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Christian in Name Only

by David Sielaff, July 2010

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Christian
in
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Are you a Christian in name only? Do you profess to be a Christian but your heart and soul and being are not really involved? Is your belief in God and Christ merely a convenient emotional crutch to help you get through life? If you were suddenly seized by the authorities and accused of being a Christian under dire threat of punishment, could you even be convicted? Would there be sufficient evidence of you being a Christian? Would there be any evidence? Or are you a Christian in name only?

You will be saved. Your salvation is assured. The salvation for all mankind has been planned by God from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:18), and that includes you. It is God's will (1 Timothy 2:4–6; Ephesians 1:5, 11). It has pleased God to tell us, His *ekklesia*, what the final expression of His will is (Ephesians 1:9). That plan has not yet come to its final consummation but it is certain to occur in the future (1 Corinthians 15:28) because it is promised and locked in His Word (1 Timothy 4:9–11).

The important actions for that eventual universal salvation have been accomplished already by God through Christ. As a believer in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, you are sealed by God through His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30). Everyone's salvation is assured, but the fulfillment will occur later (again, 1 Timothy 2:4–6; Romans 5:18–19; Colossians 1:15–20; Philippians 2:5–11).

God the Father created you specifically the individual you are — warts and all. Your relationship with Him is the most important interpersonal relationship you will ever have, now and throughout eternity. Try to grasp that fact. I repeat, it is the most important relationship that you have now, although you may not realize it. The more you take that relationship seriously and act to improve your part in that relationship, the more benefit you receive from that relationship. Why? Because your Father loves you and wants to communicate with you often. He wants to teach you about Himself and His creation that He has made for you (and for Christ and every other human being).

Jesus instructed us on how intensively we should love God our Father: **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind”** (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; and Luke 10:27, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5–6). Only Jesus has fulfilled that first and most important commandment completely. Too many people either minimize or neglect that most important relationship. I include myself, of course. Worse yet, not only do some believers neglect this relationship with God, sometimes they choose to ignore it completely. That is dangerous.

You do not have to “get right with God.” You are already reconciled with Him. He is no longer your enemy (Romans 5:10).

“And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead [for Christ’s sake], be you reconciled to God. For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he says, I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored [helped] you: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation [for you and for me].)”

• **2 Corinthians 5:18–6:2**

Note what Paul is saying. It is possible to receive the grace of God in vain. Do not neglect it. Act now. Now is the time. **“Now is the day of salvation”** for you, not some time in the future. Many have wondered what that verse meant. Now you understand what that verse means. We are to be **“workers together”** with Paul. We are not called to be impotent drones.

If it were not possible to receive the grace of God in vain, Paul would have written differently to the Corinthians. This does not mean they would not eventually be saved; they indeed would be saved — much later. It means that they might miss out on the 1st resurrection when Christ returns. They would miss out on part of the Kingdom of God, the very thing that the Old Testament saints so greatly desired to see. Some of the *ekklesia* of God will have a delay in their participation in Christ’s Kingdom.

A Mistaken Belief

Too many people who accept biblical universal salvation mistakenly think that because you believe (or once believed) and confess that Christ is your Savior and He was resurrected from the dead, that you will automatically be in the 1st resurrection. They think this because of a mistaken understanding of the degree of God’s control of your life now and your ability to express your own will and make choices in your own life.

It is a fact that God is responsible for every aspect of your life since you were born and into the future. Being responsible, however, does not mean that He actively guides or influences your every thought or action. You are able to make choices in your life, although most often we have severely limited choices.

Let me give an example I have presented before. We of the *ekklesia* are children of God, young children. Most of the *ekklesia* are immature babes, just like those in the *ekklesia* at Corinth or those original readers of the Book of Hebrews.

Consider a young child, a 1 year old child. As a parent each day you supervise and control every major aspect of that child’s life from the time the child wakes until he goes to bed. When you put that baby in the highchair and give him finger food, say Cheerios, do you feed them to the baby one at a time? Usually not. You put them on the tray and let him choose which Cheerios to eat and in what order. This is because once the baby has the finger dexterity, you allow him to feed himself as much as possible. Then throughout the child’s life you increasingly allow him to make more and more choices in his own life all under your supervision and guidance. God does the same thing with us as His children.

At this time while we are young children of God, He lets us pick up the Cheerios ourselves when we are ready. Some of us pick up one Cheerio at a time, put it in our mouth, mashing it until we swallow. Only then do we pick up another to eat. Others grab a bunch of Cheerios and stuff them in their mouths. Some do not eat at all. Some pound the tray with their hands, throw, or spill the Cheerios. All children do all of these at some time. The child is learning to eat and is developing precise digital motor skills, learning to socialize with parents, caretakers, other children, and watching the world while eating.

God has supplied you with a heart that beats automatically, as well as a blood and lymph system to transport nutrients, oxygen, and waste to and from every cell of your body. He has given you an autonomic nervous system that controls your breathing and numerous other functions so you do not have to think about each breath you take. Your digestion and elimination systems work automatically without your giving commands to your body. Your senses work without your thinking about them. If any system hesitates or stops operating, your body functions are immediately in crisis.

Milk and Meat

God the Father and Christ Jesus control every important aspect of your life. This is a gift to you so you can function and learn what he wants to teach you regarding Himself and Christ. He provides you with spiritual food which His children are able to handle in different ways during their development. The apostle Paul told the *ekklesia* at Corinth about spiritual things: **“But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man”** (1 Corinthians 2:15). Note that the person **“that is spiritual”** has a greater amount of independence by not being judged by any man. Paul continues:

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ [or, we should know His mind]. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat [solid food]: for hitherto you were not able to bear it [the meat], neither yet now are you able.”

• 1 Corinthians 2:15–3:2

The Corinthian *ekklesia* learned most of the lessons Paul taught them in First Corinthians. In Second Corinthians Paul gave more teaching and corrected other doctrines they misunderstood. They matured.

The Holy Scriptures present God’s message about the salvation He has accomplished for you. Your salvation is a much higher priority for God than any physical bodily functions He created for you. In fact, your salvation is so important to God that He will not allow you to do anything that might affect the certainty of your eventual salvation because it does not depend on what you do, whether good or bad.

In the Book of Hebrews the apostle Paul wrote to believers who thought they had a sophisticated and mature understanding of the truths of God. Paul showed them that they mistakenly interpreted biblical teachings about angels; they improperly understood the nature of Christ’s sacrifice, Christ’s relation to Moses, the Law of Moses, and the sacrifices, as well as His role as High Priest. To put it simply, they were immature and Paul told them so. Their opinion of themselves was an illusion. Paul clarified the issues and quickly corrected them. He gave them a scathing rebuke when he tried to teach them about Melchizedek, but he could not give them that mature information because they lacked basic knowledge and understanding. Again note the mention of milk and solid food referring to immature and mature understanding:

“... concerning whom there are words, many and abstruse, for us to say, since you have become dull of hearing. For when also, because of the time, you ought to be teachers, you have need again of one to teach you what are the rudimentary elements of the oracles of God, and you have come to have need of milk, and not of solid nourishment.”

For everyone who is partaking of milk is untried in the word of righteousness, for he is a minor. Now solid nourishment is for the mature, who, because of habit, have faculties exercised for discriminating between the ideal and the evil.”

• Hebrews 5:11–14, Concordant Version

Who made them “**dull of hearing**”? Who made them immature so that they required to learn again “**the rudimentary elements of the oracles of God**”? They did it to themselves. They forgot what they had been taught. Or worse, they rejected what they had been taught. They were taught reliable basic truth originally. Paul says they had “**need again**” to be taught “**the rudimentary elements**” of the faith. They were “**untried in the word of righteousness.**” They knew so little that they were unable to act upon it. Their dullness of hearing and immaturity was due to their actions and their habits, not God’s. However, God corrected them through the apostle Paul’s teaching. God does and will, however, allow you to temporarily refuse good spiritual things that He offers you, all the while guiding you with precision toward the ultimate and inevitable goal of your salvation (and the salvation of every other human being) through the works and righteousness of Christ Jesus our elder brother.

God’s Manifesto of Rights and Privileges

Dr. Ernest Martin in his book *Essentials of New Testament Doctrine* makes this point clearly in Chapter 26, “[God’s Manifesto of Human Rights and Privileges](#).” This chapter is an in-depth analysis and commentary on Ephesians chapters 1–3¹ (I expanded the paragraph into sections):

“In the meantime, we should all live by the rules of our societies, salute the flag, pay taxes and obey the civil laws (Romans 13:1–7). And alas, if Christians should become profligate in the eyes of society,

- **God can respond in chastisements in this life (Colossians 3:5–6, 25).**
- **He can even delay the time for granting us the rewards of the Manifesto.**
- **We could even miss out on the ‘Kingdom phase’ (the Millennium) by such evil actions (Ephesians 5:5).**

But on no account can we lose our ultimate salvations — which are awarded by grace.

Recall that even the Christian sinner in Corinth was handed over to Satan for chastisement, though Paul knew the person would ultimately be saved (1 Corinthians 5:1–5; see 1 Timothy 1:20). Like any parent, God chastises, but He also protects.”

• *Essentials, p. 445 (print edition)*

Such chastisements and missing out would be done for your good so that you will have proper wisdom, attitude, and character before entering God’s Kingdom.

If a Christian does habitual public sin and evil, it reflects badly upon God and Christ. God may act to chastise you and that chastisement can be severe, even unto death. Or, God may allow human judgments to prevail to punish a sinner. As the apostle Peter writes, there is no glory from suffering for doing evil. There is only glory when you suffer for the sake of righteousness:

“For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good? But and if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are you: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer [give a defense] to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”

• *1 Peter 3:12–17*

¹ Dr. Ernest L. Martin, *Essentials of New Testament Doctrine* (Portland, OR: Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, 2000/2004).

In one of the most mature writings of the entire Bible, the capstone of God's doctrinal teachings, the apostle Paul gives an explicit warning:

“Be you therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becoming saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive [seduce] you with vain [empty] words: for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”

• *Ephesians 5:1–6*

Note the last words. The **“children of disobedience”** are members of the *ekklesia*. Paul calls them **“children”** because they are indeed children of God, but disobedient children. The phrase: **“Let no man deceive you with vain words”** follows directly from the preceding thoughts. Paul is not introducing a new subject. His meaning is this: never let anyone tell you that a believer's entrance into **“the Kingdom of Christ and of God”** cannot be delayed.

The sins that Paul lists in verse 5 are habitual sins. In verses 3 and 4 Paul lists other evil and sinful things that were common but were not even spoken about, but they were not habitual. One does not become an idolater unless he does idolatrous acts often and regularly. A man is covetous by habit. Likewise with the unclean person or the whoremonger. Paul is saying that people who habitually do such things as he lists in verse 5 will not have inheritance in the kingdom until later. They will have to wait. Yet all will be saved.

Paul is warning his readers about anyone who tells them that God will not be wrathful against **“the children of disobedience.”** Such people will attempt to deceive or seduce with empty words:

“Be not you therefore partakers with them [the deceivers]. **For you were sometimes darkness, but now** [are you] **light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)** **Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.”**

• *Ephesians 5:7–10*

Encouragement

My intent here is to inspire and urge you to renew and improve your relationship with God now for your own sake. Stop ignoring God. Stop fighting Him. If you have a grudge against Him, deal directly with Him. You can be emotionally free with God. You can rant. You can wail. You can cajole. You can weep. You can be angry with God. You can shake your fist at Him. You can give a scream of anguish from the depths of your soul. There are examples of each of these and more in Scripture, proper emotions, many expressed by Jesus Himself. There is no criticism by God to any of this, but there is one caution. It should be done privately between you and Him. God understands. Life is harsh and too often filled with horror. Christ our mediator understands and He advocates for each of us, as the apostle John wrote:

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation [shelter, covering] **for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

• *1 John 2:1–2*

If **“we have an advocate with the Father”** when we sin, we also have Jesus as an advocate with our Father when we have problems and issues with Him.

Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). He is already conciliated to you; He is now your friend, your Father, having made Himself known to you. Within this reconciliation, the degree and extent of the reward

you will have in the Kingdom of God depends upon your actions now as a believer. You are at liberty to do good works. This is not an issue to minimize or disregard. Do not ever think to yourself, “Oh, I would be thrilled just to make it into the Kingdom of God, I would be happy just with that. Any time I get into the Kingdom is fine with me. Any low station of responsibility in the Kingdom is fine with me.” God’s view is: the sooner the better and the more reward the better, better for your sake! You have salvation; it is guaranteed, it is promised:

“In whom [Christ] you also [trusted], after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel [evangel] of your salvation: in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest [down payment] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession [purchased by Christ’s blood], unto the praise of his glory.”

• **Ephesians 1:13–14**

God’s Holy Spirit is your seal. It is your promise. It is your earnest. This is your purchased possession. This is your inheritance because you are **“in Christ.”** At this moment — now — God desires to interact with you. You communicate with God through your prayers and your thoughts. At this time He communicates with you through the written Word, the Bible. Those are His words, His thoughts, when properly understood in context. The Living Word is Jesus Christ, your elder brother, God’s only-begotten Son, the Captain of our salvation, your advocate, and the sole mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). Both your Father and Christ are very active in your life, working for your benefit behind the scenes of the physical creation. They are preparing your future (Isaiah 64:4; John 14:2–3; 1 Corinthians 2:9–14).

Unfortunately, during these relatively quiet historical times² when it is “easy” to be a believing Christian in the Western world, many have gotten into unfortunate habits of life and faith. Once a person learns and understands the facts and truth of universal salvation from the Bible, he or she often continues to live their life as if nothing significant or important has happened. They become “Christian in Name Only.”

Most of you reading this know and understand the truth about God, and the salvation that He has assured for man. Your ultimate salvation is guaranteed by God Himself. Nothing and no one can separate you from Christ’s love and God the Father’s love for you:

“Who shall separate us from [1] the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from [2] the love of God [the Father], which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

• **Romans 8:35–39**

Nothing can or will separate you from the salvation guaranteed in Christ Jesus from God the Father. We should have great peace in that knowledge (Philippians 4:4–13).

But Do You Care?

How much do you care about this most important relationship you can have? God gives you salvation, and you don’t care? He gives you His Word and makes available to you the secrets of His plan of salvation (Ephesians 1:9, 3:9, Colossians 1:26–27), and you don’t care? He gives you (“graces” you) repentance,

² Yes, for most people in the world these are relatively quiet times. No one is threatening their lives or the lives of their families. Few populations today face extinction, although there are horrid things going on in the world — all which God allows. Again, this is the situation for most in the world, not every part. To be sure, Christians in under-developed parts of the world are under great stress and under attack. You and I will never know about many of these situations.

belief, confession, and an open mind to accept the Gospel. Paul says, “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes**” (Romans 1:16). Your Creator gives you the opportunity to communicate with Him through Christ, and you do not take advantage of that gift? In fact you avoid Him? Paul wrote to the *eklesias* at Colosse and Laodicea,

“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding [which was given to them], to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God [which was given to them], and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge [which were given to them through Paul].”

• *Colossians 2:2–3*

Consider all the good things God wants to give to you now, if you accept them and work hard now to learn about them. Then consider the possibility that God the Father may not let you into the Kingdom of God unless you take seriously His love, His gifts, and His salvation.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting [eonian]. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

• *Galatians 6:7–9*

If you do not care, God will not care. If you turn away from God and ignore Him after He has made known to you His salvation and given you His Spirit, you are going down a dangerous path. Sometimes different translations communicate better, so let me cite the Concordant Version:

“Be not deceived, God is not to be sneered at, for whatsoever a man may be sowing, this shall he be reaping also, for he who is sowing for his own flesh, from the flesh shall be reaping corruption, yet he who is sowing for the spirit, from the spirit shall be reaping life eonian. Now we may not be despondent in ideal doing, for in due season we shall be reaping, if we do not faint.”

• *Galatians 6:7–9, Concordant Version*

If you are not careful God might require that you wait until the great white throne judgment to relearn what you could be learning now. Rather than when Christ returns, you would receive salvation at the consummation (1 Corinthians 15:24–28), with those who will learn the truths of God for the first time. This will be a glorious moment to be sure, and you will sincerely thank God for His love, grace, and salvation through Christ at that time, but why waste the terrific opportunity you are being given now? Why deny the good things that God is offering to you — for free — and offering them now rather than later?

You are being offered the knowledge and the opportunity to enter the Kingdom of God a thousand years before most of humanity. This is not ego gratification to satisfy yourself by doing what God wants you to do. There is no selfishness by accepting God’s gifts. God wants you to accept His gracious offerings to you, simply because you have been given the opportunity by lot to enter God’s Kingdom with the Old Testament and New Testament saints at the moment of Christ’s return. This was your lot and you were chosen before the foundation of the world for this.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

• *Ephesians 1:3–5*

That opportunity was given to you through allotment, through a lottery,³ but the opportunity is yours to exploit to your own benefit **NOW!** What is the cost to you? What is the price? The price you must pay is to learn as much as you can about God and then do good works for your fellow man. This is exactly what Jesus wants you to do:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

• **Luke 10:27**

God will give you the power to do that. He wants you to succeed, not perfectly, but as best as you can. You are a child after all. I am concerned that you may know these things but not care enough to even ask God to give you an increase of grace, and of wisdom. Ask Him to unhardened your heart, if you suspect you may be harboring some resentment toward Him. Ask Him to give you much more of His Holy Spirit. He is responsible for all things.

Hardened Hearts

Do you realize that even now as a believer your heart can be hardened? A hardened heart is a biblical way of saying you no longer care. You simply don't care about God or what He wants. God created our heart within us, and that is not an attractive thing (Jeremiah 17:9). The heart of man is **“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,”** incurably wicked. Yet God has deemed it as necessary for us to have it in our body-soul-spirit composition so we can learn the lessons, as His children, that He wants us to learn. Read Romans 9:9–33 about God's hardening the hearts of various individuals in ancient times.

The apostle Paul talks about people hardening their own hearts in Hebrews chapter 3. This hardening of one's own heart probably comes from bad things that occur to us in life, things that we attribute to God. We blame him for making bad things happen, or we blame him for allowing bad things to happen knowing He could prevent them. We harden our hearts toward Him.

“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost [Spirit] says, ‘Today if you will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts,’⁴ as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: ...”

• **Hebrews 3:6–8**

Paul says **“Harden not your hearts.”** He is not saying that someone else might harden their hearts or that God was hardening their hearts, but that they should take care against hardening their own hearts.

If you are in a situation where your heart is hardened — stop it, now! Grow up. Learn from the things that have happened in your life or in the lives of others. Traumas in life are very real, often serious and life-changing, and often very long lasting. But trust God. If you lack trust and faith in God, ask Him to give you faith and trust in Him. Faith and trust and love are things you can always ask for from Him. These are things He wants to give to you.

If you feel it is necessary, be free in your own mind to forgive Him for bad things you believe (rightly or wrongly) that He was responsible for committing or allowing. God never deserves your forgiveness in any way, but the apostle Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. He has conciliated himself to you. Be

³ Chapter 25, **“How Are We Chosen?”** of Dr. Martin's book *Essentials of New Testament Doctrine* describes the process of how God chooses us. It is a lottery process that was fair to all. You have been given a great opportunity. Do not waste it.

⁴ Commenting on Old Testament events, besides Hebrews 3:8, two other places Paul admonishes his audience not to harden their hearts: Hebrews 3:15 and 4:7. In those times also, they are hardened their hearts, God did not do so.

reconciled to Him. Read my article "[Forgiving God](#)" which may help explain this matter further. If you harbor feelings of resentment against God, I hope that article might help your understanding.

Back to Basics?

Some people do not care about God as strongly as they should because they do not understand the basics of doctrine. They let erroneous ideas slip into their minds, usually through false un-biblical religious ideas, and then they draw wrong conclusions about God. Or perhaps people have lost their "first love." The apostle John talks of this when he is instructed to write "**unto the angel of the *ekklesia* of Ephesus**" (Revelation 2:1) in Revelation 2:4: "**Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love.**"

Sometimes a hardness of heart develops because we lack a proper understanding regarding the basics of our faith. We forget to "**Prove all things; hold fast that which is good**" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We may need to review the basics of our faith. This is why Dr. Martin wrote his marvelous book *The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine*. It will fill that need, but only if you examine carefully the Scriptures as you read that book. The Holy Scriptures are essential and key.

The first basic doctrine to consider is your understanding of the resurrection from the dead by Jesus Christ. Did it happen? How do you know? Do you have faith in Christ's resurrection? If so, why? Can you prove it from Scripture? Can you explain to someone else why it had to occur?

Do you think it is enough to say "I can't explain it, I just have faith." How do you know you have faith in Christ's resurrection? Do you merely have faith in faith, hoping that you will be saved, or, do you have faith in Christ and His resurrection? You need to answer these questions. Are you a Christian in name only?

A good place to begin is 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. It is a wondrously concise presentation of the Gospel by the apostle Paul. Read, study, and analyze it. Use it as a basis for your own beginning study of the basic doctrines of the evangel, the Gospel. Compare this King James Version with other translations you may have. This is the message that Paul presented to everyone he spoke to: in synagogues, in town meetings, in markets, in courtrooms. All were variations of this basic message. It contains Paul's points of evidence:

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; By which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received,

[1] **how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;**

[2] **And that he was buried, and**

[3] **that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:**

- **And that he was seen of Cephas [Peter],**
- **then of the twelve:**
- **After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.**
- **After that, he was seen of James;**
- **then of all the apostles.**
- **And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."**

• **1 Corinthians 15:1–8**

Note the underlined portion above: "**if you keep in memory what I preached to you.**" It was important for them to remember this information. Note also that they could believe "**in vain.**"

Consider the thief on the cross. He did not have time to do good works, yet he expressed faith during the last moments of his life and Jesus said his faith would be honored and that thief would be with Him in paradise. You have a similar opportunity now and for some time in the future. It may be a short time or it may be a long time, none of us know what God has planned for us regarding our lifespans.

If you have been a Christian for 10, 20, 30, 40, some of you for 70+ years, and the resurrection of Christ and its evidence in the bible is not solidly in your mind and understanding, well, what have you been doing? Maybe the Gospel is not very important to you. Perhaps you are a Christian in name only? What Paul wrote applies to many of you: **“you ought to be teachers”** (Hebrews 5:12).

And yes, this applies to me also. I have not been grounded in the basics as I should have in the past. No one knows or understands God’s Word as thoroughly as we should. We had better get busy. Each of us should have the ability to, as I earlier quoted the apostle Peter:

“... sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

• **1 Peter 3:15–16**

The world will speak evil of you. They will hate you. They may oppress you. They may even kill you. Do not be surprised. Expect it.

“See that no one may be rendering evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue that which is good for one another as well as for all. Be rejoicing always. Be praying unintermittingly. In everything be giving thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Quench not the spirit.”

• **1 Thessalonians 5:15–19**

What Paul wrote here has direct relevance to our time before Christ’s return. Christianity is not a hobby. It is a way of life. In the New Testament it is even called **“the Way.”**⁵ Remember, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind”** (Luke 10:27). Yes, this is an ideal put forth by Jesus, but He is emphasizing this point to show the importance of your loving God and we should take seriously our relationship with God. Paul’s audience in the Book of Hebrews should have thoroughly understood several basic doctrines. They had been long-time believers:

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of [the] Christ [Messiah], let us go on unto perfection [Greek, “maturity”]; not laying again the foundation [the basics] of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal [eonian, age-lasting] judgment.”

• **Hebrews 6:1–2**

Paul then proceeds to write about their “falling away” from the faith. How is that possible? It is possible because they did not care enough. They had become Christian in name only.

“For it is impossible for those who

[1] **were once enlightened, and**

[2] **have tasted of the heavenly gift, and**

[3] **were made partakers of the Holy Ghost [Spirit], And**

[4] **have tasted the good word of God, and**

[5] [have tasted] **the powers of the world [aion, age] to come,**

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; [why?] seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

• **Hebrews 6:4–6**

⁵ See John 14:6; Acts 9:2, 16:17, 18:25–26, 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22. The Old Testament talks about the way of life of righteousness (Psalm 1:6; Proverbs 8:20, 12:28, 15:10; Isaiah 26:7).

Why is it impossible? Because those people would no longer care. Paul was warning his audience. Their faith had declined and they had not grown in grace and in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Grace and peace are the benefits of growing in knowledge of God and Christ (2 Peter 1:2). They were long-time believers but still immature. They should have been more spiritual, but they had not yet fallen away. They had not declined so far that they slipped irretrievably into the spiritual quagmire of not caring about God. They were headed down an bad path. Paul continues:

“But, beloved, we are persuaded [of] better things of you, and [better] things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love [they did do good works and had love], which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence [steady effort] to the full assurance of hope unto the end [the consummation]: That you be not slothful [dull], but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

• *Hebrews 6:9–12*

God remembers good works (“**God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love**” [verse 10]); He will remember you good works also. Because of the love they had shown to the saints and because of their own ministry, Paul is able to encourage them to follow through with diligent effort.

God the Father desires and gives all good things to His children. Do you honestly believe that if you asked your Father in heaven for the very things you need, such as loving Him more earnestly, more sincerely, requesting more of His Holy Spirit, to be led to do good works, do you really think He would not gladly grant you those things? He already has given you the freedom to desire such good things.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, ‘If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”

They answered him, ‘We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how say you, You shall be made free?’

Jesus answered them, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abides [lives] not in the house for ever: but the Son abides ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.’”

• *John 8:31–36*

Use that freedom and ask away! God, like any parent, wants to be asked for the good things He desires to give to you. Yes, He knows what you need (Matthew 6:8, 32; Luke 12:30), and eventually you shall receive all good things when the world is completely saved, but He likes to be asked. (I am not talking about wealth or riches.) Ask now so Christ can intercede on your behalf with the Father (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24; 1 John 2:1) for Him to give you spiritual things for your spiritual growth. Are you a Christian in name only? I hope not. If you are, then do something about it. He wants you to ask for the things He wants to give you.

The Sermon on the Mount

The longest single discourse that Jesus gave to the people was the Sermon on the Mount, comprising all of Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. In this discourse Jesus told the people what they needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear.

“Request and it shall be given you. Seek and you shall find. Knock⁶ and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who is requesting is obtaining, and who is seeking is finding, and to him who is knocking it shall be opened.”

⁶ “Request,” “seek,” and “knock” in this passage are all imperative verbs in Greek. These are commands that Jesus is

Or what man is there among you, from whom his son will be requesting bread — no stone will he be handing him! Or he will be requesting a fish also — no serpent will he be handing him!

If you, then, being wicked, have perceived how to be giving good gifts to your children, how much rather shall your Father Who is in the heavens be giving good things to those requesting Him?”

• *Matthew 7:7–11, Concordant Version*⁷

Jesus was speaking to a large Jewish audience, the general public: “If you [his audience], then, being wicked [or evil] ...”. He called His audience “wicked.” You, however, are a believer in God and Christ. You are not considered by God to be evil or wicked. Just the opposite. You are God’s child. You are reconciled to Him. You have God’s Holy Spirit. You are as pure as Christ is pure. Your righteousness is His righteousness because you are “in Christ” (Romans 5:17, 8:10; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 1:11, 3:9). The Father is even more motivated to give you what you ask for, if you ask for the right things, spiritual things.

Later in Jerusalem, before the Passover, Jesus and His disciples gathered for the last supper in the upper room (John 13:1). That was before they went to Gethsemane, before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Jesus washed His disciples’ feet and gave them the promise of God’s Holy Spirit. Then Jesus said this:

“And in that day you shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have you asked nothing in my name: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. ...

At that day you shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”

• *John 16:23–24, 26–27*

It is God’s will that you do His pleasure. He shall even give you the will to do His pleasure:

“Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

• *Philippians 2:12–13*

The apostle Paul instructs those in the *ekklesia* to DO something, and DO it “with fear and trembling,” and work out their own salvation.

Now Good Works Count!

Solomon wrote: “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.”

• *2 Corinthians 5:10*

Good works count nothing toward salvation. “Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) before our minds were opened to the Evangel of Christ, who is the resurrected Messiah and savior of mankind. After our minds were opened and we accepted Christ as our Savior and Messiah, and accepted that He was resurrected from the dead for our sakes, then good works count a great deal toward the degree of our reward

[continuing note from previous page]

instructing His audience to act on. We can do the same.

⁷ Compare this translation with the King James Version or other translations.

in the Kingdom of God. We were brought close to God through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12–13). In fact, we were created for the express purpose of doing good works:

“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.”

• *Ephesians 2:8–10*

We are God’s workmanship, yet we share the glory and gain the benefit from the good works that He does through us. It is somewhat like a 3 year old child who “helps” his older brother cut the grass or wash the car, or “helps” his sister wash the dishes. The help of the “good works” may not be very effective, but the work gets done nonetheless because God does the work through Christ, through us. Such good works help us develop maturity and it helps others who benefit from the works we do.

“For God has not given us the spirit of fear [timidity]; but [the spirit] of power, and [the spirit] of love, and [the spirit] of a sound mind. Be not you therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner:

but be you partaker of the afflictions [suffer evil] of the gospel according to the power of God; Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began [before eonian times], But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

• *2 Timothy 1:7–10*

Have courage in your faith in God and Christ and His resurrection. To put it simply: have some guts. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. God will honor your courage. Understand, however, that people might hate you for being an active believer in Christ. This may include your immediate family, your other relatives, your friends, maybe even your best friend or spouse. You should not be surprised if you are hated for being one who honors the name of Christ:

“If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody [interferer] in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping [committing] of their souls to him in well doing [doing good], as unto a faithful Creator.”

• *1 Peter 4:14–19*

Peter’s audience is being encouraged to do good works as if they are done unto God. And, Peter is addressing **“them that suffer.”** In other words he is encouraging them to do good even within their suffering.

In one of the last epistles Paul wrote to his young colleague Titus, Paul described the process and the place of good works for our former and present situation:

“For we also were once foolish, stubborn, deceived, slaves of various desires and gratifications, leading a life in malice and envy, detestable, hating one another.

Yet when the kindness and fondness for humanity of our Savior, God, made its advent, not for works which are wrought in righteousness which we do, but according to His mercy, He saves us, through the bath of renascence [regeneration] and renewal of holy spirit, which He pours out

on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified in that One's grace, we may be becoming enjoyers, in expectation, of the allotment of life eonian.

Faithful is the saying, and I am intending you to be insistent concerning these things, that those who have believed God may be concerned to preside for ideal acts [good works]. These things are ideal and beneficial for humanity.”

• *Titus 3:3–8, Concordant Version*

Paul connects belief in God with doing good works. Paul says this, and I agree with him. A Christian in name only does not show the fruit of God's Spirit. The sheep and the wolves are distinguished by their fruits (Matthew 7:15–20). Jesus said: “**Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples**” (John 15:8). “**Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God**” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Reread the parables of the talents or pounds (Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27), the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:11–15), that of the two sons (Matthew 21:28–31), and the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6–9). Note also how the apostle Paul understood works and rewards (1 Corinthians 9:17–20).

After you have been enlightened to the glorious fact that you are saved already, then the good works that you do will count toward your reward in the resurrection, not toward your salvation (for which you contribute nothing):

“**If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;**
[then] **Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it,
because it shall be revealed by fire; and
the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.**

If any man's work abide [be remaining] **which he has built thereupon,**
[then] **he shall receive a reward.**

If any man's work shall be burned,
[then] **he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.**

Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

If any man defile [is corrupting] **the temple of God,**
[then] **him shall God destroy** [corrupt]; **for the temple of God is holy, which [temple] you are.”**

• *1 Corinthians 3:12–17*

Examine Yourself

Too many people merely have faith in faith. Or worse, they have lost their faith in God. If you have faith in God and Christ, then you have a responsibility: to God's Word, and to His wishes for us, and for your treatment of other people. Paul encourages the Corinthians that each of them should:

“**Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove** [test] **your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates** [disqualified]? **But I trust that you shall know that we are not reprobates** [disqualified].

Now I pray to God that you do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that you should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates [disqualified]. **For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.”**

• *2 Corinthians 13:5–8*

These are serious matters. What does it mean to examine oneself “**whether you be in the faith**”? Test and “**examine yourself**” whether you are a “Christian in name only.” Are you “**in the faith**”? To the Philippians, after declaring that every voice will some day confess that Jesus is Lord, Paul tells us how the saints should conduct themselves:

“Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,

[1] **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**

[Why?] **For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.**

[2] **Do all things without murmurings and disputings:**

[Why?] **That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”**

• *Philippians 2:12–15*

“Work” and “do” Paul says. Now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). Now is your day of salvation. Get busy and **“work out your own salvation.”**

To be a Christian in name only is dangerous. Pray and ask God to greatly increase His Spirit to you so that your love of God and your fellowman may overflow. God bless you all.

David Sielaff, July 2010