

1. Read Acts 2:37-47

- What do we learn about “conversion” from this passage?
- What was the context? What was required? How was faith born? What was the result?
- Concerning conversion in the early church, one theologian describes the journey to faith this way:  
*Pagan converts to the [Christian] mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather, the process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely, they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life... they submitted themselves to prolonged catechetical instruction in which they practiced new modes of behavior and learned the stories of Israel and their fulfillment in Christ. Only after they had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed able intelligently and responsibly to profess the faith, to be baptized.*

George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132.

Observation:

There was a time not so long ago, and even still with us to varying degrees, when people believed that in order to know something we must take the posture of the “unencumbered self” and seek after universal truths independent of any particular communal narrative or influence. True “belief,” it was asserted, is something we must attain to by ourselves, and is based on a blind optimism about the power of individualism and human reason to bring us to absolute certainty in knowledge. Religious faith, as such, was abstracted from the “text” of communal life, rituals and teaching—the very context wherein faith was ordinarily born throughout human history!

Another epistemology will emphasize the “communal self” in search of truth based on a method of participation and human experience. The knowledge of God is a communal kind of knowledge that we must discover by means of participation with God vs. merely thinking about God. As we will see, this is not to “check our brain” at the door of faith. Rather, it is to recognize that while faith in God is reasonable, it can’t be attained by reason alone! And given the modernist context, isn’t it an intriguing reversal of the way we tend to think—that the way to belief in God and the Christian faith in the NT was to *first* decide to believe and to participate in the life of God in, with and through God’s presence in the midst of his special community wherein that belief was more and more understood such as to eventually justify believing! But if there is a God, and if He has made himself known, in so far as God is personal, wouldn’t it make sense that He would expose himself not by some impersonal media, but within the warm and personal context of communal life?

And so the question has been raised, “how can I believe in God?” My answer is by “faith seeking understanding.” By “faith” I mean that kind of knowledge that is gained by participating in it such as to then seek after the moral and intellectual justification in order to “believe” it (seeking understanding). Faith, like all communal knowledge, is a product of our will as much as our mind. We “will” to know God by participating with Him, even as the knowledge of God is found more and more reasonable on the basis of our experience and the reality of life as we know it with God.

## Chapter 15: Saving Faith

2. Is it possible NOT to have “faith”? Saving Faith? Notice then the title of Chapter 14. What are we talking about? What aren’t we talking about?

3. Notice WCF 14:1 What are the three ordinary means by which God works saving faith in people?

4. According to Chapter 14:2, What is Saving Faith? Notice also WLC #72, and discern three characteristics of saving (or justifying) Faith.

Question 72

*Q What is justifying faith?*

*A Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.*

5. Notice especially “assent” to the truth? What “truth” must we assent to in order to be saved? (c.f., What is a Christian, Preston Graham Jr)

- a. (Acts 17:24-25, Gen.3:16-17)
- b. (1 John 1:8-9, Rom.2:23)
- c. (1 John 1:7, 2:1b-2,)
- d. (Eph. 2:8ff, Rom.5:1)

5. Notice also that “assent” to the truth is not itself faith. What must be added to assent, and what isn’t added?

(Note then, the three components of saving faith—the intellectual component, the will/affection component, and the joining/communal component.)

6. How then do we strengthen faith? How don’t we?

### Chapter 15: Repentance Unto Life

1. Notice how the WCF refers to repentance as an “evangelical grace.” What do you think this means? (note the Acts 2 Commentary, in the context of Pentecost, it is said, “and the Lord added to their number day by day” vs. 47)

2. Some have mistaken “repentance” with “good works”—what is two separate chapters in the WCF as related to two separate ends theologically is conflated. It is important therefore to understand this description of “repentance unto Life” in a way that doesn’t refute WCF 11 and then 14.

Note for instance the important qualification in WCF 11:

*1: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone... they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves it is the gift of God.*

*2: Faith... is the alone instrument of justification, yet is not alone.. but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but walketh by love.*

Note again the important language of WCF 14: 2

*The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for...*

Given the above qualifications concerning saving faith, how should we understand “repentance” as per the meaning of “as to turning from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.” Notice 15:3

3. What does paragraph 4 mean? Again, notice that the context is not civil codes or even church discipline, but in the greater scheme within our human covenant with God—we are saved either by our own keeping of the terms of the covenant at creation, or by Christ’s keeping the terms on behalf of us. This is the point of James 2:10-11 (e.g. on the context of the overarching law “love your neighbor as yourself” vs. 8) C.f. WLC # 150

Q Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?

A All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Observation: Isn’t it interesting that one of the sure signs that people have NOT repented unto life is that they justify themselves by distinguishing their sins from the really “heinous” sins of others... thus not understanding their own culpability in failing the whole of the law in their failure to love wholly!

4. We know of course that there is the possibility of “false conversions” (Mt.7:21, 19:11, 1Cor.8”7) What might some types of false conversions?

5. How does the question of conversion engage the transition from non-communicant (baptized) covenant children membership and then full- communicant (adult) membership (c.f. “Covenant Child Membership)