

# The Gospel: The Call for a Response

What Does it Mean to Have Faith in Jesus?

# The Gospel in Simple Form

- <sup>1</sup> Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this **gospel** you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.
- <sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: **that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Cor 15:1-4)**

# Introduction

- The Christian gospel always calls for and expects a response from those who hear it
- Thus, Jesus preached, “Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15)
- Through faith, sinners receive Jesus’ sacrificial death for the forgiveness of our sins
- What does it mean to have faith in Jesus?
- How do we persevere in view of personal tragedy and loss?
- How does God preserve our faith?

# The Term “Faith”

- The OT term, *heemin*, means “to have faith” or to “trust in Yahweh”
- The NT noun, *pistis*, means “belief, reliance, or trust” (Rom 3:3, 22)
- The NT verb, *pisteuo*, means “to believe, have faith, or confidence” (Heb 11:1, 27)

# The Nature of Saving Faith

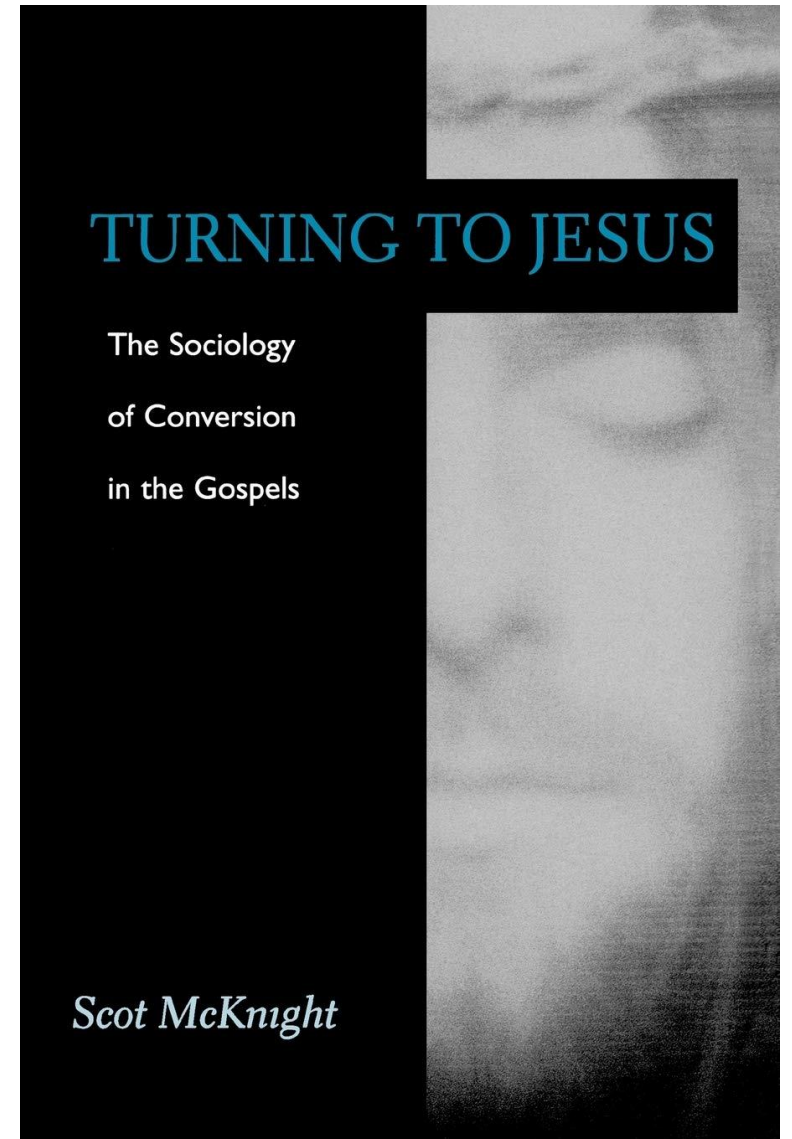
- *Notitia*: Knowledge of facts or content (Rom 10:14-17; Jn 9:35-38)
- *Assensus*: Mental acceptance of or agreement with this knowledge as truth (Heb 11:1, 6)
- *Fiducia*: Personal appropriation of the Savior (Jas 1:22; 2:17-19)
  - “believing in me” (πιστευων εις εμε) (Jn 6:35, 37)
  - “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim 1:12)
  - “believing in him” (πιστευων εις αυτον) (Jn 3:15-16)
- Faith is to trust in Jesus, to believe in him, to rely on him alone for salvation

# Conversion as Turning Away from Sin and Toward Jesus

- *sub*—“turning”
- “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you” (Ps 51:13; cf. Jer 31:18)
- *epistrepho*—“to turn” or “return”
- <sup>32</sup> “But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Lu 22:32)
- *metanoeo*—“to repent” or “to turn” (Matt 3:2)

# Scot McKnight on *Turning to Jesus*

- Socialization
- Liturgical acts
- Peter or Paul's conversion experience as the norm?
- "Conversion is a process, where many have no comprehension of a time and date on which they became a Christian" (McKnight 2002, 5)
- Conversion is not so much about "making a decision" as it is "following Jesus as the shaping core of one's identity" (2002, 181)



# Rambo's Stages of Conversion

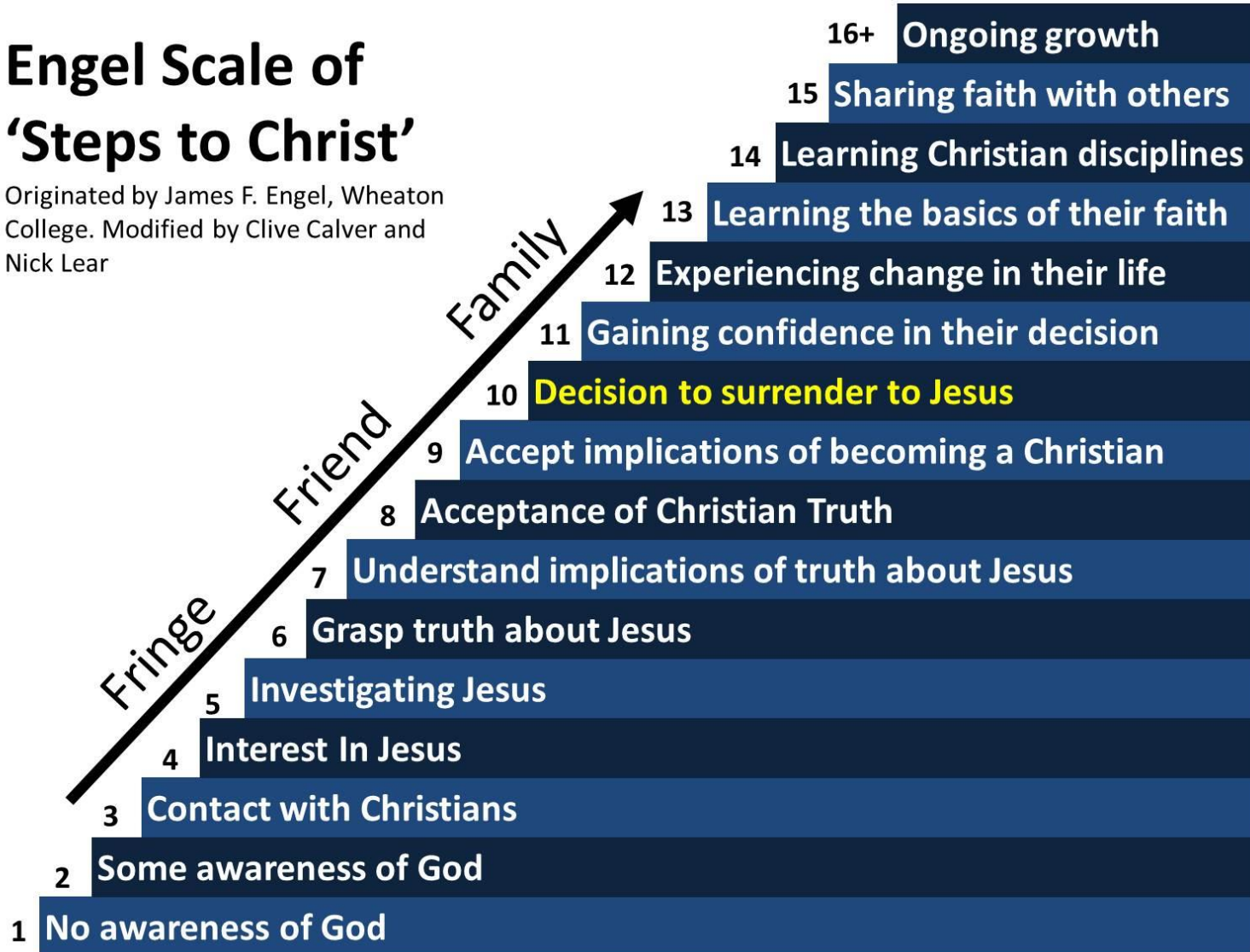
- Context—everything that has brought the people to where they are now
- Crisis—challenges that destabilize their religious identity
- Quest—attempts to search for religious alternatives
- Encounter—seeker meets somebody or notices someone who is devout
- Interaction—seeker finds a religious community that seems to suit them better
- Commitment—seeker joins the new faith community by taking on formal ritual and moral obligations
- Outcomes—the person participates fully in the new faith community



# Conversion as a Process

## Engel Scale of 'Steps to Christ'

Originated by James F. Engel, Wheaton College. Modified by Clive Calver and Nick Lear



# Crisis of Faith: Tragedy and Loss

- <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thess 4:13-18)

# Crisis of Faith: Tragedy and Loss

- Crisis of faith can precipitate Christian defection or cause believers to mistrust in God
- This passage doesn't explain why Christians in Thessalonica were in a crisis of faith; it just says that members have died
- The message is that believers can grieve, because we have the blessed future hope with Jesus

# Crisis of Faith: Tragedy and Loss

- Exhortation: <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope
- The difference between believers and unbelievers is not the quantity of grief
- Rather, our hope is the lens that colors or corrects how we look at our grief
- The difference is the quality—unbelievers grieve without hope and believers grieve with hope

# Crisis of Faith: Tragedy and Loss

- Paul gives two reasons for why we can grieve with hope
- **One**, Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection (v. 14)
- **<sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.**
- But didn't the Thessalonians already know this?
- They needed to understand the difference between theory and reality

# Crisis of Faith: Tragedy and Loss

- **Two**, we will be with the Lord forever (vv. 15-17)
- <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever
- As the result of Christ's return, we will be with him forever
- Believers are not only in the Lord (*en Kyriou*), but will be with the Lord (*sun Kyriou*) forever

# Crisis of Faith: Tragedy and Loss

- Conclusion in v. 18
- **18 Therefore encourage one another with these words**
- Notice the corporate dimension of Christian faith to exhort and care for one another

# God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

- Knowing a fundamental tension in the Bible has helped me to persevere in Christian faith
- <sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it (1 Thess 5:23-24)
- God's sovereignty means he is the one who calls us to salvation
- Yet the previous verses lay the emphasis on perseverance on our part
- Paul instructs believers to admonish and encourage each other, which presupposes the Thessalonians were wavering in their faith



# God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

- <sup>14</sup> And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone
- <sup>15</sup> Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else
- <sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray continually, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus
- <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not treat prophecies with contempt <sup>21</sup> but test them all; hold on to what is good, <sup>22</sup> reject every kind of evil (1 Thess 5:14-22)

# God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

- We never find this logic in the Bible—God is sovereign, so it doesn't matter what we do
- It doesn't mean God will save people without our effort to evangelize or to grow
- At the same time, it's unbiblical to say that God has done his part in electing us, and now it's up to us to persevere or we will lose our salvation
- Rather, we must hold in tension the sovereignty of God and human responsibility

# Protected by God's Power

- Christian faith is protected by the power of God ***through*** faith for a salvation ready to be revealed
- <sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pt 1:5)