

Chapter 5

Four Recurring Questions of Conversion

Included in this study on conversion there must, by necessity, be an in-depth look at the hypothetical situations which are continually placed before believers. When the subject of evangelism or conversion comes up, either through a discussion of this topic or as a result of the actual process itself, there are basically four recurring themes with which the evangelist is faced.

1. “What about those who never hear?” This challenges the sovereignty and justice of God.
2. “What about those who are basically good?” This strikes at the heart of the righteousness of God and the sin nature of man.
3. “What about other religions?” This challenges the person of Christ and justice of God.
4. “What about infants and the mentally retarded?” This challenges both the goodness and moral integrity of God.

In the following study these four questions will be dealt with in the light of Scripture. In asking these questions, it is paramount, however, that we take caution to ask “What about...?” God in the context of what He is doing and not “What about...” in terms of questioning God’s moral integrity, motives, or the right to do as He pleases.

To crystallize this truth before continuing on in the study, fill in the following chart.

Verse	Key thought as pertains to man	Key thought as pertains to God
Nehemiah 9:33		
Daniel 9:7		
Daniel 9:14		
Romans 9:14-29		

Question 1 – “What about those who never hear?”

To begin with this question presupposes several unstated assumptions, all of which are false. To establish this, fill in the chart below.

Assumption	Biblical Truth	Key Thought
Man can exist outside the sovereign control of God.	Acts 17:24-28	
God is sovereign, yet indifferent to certain classes of mankind’s fate.	1 Timothy 2:3, 4	
If man does not evidence knowledge of the gospel, this is God’s failing and not man’s.	Romans 3:10-12 2 Samuel 14:14	
If man does not evidence knowledge of the gospel, we can presuppose that God has not acted on his behalf.	John 3:17-19 Romans 10:21	
Man, being basically good, would seek God if God would only reveal Himself in a valid and rational manner.	Romans 3:10-12	

How then are we to approach this issue? We must begin with biblical fact rather than fleshly or worldly assumptions.

Read Romans 1:18-32. In this passage, how does God justify His judgment of mankind?

To what degree or scope of mankind can Romans 1:18-32 be applied? Use Romans 3:9-11 in developing your argument.

Even though the rejection of God’s knowledge is universal, how will God judge those without the law – God – either in the present or distant past? Romans 2:11, 12

According to Romans 2:2, what can be said about the judgment of God?

What is the context of this passage – to whom is it referring?

Read Romans 2:12, 13.

What is the fate of those who sin without the law?

What is the fate of those who sinned under the law?

Will either be justified before God? Why?

What is the fate of both, then?

Read Romans 2:14-16.

What has God placed in all men?

What will occur as a result of this?

What, then, is the fate of mankind:

With the law?

Without the law?

Summarize the study up to this point, explaining from Scripture how God can justify the condemnation of mankind, keying on man's response to and attitude toward God.

God, however, does not rest with these results, and has loosed five agents upon mankind to undo them.

Passage	Agent	Purpose
John 16:8		
Romans 10:18		
Revelation 3:20		
Romans 1:19-21		
Hebrews 1:7		

Through these agents God exerts the will of His grace. How is this described in 2 Timothy 1:9?

It is at this point that man begins to respond. What is God's promise in Jeremiah 29:13 to those who respond?

Let us create, then, the order by which God may deal with mankind in even the most remote or difficult situation.

In Romans 1:19, 20 what stimulus is at God's disposal in even the most remote and primitive situation?

According to Acts 17:24-27 what is God's will for those who find themselves in this situation?

To accomplish this, God responds by sending His agents.

According to Jeremiah 29:11, is God prepared to do this? Why?

List now the five agents available to God which were discussed earlier in the study.

According to John 1:11-13, what is the next step which must be taken?

We have discovered now how one might come to God under any circumstances, given a sovereign and loving God. The chart below will be useful in illustrating how God used this process to draw men to Him as presented in the book of Acts.

Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:25-39

Steps	Verse and illustration in this man's life
1. Revelation through creation	
2. Begins to seek God?	
3. God provides agents.	a.
	b.
	c.
	d.
4. Man responds.	

Cornelius' Conversion – Acts 10:1-48

Steps	Verse and illustration in this man's life
1. Revelation through creation	Not applicable
2. Begins to seek God?	
3. God provides agents.	a.
	b.
	c.
	d.
4. Man responds.	

What are the four basic steps used by God to ensure all mankind is reached?

Step	Verse	Key Thought
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

How can and does mankind short-circuit this process?

Step	Man's Failure	Proof Text
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Answer the question, "What about those who have never heard?"

Question 2 – “What about those who are basically good, yet not Christians?”

Again, we must deal with fallacious, yet presupposed facts which are unstated yet assumed by the question.

The basis of the whole issue here rests with the existence of presumed “good” people who do not need the shed blood of Christ to justify them before God.

According to Romans 3:10-12, does such a class exist? Why or why not?

Complete the chart below.

Verse	Key thought as it relates to topic
Ecclesiastes 7:20	
2 Chronicles 6:36	
1 Kings 8:46	
Isaiah 53:6	
Jeremiah 8:6	
Jeremiah 16:12	

Write a summary statement concerning what you have learned about the existence of good people.

The results of this: Paraphrase the following passages.

Ezekiel 18:4

Ezekiel 18:20

Romans 6:33

Write a summary statement of the fate of all mankind apart from Christ.

Paraphrase John 14:6.

How does this verse speak to the issue at hand?

Answer the question – What about those who are basically good, yet not Christians?

Question 3 – “What about other religions?”

Having successfully answered the previous question, a second line of thought inevitably emerges – that of other religions. If man does not trust in himself, but rather in a god or gods, will this not suffice as long as he is sincere?

At this point it will be beneficial to discuss the difference between Christianity and religions. The two graphs below will be useful for illustrations.

Illustration A

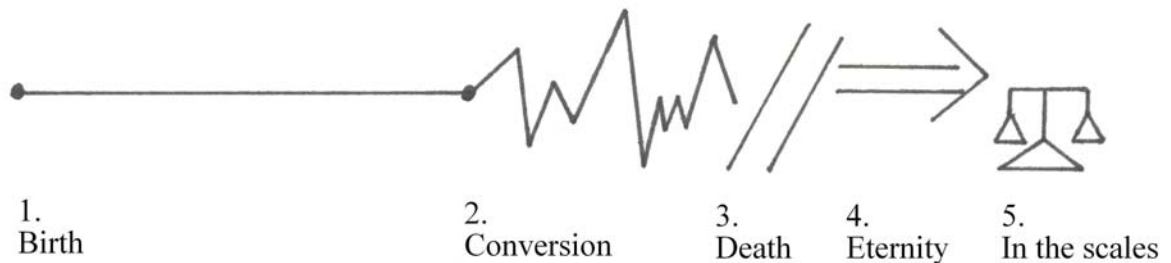


Illustration B

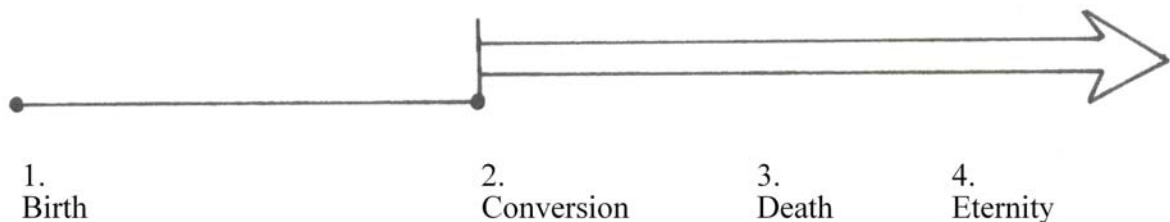


Illustration A is a simple bar graph representative of a man’s life. At point 1 he is born. Then sometime during his life at point 2 he is initiated into or converted to a religion. He then begins to seek, appease, satisfy, and follow the god or gods to which he owes his allegiance. He does this until his death, point 3, after which he discovers whether or not he was right, and if right, whether or not the scales will tip in his favor. The great deficiency of this, and of all religions, is that God is not known until after death, and thus the validity of the religion cannot be known until after death.

Contrastingly in Illustration B, the individual at point 1 is born. At point 2 he is converted, and at that point comes into a personal relationship with God. This relationship transcends to death at point 3 and extends on into eternity. Thus, Christianity is not a religion, but a personal relationship with God.

Knowing this, read Romans 1:18-32 and fill in the following chart.

Verse	What does this have to say about the creation of religions?
Romans 1:18	
Romans 1:21	
Romans 1:22	
Romans 1:23	
Romans 1:25	
Romans 1:28	
Romans 1:32	

According to the following verses how else can the existence of other religions be explained? Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:15-18; Psalm 106:34-37; and 1 Timothy 4:1

Summarize from Romans 10:1-4 another way in which religions can come into being. Does sincerity or zeal make a difference?

Write a summary statement on the existence of other religions in the world.

What, then, does the Bible say about Christianity in the face of other religions?

John 14:6

Acts 4:12

1 Timothy 2:5

Answer the question: "What about other religions?"

Question 4 – “What about infants and children who die, and the mentally impaired?”

This question speaks to those people who never develop to the point of conceptualizing the knowledge of the gospel or of Christ before their death. This would include infants killed by abortion before their birth, infants and small children who die before they are able to conceptualize Christ, and brain damaged babies and infants who genetically never develop mentally to the point of conceptualizing Jesus Christ.

Before delving into this subject, we must first establish as fact certain truths about God. To do this fill in the chart below.

Verse	Key thought as it pertains to God
Psalm 118:2-4; 136:2, 3, 26	
Psalm 103:13; 111:4; 116:5	
1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 2 Peter 3:9	
Neh. 9:33; Ps. 111:7; John 5:30	
Psalm 11:7; 92:15; 145:17	
Romans 9:14-23	

Having refocused our eyes upon God, let us now consider the fate of the undeveloped.

At the outset, several principles must be laid as groundwork in order to consider this question.

Read Psalm 139:1, 3, 16 and Ephesians 2:10. What can be said of the child from the point of conception?

Now read Psalm 139:13-16 and fill in the chart below.

Verse	Basic truths about the developing child in the womb of the mother
Psalm 139:13	1.
	2.
Psalm 139:14	1.
	2.
	3.
Psalm 139:15	1.
	2.
	3.
Psalm 139:16	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.

What observations can be made about unborn children from the following passages?

Matthew 1:18

Matthew 1:23

Luke 1:41

Luke 1:42

Luke 1:43

Luke 1:44

According to Romans 5:12, 15, 19, what is also true of all children?

According to Romans 3:10-12 and 23, whose responsibility is sin; man or God's?

Given these principles, we must now face the reality that the Bible does not speak directly to this subject. There are scriptures, though, that allude to this, and they are presented below.

2 Samuel 12:7-23

(Read the passage and answer the following questions, including proof text.)

What is to be the fate of David's child when it is born?

What was David's response while the child lived, yet was sick?

What was the servants' response when the child died?

What was David's response to the death of the child?

What justification did David give for his seemingly contradictory behavior?

For his weeping and fasting?

For the change in his behavior?

What can we infer from the statement, "I shall go to him"? Note that if David had simply meant death he would have undoubtedly used the more common phrase, "I shall sleep with him" or "We shall sleep together with the fathers."

From Psalm 16:10; 30:3; and 86:13, what do we learn of David's view of the death experience? How does this support the theory that David was not speaking of simply the death experience with the phrase, "I shall go to him"?

The Hebrew word in the phrase "I shall go to him" for "go" is HALAK, which means "to walk with, endear oneself to, converse with, etc." How does the use of this word support the theory that David was not speaking of himself simply dying physically as the child had done?

1 Kings 14:1-13

(Read the passage and answer the questions below, including proof text.)

Who was ill in this passage?

Why was the child ill?

What was the fate of the child?

Note the word of child in this text is used in two different forms. In verses 3 and 17 the Hebrew word used is NA'AR, meaning infancy to adolescence, while in verse 12 YELED is used, which seems to represent the earlier years of childhood. The second word of interest here is "good" from the Hebrew word TOWB, which denotes good in the widest sense of the word. From the knowledge of these words, what conclusions can be drawn?

Job 3:11-13

(Read the passage and answer the questions below, including proof text.)

Did Job believe the fate of stillborn children was worse or better than that of those who suffer in this life?

How does he express the emotional state of those who die at birth?

Does this sound like Hell?

What, then, can be deduced from this passage?

Luke 18:15-17

(Read the passage and answer the questions below, including proof text.)

Note: The Greek word for the children in verse 15 is BREPHOS and occurs 8 times in the Greek New Testament. It signifies an unborn or newborn baby.

What were the people doing with their babies?

What was the response of the disciple to this?

What two statements does Christ make about babies in verse 16?

What statement does He make about babies in verse 17?

What is Christ's desire concerning babies?

What is the relationship of the kingdom of God to babies?

What conclusions can be drawn from this passage?

Matthew 18:10-14

(Read the passage and answer the questions below, including proof text.)

What is the theme of this passage?

What special relationship does this passage create between children and the spiritual world?

What is our attitude to be toward children, and why?

What is God's will concerning children, and why?

What conclusions can be drawn from this passage?

Matthew 21:12-17

(Read the passage and answer the questions below, including proof text.)

What is the context of the children's activities?

Who reacts negatively to this, and why?

What is Jesus' reply to the downplaying of children and infants in His kingdom?

Turn to Psalm 8:2, which many feel is quoted here. How does Jesus change this passage?

How could the mouth of an infant or nursing babe praise God?

What conclusions can be drawn from this passage?

In closing, then, what conclusions can be inferred about the death of the unborn, newborn, or older children?

Irrespective of your personal convictions, would it be an act of cruelty or kindness to share with one who has lost a child that the child is in Hell? Explain your answer.

How could these passages be used to comfort one after the loss of a child?

Conclusion

Each of the four questions presented here challenges the sovereignty of God. In the space below, explain how each question does this.

Those who never hear?

People who are good?

Other religions?

Infants?

Each of the four questions presented here challenges the love of God. In the space below, explain how each question does this.

Those who never hear?

People who are good?

Other religions?

Infants?

Each of the four questions presented here challenges the just and moral will by which God rules. In the space below, explain how each question does this.

Those who never hear?

People who are good?

Other religions?

Infants?

Write out a paragraph which sums up what you have learned about God from this study.

Application

How will a better understanding of the four recurring questions of conversion aid us in our worship of God?

How and why will a proper understanding of the state of the four recurring questions of conversion aid us in our relationships with one another?

How and why will a proper understanding of the four recurring questions of conversion promote a better self image?

How would a lack of conviction in this area affect a disciple's walk with God? List below the five basic areas which would be affected by a lack of proper convictions in this area.

What extremes might a Christian drift into if he did not fully understand the four recurring questions of his conversion?

How would a proper understanding in this area aid in consistency in the basics?