israel in the days of the Old Testament, or at any time for that matter, were God's elect. The Bible is very clear that being a natural Jew, that is, a blood descendant of Abraham, does not mean that one is a child of God.

"Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7) Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8) That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." (Rom 9:6-8)

God had His elect among the Jews as well as the Gentiles (Rom 9:24), but only a portion, a remnant, were of the election of grace (Rom 9:27-29 c/w Rom 11:5).

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he uses the Israelites, whom God delivered from Egypt and who later died in the wilderness in unbelief, as an example and a warning to Christians that they be careful to not follow in their footsteps. Let's take a look at this passage and pay close attention to what is said of these Israelites.

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2) And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3) And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4) And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 5) But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 6) Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 7) Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 8) Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. 9) Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. 10) Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 11) Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1Co 10:1-11)

Notice some things about these Israelites: 1) first of all Paul calls them *our fathers*. Paul was a Jew, but the Corinthians were predominantly Gentiles, but yet Paul calls them *our fathers*, that is, fathers in the faith. 2) They ate the same *spiritual meat* and drank of the same *spiritual drink* of that *spiritual Rock...that was Christ*. This is not referring to the manna that God gave them from heaven, and to the water that God caused to come out of the rock to drink. The manna that fell from heaven was not spiritual, but rather of a carnal nature. Manna was one of the things that was kept in the ark of the covenant (Heb 9:4) which was part of the religion of the Old Testament, which is referred to as "carnal ordinances" (Heb 9:10). Jesus contrasted the bread that Moses gave Israel when they wandered in the wilderness with the true bread from heaven: Himself.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread

from heaven. 33) For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. 34) Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. 35) And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." (Joh 6:32-35)

Jesus made it very clear that they who eat that meat and drink that drink have eternal life.

"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55) For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56) He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57) As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. 58) This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." (Joh 6:54-58)

In light of Jesus' words in Joh 6:32-35, 53-58, it could not be more plain that these Israelites of whom Paul was writing in 1Co 10:1-11 were elect children of God who had eternal life. Notice what else was said of these people who were possessors of eternal life and who *by faith* passed through the Red sea (Heb 11:29): with many of them God was not well pleased (v.5), they lusted after evil things (v.6), they were idolaters (v.7), they were fornicators (v.8), they tempted Christ (v.9), and they were murmurers (v.10). These elect children of God who were in possession of eternal life died in the wilderness; and what is more, the Bible says that they died in unbelief, and specifically unbelief of the gospel. Read the following passage for the proof.

"For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17) But with whom was he grieved forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18) And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19) So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. 4:1) Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2) For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*." (Heb 3:16 - 4:2)

This passage could not be more clear: the children of Israel died in the wilderness because of unbelief, and yet, based upon the words of Jesus Christ and those written by the Apostle Paul, these (at least some of them) were children of God who were in possession of eternal life. These people were at one time regenerate believers, but they died as unbelieving rebels. Thanks be to God that His election is of grace and not our works, so much so that it is written, "For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? 4) God forbid..." (Rom 3:3-4) and, "If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." (2Ti 2:13) So strong and

unconditional is the love of God that nothing, not even the unbelief of a child of God, can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature (including ourselves), shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:38-39) Jesus gives his elect eternal life and they shall *never* perish: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (Joh 10:28)

Some would say that these Israelites were never children of God and that is why they died in the wilderness and never entered the promise land. Why then would Paul use them as an example to believing children of God in the church at Corinth? He used them as an example to show that elect children of God can fall into sin if they do not continually guard themselves; and if they do, there are sore temporal earthly punishments that follow, as happened to Israel. Those that think that these Israelites were not elect children of God because they did not enter into the promised land because of unbelief need to remember that Moses did not enter into the promise land because of unbelief either (Num 20:12), and yet we know that Moses is in glory (Luk 9:30-31).

Example 2: King Solomon

The Bible teaches that Solomon was a chosen (elect) child of God. God said to David, "Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him *to be* my son, and I will be his father." (1Ch 28:6) If a person is chosen in Christ to be a son of God, he will without fail end up glorified in heaven (Eph 1:4-5 c/w Rom 8:29-30); therefore, we know that Solomon is in heaven now. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us that in the end of his life outlandish women caused him to sin (Neh 13:26), and his wives turned his heart after other gods, "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father." (1Ki 11:4) This happened when he was old and the last thing that we read about Solomon was that he tried to kill Jeroboam and Jeroboam fled to Egypt until the death of Solomon (1Ki 11:40). Nowhere in the Bible do we read that Solomon ever repented before his death, and the implication is that he did not, yet we know that he was a chosen son of God and that he was a prophet who wrote several books of the Bible, and we know that one day we will "see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God" (Luk 13:28). Solomon was obviously converted in the earlier part of his life when God made him the wisest man that had ever lived and blessed him greatly, but in the end of his life he fell into unbelief and unconversion, notwithstanding, his unbelief could not nullify the faith of God who had covenanted to save him eternally.

6) Based on points 4 and 5, it has been proven that a person can be regenerate, but not converted.

As has been shown by several biblical examples, it is certainly possible for children of God to be regenerate, that is, born-again with a new spirit within and in possession of eternal life, and yet not be converted, either because 1) the gospel has yet to be preached to them, or 2) because the gospel was preached to them and they rejected it, as some of the elect portion of Israel did, of whom it is written, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. 29) For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Rom 11:28-29), or 3) because they fell into unbelief because of sin.

Admittedly, cases like the above mentioned are not the norm, but that doesn't mean they are not true. The importance of belief and repentance cannot be stressed enough, since the Bible certainly does stress them. The Bible does give examples of regenerate people that did not believe the gospel, and even regenerate people who died in unbelief and yet had eternal life, but what it does not give is the assurance to a person that if *they* reject the gospel and refuse to repent of their sins, that *they* are regenerate and one of the elect of God. The only evidence that a man has that he is a child of God is his faith and works: (Joh 5:24; 1Jo 5:1; Rom 2:7; Gal 5:22-25; 2Pe 1:5-11; 1Jo 2:29; 3:7; 3:24; 4:7, etc), so if a person wants to know that they are a child of God, and be in fellowship with God, they must do these things.