

Emergent Concerns

The Emergent Church has shied away from terminology that declares people are either in or out of salvation. They feel that for many it has become a badge of spirituality when they lead someone to Christ, like a notch on the belt, and then the “converts” are abandoned. The solution is not to get rid of the category of ‘point in time’ conversion where the person was outside of God’s grace before they trusted in Christ and at a point in time become saved, because this is thoroughly Biblical as we will see. The solution is the Biblical alternative where the Church seeks to make disciples (Matthew 28:19) rather than converts, but emphasizing that to become a disciple the person must initially convert. The following are a number of Scriptures that back this up, revealing that the emergent alternative of seeing people as gradually growing into the faith makes the same mistake as Roman Catholicism where justification and sanctification are blurred.

John’s Gospel makes the case for decision related conversion in several places:

3:3 you must be born again. Regeneration is necessary for someone to even see the kingdom of God (Titus 3:5).

3:18 If you believe you are not condemned but if you don’t believe you are already condemned.

3:36 the one who believes has eternal life and the one who doesn’t has the wrath of God remaining on him or her.

6:53 Jesus says that unless you eat his flesh and drink his blood you do not have life

8:44 Jesus says to the crowd that their father was the devil

12:40 God hardens people’s hearts so they are not converted

12:44-50 is a summary of Jesus’ teachings where those who believe are in the light and those who don’t will be judged on the last day (48).

20:30-31 gives the purpose of the entire Gospel which is to help people believe and when they do they receive life in his name, also called eternal life throughout the Gospel.

The Book of Acts stresses over and over that the original disciples called people to a crisis conversion experience that began with repentance, faith and baptism. It highlights throughout the book the numbers of converts coming into the faith. If numbers are important to God then they should be to us as well because each number represents an individual human being who was lost but is now found.

2:38 repent and be baptized

2:41 3000 added to the church

3:19 repent and be converted (NKJ)

4:4 number grew to 5000

5:14 believers are added to the Lord in increasing numbers – crowds of both men and women

6:7 the number of disciples multiplied greatly and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith

8:12 When they believed they were baptized – a decisive moment

8:36 the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized

9:18 Paul was baptized

9:31 the church increased in numbers

9:35 All in Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord

9:42 many believed in the Lord

10:44-48 Gentiles believed, were filled with the Spirit and then were baptized

11:18 God granted repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles.

11:21 A large number who believed turned to the Lord

11:24 large numbers of people were added to the Lord
12:44 after Herod's death God's message flourished and multiplied
13:10,12 Paul called Elymas a son of the devil and then the proconsul believed.
13:48 all who were appointed to eternal life believed. "Believed" is in the aorist tense in the Greek, which indicates a point in time occurrence rather than a gradual or continual state. The use of the aorist in reference to belief is used throughout Acts in multiple instances.
14:1 a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed
14:15 Paul calls the people to turn from worthless gods to the living God
14:21 they made many disciples in Derbe. Notice they "made" disciples (aorist participle). NIV says they won a large number of disciples.
16:5 the church increased in number daily
16:14-15 God opened Lydia's heart and then she was baptized along with her whole household
16:30-34 the jailor asked what he must do to be saved and Paul told him to believe on the Lord Jesus. He and his entire household believed and then were baptized.
17:1-4 Paul reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks seeking to persuade them about Jesus and some of the Jews and a great number of Greeks as well as a number of the leading women of the city were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas.
17:10-12 After examining the Scriptures many of the Berean Jews believed including a number of the prominent Greek women as well as men.
17:16-34 Paul reasoned with the Athenians and "some men joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."
18:8 "Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized."
19:1-7 Some supposed disciples were taught by Paul and then 12 of them were baptized in the name of Jesus.
19:18 says "many who had become believers confessed their sins and gave up their magic books. Here he uses a perfect active participle which indicates a point in time in the past they became believers and continued believing.
28:23-31 Acts concludes with Paul in jail in Rome witnessing to the Jews and all who visited him, seeking to persuade them to believe.

Paul emphasized the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works. Throughout his letters we see that people are saved when they place their faith in Jesus (Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8-9), having been declared righteous and credited righteousness, being justified by God apart from works (Romans 3:26, 28, 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6-7). Paul goes so far as to say that if anyone preaches any other gospel than the one he preached should be damned to hell (Galatians 1:8-9) and that there is another Jesus, another Spirit and another gospel that cannot save people (2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15).

This survey could be multiplied over and over, but what we see is that the belief of Jesus and the practice of the early church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit emphasized the point in time conversion experience as absolutely necessary for salvation, revealing that people are either in or out, under the covenant of grace or under judgment, born again or spiritually corrupt and dead, saved or unsaved, God's child or Satan's child – there is no middle ground (Matthew 12:30). If this is the belief and practice of Jesus and the early church and taught by the Apostles we would be wise to follow their practice even if it is not appealing to postmoderns. We dare not compromise the Gospel in order to please people. Looking cool should never be our method of reaching people; rather we must depend on the power of the Spirit and preach the Gospel, leaving the results up to God. Let's make true disciples, calling them to repent of their sins, place their faith in Christ and outwardly express that faith in baptism.