

## Acts 2:37-41

# Initiation into the new community

(How does a person become a member of the Christian community?)

### Introduction

1. Last week we looked at a model of NT gospel preaching. This week we begin to look at a model of NT response.
2. The first issues have to do with initiation into the Christian faith.
3. Unlike John who talks a lot about “faith”, Luke uses the term “repentance.”.

“<sup>37</sup>Now when they heard {this}, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

1. It was the hearing of the message that triggered a response. There is no substitute for preaching the gospel message. Christianity is not only an ethical style of life, it is a commitment of faith based on an understanding of truth. The content of the preaching is vital to the believing.
2. These Jewish pilgrims were told that they had just crucified their Messiah and that he had been raised from the dead. They no doubt expected him to come seeking revenge for what had happened.
3. **CALLED BY THE SPIRIT:** Before we look at the response at face value, we need to be aware of the spiritual dynamic behind it. Acts 13:48 “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” “Appointed” is a past perfect passive indicative suggesting that the “believing” was linked to something outside and prior to the event. It is not specified as to what or whom the force leading to faith, might be. The point however is that saving faith is an action with a history. What lies behind our faith?

Four kinds of Spiritual calls.

1	2	3	4
<b>To Salvation</b>	<b>To saving faith</b>	<b>To sanctification</b>	<b>To special service</b>
Matt.22:14 “Many are called, but few are chosen”	I Cor.1:26 “For consider your calling brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh,”	Eph.4:1 “walk in a manner worthy of your calling”	Matt.4:21”and he called them” (James and John)
To all people	To some people	To all believers	To some believers

- a. A **general calling** of all to repent.
- Matt.11:28 “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”
  - Isa.45:22 “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!”
  - Matt.22:14 “Many are called, but few are chosen”
- b. An **efficacious calling** of the elect to believe. The fact that God calls some people in ways that He does not call others is evident in the call of Israel. This calling is similar to the *prevenient grace* of which Arminians speak. It differs in two ways 1) it is not extended to everyone, 2) it is always effective.
- Rom.8:30 “And those whom he predestined he also called; and whom he called, these he also justified.”
  - I Cor.1:9 “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
  - I Cor.1:23-26 “<sup>23</sup> But we preach Christ crucified. To Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . . For consider your calling brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh,”
  - Lk.14:23; Rom.1:7; 11:29; Eph.1:18; Phil.3:14; I Thess.2:12; II Thess.2:14; II Tim.1:9; Heb.3:1; II Pet.1:10
- c. The relationship between God’s “call” of some but not all to saving faith and our responsibility to choose our fate is not easily answered and best left a mystery.

### ***God’s view***

Rom.8:29-30

“for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren, and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

### ***Man’s view***

Rom.10:13-14

“for ‘*Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*’ How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

Foreknew

Predestined

Called

Justified

Preached

Heard

Believed

Call on the Name of the Lord

Saved

Glorified

4. **CONVICTED IN THE HEART:** The first response step to Peter’s preaching was one of deep conviction.
- Literally the text reads, “they were stung in the heart.” The “heart” refers to the core of a person’s life (intellectual and emotional).
  - Repentance starts with an intellectual understanding of one’s need for Christ and a deeply personal conviction of sin.
  - Examples: In this case they realized that they had crucified their Messiah – not a good thing to do especially when He is raised and might remember who did it.
  - If it does not start in the heart (mind and gut) it does not start. But if it stops in the heart, it stops.
  - Conviction is not repentance but sets the stage for repentance. "Brethren, what shall we do?" is an important question. Saving faith involves an action response not just an inner conversion.
  - There are different ways of understanding the human soul.

*This is the popular Western way of looking at the soul.*

<b>Right brain</b>	<b>Left brain</b>
Subjective	Objective
Feeling	Thinking
Personal	Impersonal
Creative	Logical

*This is the Biblical way of looking at the soul.*

<b>Inner life</b>	<b>Outer life</b>
Heart	Flesh
Faith	Confession
Radical	Superficial
Conviction	Action

38 And Peter {said} to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

1. **CHANGED IN THE MIND:** The word Repentance means “to turn around,” “to have a change of mind,” “to see things differently.”
  - a. This is expressed in water baptism (not going forward to an altar or raising your hand).
  - b. The Baptism is an expression of repentance which is for the forgiveness of sin.
  - c. It is interesting that Luke talks about repentance, the other gospel writers talk about faith.
  - d. Faith is repentance and is “calling on the name of the Lord”.
  - e. It is the only requirement for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - f. It is also called salvation.
2. Repentance is to be understood in two contexts.

<b>Justification</b>
Repentance from dead works (pride of self righteousness) to faith in Christ’s righteousness.
Turning from self (generally) to Christ
Mk.1:15; Heb.6:1

<b>Sanctification</b>
Repentance from sinful habits to a walk that conforms to the glory of God.
Turning from specific sins to obedience.
II Cor.12:21

3. A word about “baptism” and salvation.
  - a. It is like a marriage ceremony and commitment.
  - b. Which makes the marriage? Both do. The ceremony is an outward sign of the commitment.
  - c. Is it necessary for marriage? No but it would be unusual to be married without it.
4. **ACTS 2:38** is one of the primary proof texts, where the *Church of Christ* sect would insist that the forgiveness of sins is directly tied to water baptism.
 

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent (plural), {and let each of you be baptized (singular) in the name of Jesus Christ} for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

  - a. It should be noted however that the clause “and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” can be understood as parenthetical because of the harmony between Greek tenses indicated above. This suggests that we have here, a reiteration of Matt.28:19.
  - b. The relationship between REPENTANCE and forgiveness is the key. Luke’s writing (Lk.24:47; Acts 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18, 26:18-20) is clearly in support of this connection.
  - c. Only in 2:38, & 22:16 is baptism even mentioned, and in these texts the link with forgiveness is not compelling.

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

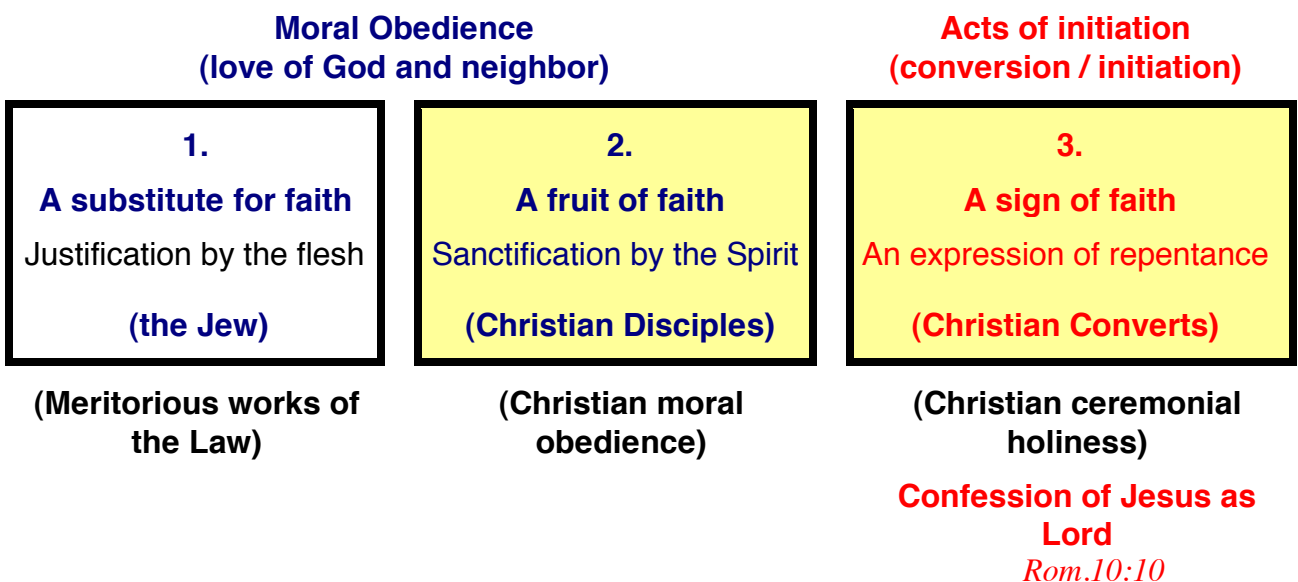
1. **BAPTIZED IN THE FLESH:** Christ in Matt.28 commanded Water baptism.
2. How are we to understand the meaning of Christian baptism?

**The Conversion / Initiation View of Baptism and Salvation**

Three views of water baptism compared

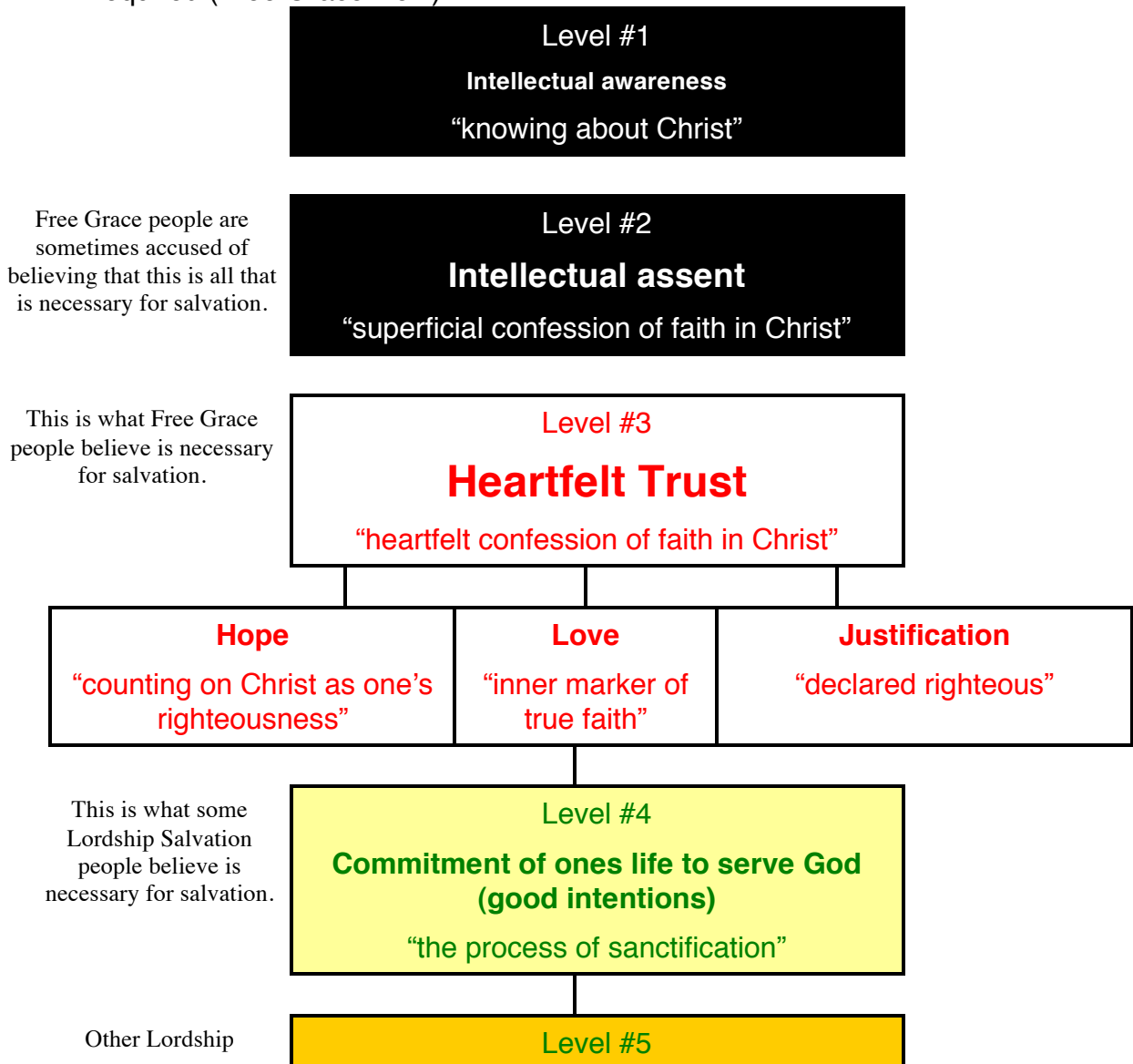
<b>Sacrament</b>	<b>Seal</b>	<b>Sign</b>
Essential for salvation	Initiation rite of salvation	Optional to Salvation
It is the actual means of imparting grace.	It is the formal introduction to our new life in Christ.	It is a way of testifying to our new life in Christ.

- a. This is a view expressed by F.F. Bruce, James D.G. Dunn, and Richard Longnecker. It is also my own view.
  - b. In essence, this position holds that a person becomes a Christian (i.e., receives the Holy Spirit) by a complicated process composed of three elements: faith, water baptism, and the reception of the Spirit. However, the reception of the Spirit may come before or after water baptism. While faith and the reception of the Spirit work an inner transformation called conversion, water baptism works at an objective and ritualistic level called initiation.
3. What is the relationship between faith, works, and water baptism? Three kinds of works are represented in the following chart.



**Water baptism**  
Acts 2:38

4. What was the mode of baptism in this text? Probably pouring. The presence of enough water for complete immersion would be unlikely for 3000 people. See theology note file #812
5. Is water baptism necessary for saving faith? Technically NO! but practically YES! There is no indication that anyone was accepted into the early church without water baptism.
6. There are degrees or levels of Christian knowledge (St. Augustine) and commitment. The point of dispute is with respect to a distinction between Level #3 and #4. Does true saving faith require a level #4 or #5 commitment (The Lordship Salvation view), or is level #3 all that is required (Free Grace view)?



Salvation people believe this is necessary for salvation.

**Obedience (good works)**  
“outer marker of true faith”

- True faith is more than intellectual awareness or assent.
- True faith does not take the form of faithfulness.
- True faith always produces inner fruit (hope and love).
- True faith normally produces outer fruit (faithfulness).

7. Our participation in the Body of Christ starts with the calling of God’s Spirit resulting in our **conversion** (witnessed in baptism), which is characterized by **repentance** (witnessed in faith) and **regeneration** (witnessed in the presence of the Holy Spirit).

