

Examples of Christian Salvation

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Note: Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated. They are emboldened in a font different from the body of this text rather than being placed within quotation marks.

What Is Christian Salvation?

The Christian Church is a very special and specific era in redemptive history. Many people confuse the Christian era as being from the time of the Gospels, meaning from the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. They would include such persons as the thief on the cross in the Christian era. But that is not so. The Christian Church did not come into existence until the Day of Pentecost which was fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus. The thief on the cross predated the Christian era and, therefore, cannot be cited as an example of Christian conversion. The Christian era will last until the Rapture of the Church. This significant two thousand year period (the time frame based on interpretation of prophecy) has a specific plan of salvation. It was revealed on the Day of Pentecost by the Apostle Peter to consist of repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38-39).

The Need For A Clear Salvation Message

Salvation is the primary message of the Bible and the most important reality that humans face. It involves eternity. Therefore, it cannot be trifled or gambled with but must be obtained with absolute certainty. There's just too much at stake. Because of this poignant reality, there must be a distinct and clear plan of salvation— one that cannot be obscured to the eyes of a sincere seeker. God would not have left such an important matter vague in His Word. Sincere people seeking salvation would want to know beyond the shadow of a doubt what is necessary for salvation and would spare no pains to be certain of the precious salvation Jesus died to bring us. The question that was first asked on the Day of Pentecost regarding Christian salvation, **Men and brethren, what shall we do?** (Acts 2:37), would be repeated, in some form or another, countless times throughout Church history. Preachers of the Gospel must have a sure word to preach regarding how a person can be saved, not only for the sake of eternal souls but for their own responsibility's sake (James 3:1). No one on earth has a more

serious job. Certainty of salvation must be attainable more than anything else. It logically follows that, if we had a book of the Bible that contained active evangelism and conversion in the Apostolic era, then certainty regarding salvation would be obtained. That is exactly what God gave us in the book of Acts.

The Significance Of The Book Of Acts

Acts is the only New Testament book that contains examples of Christian evangelism and salvation. In fact, it is the only book that states the Christian plan of salvation. In the wisdom of God, that leaves nowhere else to go, simplifying matters. In Acts, the conversion experience of the first generation of Christians is well documented for us, involving thousands of people. It's unimaginable what could be clearer than that, or more valuable than that, for salvation purposes. The clarity comes immediately in the Christian era with the announcement of the plan of salvation on the Day of Pentecost in response to that first inquiry about salvation (Acts 2:37-38) and remains in focus by the other numerous examples of salvation throughout the thirty-year history of the book of Acts. There are five instances where souls received salvation that reveal specific detail as to how they were saved (Acts 2,8,9,10,19). In all cases, the tenets contained in Acts 2:38 were followed. We will examine them all.

Salvation Prominently On Display In Acts

1. The Birthday Of The Church (Acts 2)

It all began on the eventful Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It came fifty-three days after Jesus gave His precious blood on Calvary. It was the commencement of the Christian era, the birthday of the Church, the beginning point of Christian evangelism and salvation. Souls would find salvation on this day for the first time in Christian history, in fact, three thousand of them! The plan of salvation *must* be heralded here. Expect it. Christ has set the stage well for this momentous event. It's impossible to not see the plan of salvation evident on this day. And, without surprise, what is expected and necessary clamors for notice. The revelation of the plan of salvation was preceded by the pointed question of those convicted by Peter's preaching. They asked, **Men and brethren, what shall we do?** (Acts 2:37). This question is the bell that signals the coming answer that has to state the plan of salvation. Undeniably, the next verse must contain these precious tenets. Acts 2:37 and 38 have a Q&A sequence about them. In answer to the all-important question, **what shall we do?**, verse 38 must state the terms of Christian salvation. And, unremarkably, it does. **Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.**

And what does Peter reveal the tenets of salvation to be?

- Repentance
- Water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins
- The infilling of the Holy Ghost

And in verse 39, Peter declares this to be the plan of salvation for the entire Church age. **For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call** (underline added).

The tenets of Acts 2:38 are the tenets of salvation for the entire Church age. This is necessarily the theological conclusion to be drawn. Peter has demonstrated this in his discourse, beginning in verse 14, as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Three thousand were saved that day. We can only thank God for the clarity of this inspired record in Acts.

2. The Samaritans (Acts 8)

Philip went down from Jerusalem to preach the Gospel to the Samaritans. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews because, in the past, their ancestors, who had been Jews, intermingled with Gentiles (non-Jews), bringing about this mixed race. The Jewish prejudice held against them, however, was no hindrance to them receiving the great salvation of God, Who is partial to no one. It is evident in the passage of Acts 8 that they fulfilled the tenets of salvation in Acts 2:38, introduced by Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

They had the experience of **repentance** by turning to Christ upon hearing Philip's preaching (verse 12). This is also evident to us by the fact that they were baptized. Repentance was stated by Christ in His Great Commission to be prerequisite to baptism (Luke 24:47).

They were baptized in Jesus' name (verse 12,16).

And they were filled with the Holy Ghost (verse 17).

That's the Acts 2:38 experience.

3. The Conversion Of Paul (Acts 9)

Paul's conversion (formerly, Saul) is quite revelatory regarding salvation. It corroborates the tenets of Acts 2:38 in a very profound way.

Paul's repentance experience was on the Damascus Road when he was confronted by Christ and submitted to Him.

He was then baptized three days later in Jesus' name for the remission of his sins (Acts 9:18; 22:16).

And he received the Holy Ghost (Acts 9:17).

Once again, that's Acts 2:38!

What's especially significant about Paul's experience is that it shows the incompleteness of mere faith in Christ for salvation and demonstrates the efficacy of Acts 2:38 in providing remission of sins through baptism in Jesus' name. It also shows that receiving the Holy Ghost is a separate experience from believing and cannot be claimed just because one believes in Christ. (The previous example involving the Samaritans proved this point as well.)

The Incompleteness Of Mere Faith In Christ

The encounter Paul had with Christ on the Damascus Road is indisputable. It was life-altering. Jesus revealed Himself to Paul in a most dramatic way. Paul, who previously had been trying to wipe out Christianity, was made a believer in Christ immediately and profoundly. Christ had spoken to him audibly and Paul melted into submission to Him, asking what Christ would have him do. The verbal exchange is recorded for us in Acts 9:4-6. Many people cite this as the point at which Paul was saved. But the Scriptures are clear that, at this initial point of faith, Paul neither had his sins yet remitted nor had he received the Holy Ghost, both of which are necessary for salvation in the Christian era. It wasn't until three days later when he met Ananias, the man commissioned by God to attend to his conversion, that he received these vital tenets and was saved (Acts 9:17-18).

Paul recounted his conversion experience later to the Jews in Acts 22. There he recalled Ananias' words to him when meeting him three days after his Damascus Road encounter with Christ. Ananias said to him, **And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord** (Acts

22:16). Three days after a cataclysmic encounter on the Damascus Road that resulted in deep faith in Christ, Paul's sins were not washed away. The point of the Scripture here must be received. Believing in Jesus Christ does not remit sin. Baptism in Jesus' name accomplishes that. That fact was revealed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) at Jesus' Own direction given to His Apostles in the Great Commission (Luke 24:47). That's why Paul was told by Christ to, **Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do** (Acts 9:6, underline added). The means to have his sins remitted was awaiting him. So was the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

At his meeting with Ananias, Paul received the Holy Ghost (Acts 9:17). This point of Scripture must also be received. Believing in Jesus Christ does not mean that one has automatically received the Holy Ghost. Paul's conversion experience clearly demonstrates this fact. Receiving God's Spirit is a separate experience from initial faith in Christ. And without the Spirit, a person is not saved. That is according to Paul's own testimony (Romans 8:9; 1Corinthians 12:13). It also complies with Jesus' word in John 3:5.

Summary Regarding Paul's Conversion

On the Damascus Road Jesus revealed Himself to Paul and it inspired awesome, life-changing faith in Christ. It wasn't salvation. It was headed there, and would result in that, because Paul's faith was not going to be deterred. He would obey God's terms of salvation. That's the nature of true faith. Faith obeys. Paul himself styled this faith/obedience relationship as the **obedience of faith** in his Roman epistle (Romans 16:26; 1:5).

4. The Conversion Of The Gentiles (Acts 10)

The Christian Jews weren't expecting God's wonderful salvation to go to the Gentiles. They probably anticipated a sprinkling of proselytes here and there, as was the case in their previous Jewish history, but nothing like what God was about to do. For that reason, it took some persuasion on Peter's part involving the vision God gave him prior to sending him to the household of a Gentile named Cornelius. But once there, Peter recognized the hand of God in the situation and preached to him the Word of the Lord. Of course, Peter began the era of Christian preaching of the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, culminating in the Acts 2:38 experience of salvation. You would expect he would do the same here at the home of a Gentile, and he does.

The repentance of Cornelius, at some time prior to Peter's visit, is known by his experience with God as recorded in the opening verses of Acts 10. He is described as devout, a God-fearer, and generous in his giving (verse 2). To many, it would seem that he was already sufficiently saved. But he wasn't. This is clear in Acts 11:14 where Peter recounts Cornelius' own words of what the angel had told him regarding his spiritual state. He was told to send for Peter, who would tell him words **whereby he and all his household shall be saved**. As good and as religious as he was, Cornelius was not saved. And the reason for that was that he had not yet fulfilled the plan of salvation. But that was about to change. Consider that the mercy God was showing Cornelius now certainly substantiates the necessity of meeting the tenets of salvation.

Peter was graciously received by Cornelius and Peter preached to him the Word of the Lord. God saw the hunger in their hearts and, even before Peter was finished preaching, the Holy Ghost fell on them. Verse 44 records that, **While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word**. It astonished the Jews that had accompanied Peter that God would pour out His Spirit on the Gentiles, too. But they couldn't doubt what happened because they heard them speak with other tongues (verses 45,46).

So the Gentiles had received repentance and the Holy Ghost. That's two-thirds of Acts 2:38. Since God had already filled them with His Spirit, is that an indication that water baptism is not necessary? No. The context actually emphasizes the opposite. Using some of the strongest language in the New Testament, the Bible says Peter **commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord** (verse 48, underline added). If receiving God's Spirit doesn't relieve the necessity of water baptism, then nothing does! With their baptism, the Gentiles had, along with all the other people groups in the New Testament, fulfilled the plan of salvation as announced on the Day of Pentecost.

5. The Conversion Of The Ephesians (Acts 19:1-6)

The Bible seems to stress the importance of correct salvation doctrine with every new example of it that it provides. The case of the Ephesians that we focus on now does so with yet another variety of potency. These people that Paul met in his missionary travels had been "believers" for more than twenty years. But notice his initial question to them: **Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?** (verse 2, underline added). They believed. But the inadequacy of their faith experience, by no fault of theirs due to lack of opportunity up until this point, is immediately obvious. The Scriptural point that must be received here is that mere faith in Christ, as in the case

with Paul himself, is not the plan of salvation for the Church age. Acts 2:38 is. Notice the wisdom and insistence of Paul in carrying out this point.

As Paul inquired further of their faith experience, he discovered that they were not baptized in Jesus' name either, but had received John the Baptist's baptism, which was practiced on the condition of repentance (Mark 1:4). So we know they had previously repented of their sins. But John's baptism was only preparatory, leading up to the Christian era. It was valid in its short time but would give way to the baptism prescribed by Jesus in the Great Commission to be administered on the Day of Pentecost involving His name. Paul explained the temporary nature of John's ministry and they were re-baptized in Jesus' name (verse 5). And in the next verse, they received the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues. Thus, Acts 2:38 was fulfilled yet again.

Summary Of The Five Examples Of Christian Conversion

Acts 2:38 was received by every people group.

The examples in the New Testament, where full detail is given regarding the conversion experience of Christians, involved *every people-group*— Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. That covers every nationality. That would imply universality in salvation for all those whom God would call, as Peter expressed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:39) and as Jesus stated in His Great Commission (Luke 24:47), which governed the evangelism of Acts and which continues to govern true evangelism and salvation today. *The book of Acts does not witness of any belief system or salvation example that denies the tenets of salvation revealed on the Day of Pentecost.* As Peter said, it is **for every one of you,...even as many as the Lord our God shall call** (Acts 2:38-39). There is nothing in Acts to give anyone a reason to be exempted from the tremendous salvation offered in Acts 2:38 that involves complete remission of sins and the powerful infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 2:38 is the fulfillment of the promised new birth experience (John 3:5).

Someone might ask, "Why is all this stress laid on Acts 2:38?". The answer is simple. It is the fulfillment of the necessary new birth experience, involving water and the Spirit, which Jesus made absolute and imperative in John 3:5. The water aspect of the new birth is water baptism for the remission of sins. It's easy to see how that is an imperative for salvation. Hebrews 9:22 says that **without shedding of blood is no remission**. That implies that without remission of sins, there is no salvation. Who can deny that remission of sins is the most important aspect of salvation? In Acts, where real souls actually got saved, remission of sins was declared to be accomplished by

baptism in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The Spirit aspect of Jesus' statement in John 3:5 referred to receiving the Holy Ghost. What can be more gracious of God than to fill us with His Own Spirit— His Own living presence? That's the source from which overcoming Christians receive power. This, along with being baptized in His name, comprises the new birth experience.

That means we are born of Christ Himself, Whom the Bible metaphorically describes as **the last Adam** (1Corinthians 15:45). It's helpful to understand the significance of this expression. Initially, we were born into sin and death because of the *first Adam* who sinned. But Christ was the perfect Man Who did not fall when He was tempted, by Whom we now can be born again of water and Spirit. By this process, the eternal death and condemnation we inherited from our first birth in the first Adam is cancelled. Being born again of Christ, we are freed from condemnation, due to His death on the cross, and inherit eternal life. Receiving this new birth of **the last Adam** is the reason Acts 2:38 is so important. We all connect with either one or the other "Adam". Only if you have fulfilled the plan of salvation can you claim what Paul said in Romans 8:1-2.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Because of this vital truth, our insistence on Acts 2:38 today must be the same as that of the Apostles in the book of Acts.

Remission of sins is a separate experience from believing in Christ.

As we have pointed out, the most important aspect of salvation involves the remission of sins. This is a most appealing feature of the Gospel. Remission means that sins are not just forgiven (that would be great enough if that was all that it meant), they are obliterated. They discontinue existing. They're gone! John the Baptist made this clear when he announced Jesus' coming. He declared, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world** (John 1:29 underline added).

The Bible is emphatic in making this tremendous point. It was declared on day one of the Church: **...be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...** (Acts 2:38 underline added). It was punctuated in the account of the conversion of Paul, who, three days after he surrendered to Christ, still needed his sins to be washed away by baptism in Jesus' name! That's revelatory. It might be impossible to highlight the point that baptism is for the remission of sins any better, especially since it involved what was arguably the most famous conversion ever.

Another great aspect about the fact of baptism being for the remission of sins is that we can derive wonderful assurance from it when we ourselves obey the command. With absolute biblical assurance, we can say, "My sins are gone!!!" It's gracious on God's part to provide such a well-defined (and easy) means to claim a most important benefit of Calvary. There's nothing vague or presumptuous in the claim, as there would be by claiming remission of sins in a way that is not specifically prescribed in Scripture.

All the Christian baptisms were performed in Jesus' name.

Peter told the Jewish Sanhedrin that salvation is only in Jesus' name. **Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved** (Acts 4:12). Baptism was carried out by the Apostles and early ministers of Christ exclusively in the name of Jesus. It is evident in the five examples covered in this lesson. That is because Jesus commissioned His Apostles to do so (Luke 24:47).

Receiving the Holy Ghost is a separate experience from believing in Christ.

All of the examples we cited in this lesson clearly show that receiving the Holy Ghost is a separate experience from believing in God or Christ.

1. The Jews on the Day of Pentecost accepted Peter's words about Christ. They asked in faith what they must do to be saved. They were told *after* that point how they could receive His Spirit.
2. The example of the Samaritans in Acts 8, likewise, shows that the Spirit is not given at the moment of belief in Christ. Here, they hadn't received it, even though they were already baptized, until Peter and John came down from Jerusalem.
3. We pointed out that the Apostle Paul himself was not filled with the Holy Ghost upon his initial faith in Christ. It wasn't until three days later when he met Ananias that he was filled (Acts 9:17).
4. Cornelius had a fervent relationship with God, one that built for him a memorial in heaven (Acts 10:4). But he didn't have the necessary remission of sins or the baptism of the Holy Ghost until Peter came with the Gospel. By obeying Acts 2:38, Cornelius suddenly had more than a *relationship* with God. He entered a *covenant relationship* with Him.
5. The Ephesians in Acts 19 were believers for twenty-plus years without possessing the Holy Ghost. When they learned of further revelation concerning Christ, they accepted it and were re-baptized. The Holy Ghost was given to them subsequent to all

of this.

The Holy Ghost was known to have been received because the recipients spoke in other tongues. The absolute necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost for salvation (John 3:5; Romans 8:9; 1Corinthians 12:13) would necessitate a means whereby a person could know certainly when it occurs. Speaking in tongues was the universal evidence in the book of Acts that a person had received the Spirit.

All the ministers of the New Testament preached the same message.

In the five examples of conversion we've presented, all the ministers involved gave witness to the same salvation message— that which had been enjoined on the Day of Pentecost. This is in accordance with the Great Commission of Christ (Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8). There was to be only one true faith. The plan of salvation was not to be edited or altered in any way. Paul stressed that point in his letter to the Galatians. Any alteration of the Gospel would render it ineffective (Galatians 1:6-10; 5:1-4,9). Jude concurred (Jude 3).

The ministers cited in these five examples include Peter, John, Philip, Ananias, and Paul — and, by association, all of the twelve Apostles who were present on the Day of Pentecost. There was unanimity among the Apostles concerning the Gospel message because Acts 2:38 was referred to as the **Apostles' doctrine** (Acts 2:42). The uniformity of all these ministers demonstrates what Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians. There is but **One Lord, one faith, one baptism** (Ephesians 4:5).

Acts solves all salvation issues.

As previously noted, Acts is the only New Testament book that contains examples of Christian salvation. These are all that are relevant to us today. These examples show more clearly than any other New Testament reading what comprises salvation in the Christian era. Many controversies regarding salvation have arisen throughout Church history and many plague us today. Acts is able, more than any other book of the New Testament, to solve controversial issues because of the vivid pictures of salvation that are provided. In Acts, the salvation experience can, in effect, be dissected. The separate aspects of it are chronologically apparent and practically force themselves upon our gaze. Clarity, therefore, abounds. This makes Acts the most important book in the Bible regarding salvation. No serious look at Christian salvation can ignore the book that contains the greatest evidence of it. To know Acts is to know of Christian salvation.