

August 1, 2010 – 5 of 12 in Signs of Life

# Turn and Follow

1 Thessalonians 1:9

## INTRODUCTION

What is an idol? Is it made of stone or wood? Is it shaped like a bull? Does it exist in a pagan temple? Are you sure you don't have them in your living room or your wallet or the mirror or your heart? In this fourth sign of life we will see Paul continue his train of thought with the same Thessalonian believers who were shaken in their faith. He had already cited their true gospel hearing as evidence that they were saved. Now he moves on to something even more visible.

Defining conversion and the new birth side-by-side is tricky business. Wayne Grudem parses them out this way: “**Regeneration** is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us,” while “**Conversion** is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, in regeneration God makes a new life and in conversion this new life cannot stand to be facing the same direction at the same objects of sin, and so the new life takes a “one-eighty” away from sin toward God.

- CONVERSION BEGINS IN IMMEDIATE REJECTION OF OUR FALSE GODS
- CONVERSION FOLLOWS IN IMMEDIATE PURSUIT OF THE TRUE GOD

**The Big Idea** is that a whole new heart turns toward a whole new world.

Edwards' fifth sign of authentic spiritual life is ‘a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things.’ This conviction is a natural effect of the first four—a new spiritual sense, of divine excellency, especially the beauty of his holiness, rightly perceived—so that this new view inclines the soul from one thing to another (from an entire old world to an entire new world). As Storms put it: “So powerful is this influence that in the absence of change in ethical conduct, one may conclude that saving knowledge of the gospel is absent.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1994); pp. 699, 709

<sup>2</sup> Storms, p. 103

## DOCTRINE

### I. CONVERSION BEGINS IN IMMEDIATE REJECTION OF OUR FALSE GODS

#### A) What is an 'Idol' that People Should Serve Them?

##### 1. An **idol** (eidolon) is an object of ultimate worth

[Jer. 2:11–13, **TURN**] The water here represents fulfillment of the soul

- a. Whether an idol is 'natural' or 'functional' makes no difference to the sin or the irrationality of it. The issue is whether you go to it for that which only God can be.
- b. These are things that sinners have pretend conversations with [Is. 42:17], in which sinners put their "delight" [Is. 44:9], in which they put their "trust" for salvation [Is. 45:20].

##### 2. Such idols wield a spiritual power that is bigger than us

[Ps. 106:36] "They served their idols, which became a snare to them."

- a. Why? What kind of a power is this that it is so impressive to turn from them?

#### B) Natural Man Can Do Nothing But **Serve** (douleuein) Idols

##### 1. We are "slaves" to our world

- a. Natural man is enslaved to his desires – he only desires to do evil

[Jn. 8:34] "everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

[Gen. 6:5] "that **every intention** of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

[2 Pet. 2:19] "They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved."

- b. Natural man is enslaved to his viewpoint – he only desires as he sees

[Rom. 6:16–17] "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were

once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart **to the standard of teaching** to which you were committed.”

“Our condition before the new birth is that we treasure sin and self-exaltation so much that we cannot treasure Christ supremely.” JOHN PIPER, *Finally Alive*

[Josh. 24:14–19, TURN] Put away your gods to serve the true God...We will!...You can't

2. The power of darkness is enough to finish off our natural inability to turn.

a. The Bible uses the imagery of darkness-to-light to describe true turning.

[Jn. 3:20–21] “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

[Eph. 4:17–19] “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer **walk** as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are **darkened** in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”

[Eph. 5:8] “at one time you **were** darkness, but now you **are** light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”

[1 Jn. 2:11] “But whoever hates his brother is **in** the darkness and **walks** in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”

The essence of the proof for Paul: “**For** (9a)...**you turned** (9b)” from that kind of a thing to that kind of a thing! That’s not natural! If it’s real, it’ll last—so it’s an immediate turn that lasts.

But let’s be skeptical here for a second. How do we know that this turning is not natural? For instance—perhaps the only reason you don’t run with the same people is that you became a bore! Maybe the reason you’re not a wild person anymore is that you don’t have a choice! You got old. You became enslaved by the suburbs, a mortgage, a family, a bad economy.

## II. CONVERSION FOLLOWS IN IMMEDIATE PURSUIT OF THE TRUE GOD

A) This is a Noticeable, Undeniable “One-Eighty”

1. RESPONSE to Objection:

- a. Natural behavioral shifts aren't 180's—more like 90's (they're half-hearted).

[2 Tim. 4:10] “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.”

[2 Pet. 1:5–10, TURN] So the examination we talked about (Sign 2) has ‘qualities’ that the new nature is now ‘naturally’ looking for and Peter seems to give a guarantee about it.

- b. Natural behavioral shifts don't have a reason—they don't even believe it!

[1 Cor 9:26] “So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.”

- c. Natural behavioral shifts should tend toward the highest natural pleasure.

[Col. 2:23] “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in **stopping** the indulgence of the flesh.”

– Ergo, the natural man will get worse in his nature (corruption corrupts).

- d. A “supernatural” 180, on the other hand, is always pictured as radical—fast and far

[Mat. 4:22] “**Immediately** they left the boat and their father and followed him.”

[Mat. 8:19–22] “And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

## B) The Motive is that this Good is Living and True

1. This God is “living,” personal, everywhere–present...(the only option)

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” JIM ELLIOT

- a. Unlike idols, we see that God is there to talk back, to provide, to turn to!

[Jn. 6:45] “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.”

- b. Unlike idols, this God seems obviously bent on burning the city I live in, and my response proves this belief [i.e. Christian in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress]

[2 Pet. 1:4] "you may become partakers of the divine nature, **having escaped** from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire"

- c. Now the "fountain" is not just in front of my eyes but raging in my own heart, so that it recognizes itself:

[Jn. 4:14] "The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

[Ps. 42:7] "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls."

"It is like the brightness that is in a diamond which the sun shines on...Although (God) may influence (natural men) in many ways, He never, in any of his influences communicates Himself to them according to His own proper nature." JONATHAN EDWARDS, Religious Affections, 79

## 2. This God is the real thing with definitive content and contours.

- a. When we see a total carelessness about who God has revealed himself to be, we have a definite problem.

[Acts 17:16, 22–23] "Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols...So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."

- b. How do you know you've turned toward God if you can't even pick God out of a police investigation lineup?

- c. When you turn toward the true God (though you have a rear view mirror that causes sin), your basic sight is now overwhelmed with God's truth in every area of life and you're burning rubber in that direction, or at least flooring it, even if you're spinning your wheels.

So, to summarize Paul here: I know about you Thessalonians, because you TURNED 180 degrees:

## APPLICATION

- 1. Knowing that idols may be ‘natural’ and ‘functional,’** can you take inventory of your idols and judge whether you have turned from them? Let’s provide a basic list of typical American idols:

Vocational:	Money, Lifestyle, Prestige, Meaning/Identity
Relational:	Approval, Control, Sensuality, Unforgiveness
Psychological:	Fear, Co-dependence, Self-Pity, Narcissism
Cultural:	Political, Leisure, Mindless (Harmless) Amusement
Religious:	a god in my legalistic image, a god in my narcissistic image

And who should you let help you assess your turning? The world or your brothers/sisters?

- 2. Knowing that there’s a ‘counterfeit turn’**—it may be look 180 degrees, but lasts a few days; or you may have been “following” Jesus for decades but never really turned from things that you depend on for satisfaction or security—knowing that, what does it take to finally and fully turn and follow? 1) God, 2) You - whatever it takes!

How the gospel turns me