

## The case of the commercial Christian

(Sometimes people come to faith in Christ for the wrong reasons.)

See also [apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org) theology files #603, #705, #713

### Introduction

- There are many reasons people respond to the Gospel.
  - a. Some express faith because they grew up in a culture where this was a part of participation in the community or family.
  - b. Others are motivated by personal gain –
    1. “This will help my career.”
    2. “This will enable me to be delivered from some discomfort.”
    3. “This will enable me to marry the person I love.”
- The average church membership is composed of individuals who are motivated by valid and invalid reasons for identifying with Christ.
- The story that follows may be a case of a person who identified himself with the church but was not genuinely born of God.

### 1. Simon was in the signs and wonders business and saw Jesus as an asset.

“9 Now there was a certain man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city, and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; 10 and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." 11 And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. 13 And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip; and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

### 2. Simon's true motives are eventually exposed.

14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they {began} laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." 24 But Simon answered and said,

"Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

25 And so, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

- a. **This text is about Simon** more than about the coming of the Spirit to the Samaritans. The point may have to do with the motives that were driving Simon to be baptized. He may not have been truly converted but rather was attaching himself to Philip and his power.
- b. **This text has become a pillar for those who advocate a “baptism with the Spirit” subsequent to regeneration.** But the text is not without its problems, not the least of which is the testimony of the context of the rest of Scripture. The Scriptures seem to indicate that regeneration (being born again into the family of God) necessitates the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (in our present age - Romans 8:9 “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His”). If this is true, then it seems that we are left with three major possibilities in interpreting Acts 8:
  1. The Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit at their new birth (when they “believed” Philip) but had not been “baptized with” in the sense of experiencing His power and signs.

**But:** To say that they had the Spirit but not the “baptism” with or the manifestation of (tongues and power) is to claim that Peter and John were interested only in the manifestation of signs of power. This would seem to exalt the “gifts” of the Spirit far above their New Testament status. Luke explicitly tells us that the Spirit had not yet fallen on them (vs. 16) and that only after Peter and John had laid hands on them was the Holy Spirit given (vs. 18) and received (vs. 15,17,19). I am forced to conclude that these individuals did not have the Spirit until hands were laid on them. Luke never distinguishes between a first and second coming of the Spirit in Luke or Acts. The “receiving of,” “giving of,” “falling upon” by the Spirit are synonymous with the initial coming and indwelling of the Spirit in all of Luke’s record (Acts 2:38; 11:17; 10:43ff; 11:14). If we work under the assumption that the Scriptures must be viewed in a harmonious manner, we must either allow this text to be the rule and the many others (i.e., Rom.8:9; I Cor.12:13) the exception or question the above interpretation.
  2. The Samaritans were a “special case” being alienated from the Jewish church at Jerusalem and therefore required a special impartation of the Spirit by apostolic authority and witness.

**But:** The Samaritans no doubt represented a special group, but so did the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and the Ephesians, yet there is no indication that such a phenomenon was necessary in their cases. But perhaps most important is the promise of Acts 2:38. If the Samaritans had truly met the conditions of Acts 2:38, why were they not recipients of the gift? To embrace the above position is to say that Acts 8 stands in complete contradiction to Luke (Acts 2:38) as well as to Paul (Rom.8:9).
  3. The Samaritans were not regenerate (in the sense that we are today) until the Holy Spirit fell on them.

**Note:** This I feel is the most plausible explanation of Acts 8. I would make the following observations in its support:

- a. Luke never describes a “receiving” of the Spirit subsequent to regeneration (Acts 2:38).
- b. “Receiving the Word” about Christ is not synonymous with regeneration, for the people at Berea “received the Word” and later “many of them” believed (Acts 17:2,11). The parable of the soils (Mark 4) indicates that people can receive the Word with joy and not truly be born again. There is a faith that is not unto salvation (John 8:30-31,43-45).
- c. We are told that Simon believed (in the same way - 8:13) and yet there is evidence that he was not yet born again.
  - 1) Simon continued with Philip (literally, “attached himself to Philip”--8:13), not the Lord.
  - 2) Simon’s attention remained on the signs (8:13), not on the Savior.
  - 3) Simon tried to buy sign power (8:18).
  - 4) Peter tells Simon that his heart is not right before God (8:21).
  - 5) Peter recognized that although Simon professed real faith, he was yet in the bond of unrighteousness (8:23).
- d. The Samaritans responded to Philip as they did to Simon, that is, following signs but not the Savior (8:16).
- e. The text does not say that they believed in Jesus, only that they believed Philip (8:12-13). When this Greek word (pisteuein = to believe) governs a dative object (except perhaps “Lord” or “God”), it nearly always signifies intellectual assent to a statement of proposition, rather than commitment to God (Acts 24:14; 26:27).
- f. From other texts it seems impossible to believe in Jesus unto salvation and not receive the Spirit (Acts 2:38,39; 15:8,9; Gal.3:2; Rom.8:9; 5:1,5).

### **3. Degrees of “knowledge” with respect to salvation have been recognized for centuries.**

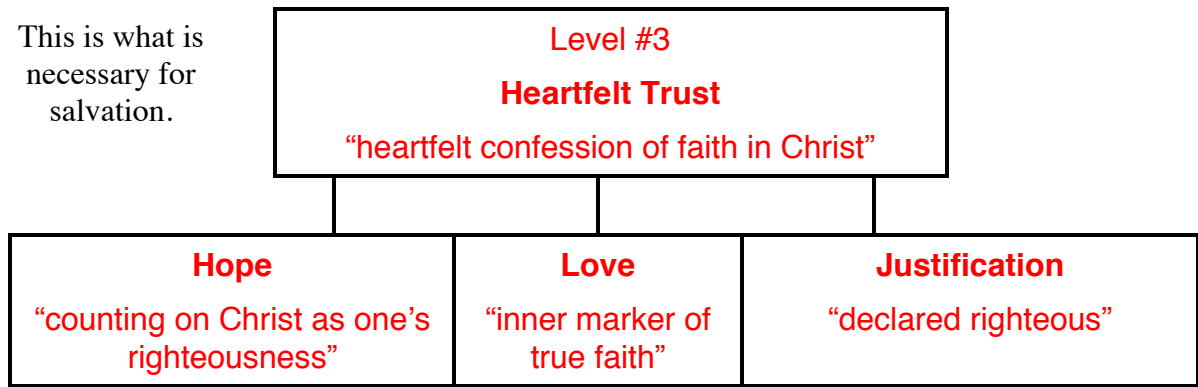
There are degrees or levels of Christian knowledge (St. Augustine) and commitment. The point of dispute is with respect to a distinction between Level #3 and #4. Does true saving faith require a level #4 or #5 commitment (The Lordship Salvation view), or is level #3 all that is required (Free Grace view)?

Level #1  
**Intellectual awareness**  
“knowing about Christ”

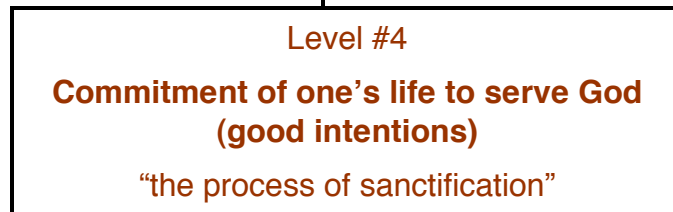
This is insufficient for salvation.

Level #2  
**Intellectual assent**  
“superficial confession of faith in Christ”

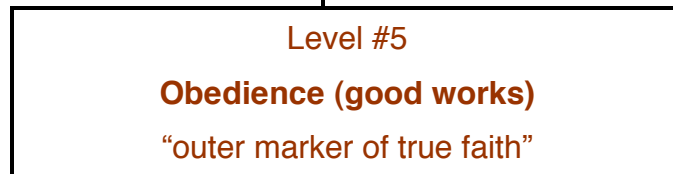
This is what is necessary for salvation.



This is what normally follows true saving faith.



This is the expected fruit of saving 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).