

Who Are the Real Christians?

The **Essentials** of Christianity

With two billion people claiming to be Christians, who are the real Christians? Do they all really follow Jesus? Which ones are with Him?

Jesus said, “**He that is not with Me is against Me...**” (Matthew 12:30). How can we tell who is with Him and who is against Him?

Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and hundreds of other denominations and sects do not all preach the same gospel.

The Apostle Paul showed how serious it is to change the gospel:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8).

But there are many other differences besides different gospels. There are many different doctrines, traditions, life styles, and worship styles. Some of the differences are basic, some are not basic but still important, some of these differences are only minor.

Some differences are little more than differences of opinion. We should lovingly receive others when this is the case.

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations (Romans 14:1).

So how do we know the difference between little errors and big errors? How can we tell the difference between a mistaken Christian and an enemy of the gospel?

Which people or groups can we work with and help as Christian brothers and sisters? Which ones should we recognize as against Christ?

God has not left us without clear direction. The Bible spells out what the basics are. We can know the difference between children of God and children of the devil (1 John 3:10).

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CHRISTIANITY

The fundamentals of Christianity are the *essentials*. Without them true Christianity does not exist. In a sense the entire Bible is essential, every word of it: **“Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4)**. But God’s Word exalts certain doctrines as tests of the faith, marks of a true believer, essential. Each of these doctrines is emphasized in Scripture.

1. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The first and most basic fundamental of Christianity is the doctrine the Bible starts with, the existence of God.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” God’s existence is obvious from Genesis to Revelation. Even those who have no Bible should recognize there is a God.

For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

Furthermore, the existence of God is taught as an essential: **“...for he that cometh to God must believe that He is...”** (Hebrews 11:6).

2. THE WORD OF GOD

God's Word is a fundamental because we know about all the other fundamentals from God's Word. But the Word of God is also a fundamental in the sense that receiving God's Word is given as a test of being from God. **"He that is of God heareth God's words"** (John 8:47). **"My sheep hear My voice"** (John 10:27). **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life"** (John 5:24).

They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God hear-

eth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:5,6).

We are “born again... by the Word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). “He... begat us by the Word of Truth” (James 1:18). We live by God’s Word. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4).

3. THE DEITY OF CHRIST

The doctrine of the deity of Christ is plainly taught, repeatedly. The entire book of John is devoted to it. And it is clearly taught *as essential*.

But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name (John 20:31).

...If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24).

4. THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

While the doctrine of Christ's humanity is emphasized in Scripture, it is often overlooked as a fundamental. Most of the Gospel account shows Christ in His human aspect. Jesus' favorite name for Himself in the Gospels is "Son of Man."

In addition, the Bible holds this doctrine as a test of being "from God."

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God (1 John 4:2,3).

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist... If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 7, 10, 11).

5. THE SUBSTITUTIONAL DEATH OF CHRIST

The death of Christ takes a prominent place in each of the four Gospels as well as the Epistles. **“We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10).** The death of Christ for us is an essential part of the Gospel message by which we are saved.

Moreover, brethren. I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I

also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

6. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The resurrection of Christ also takes a prominent place in the Gospel narrative, the apostles' preaching in Acts, and in the Epistles. Not only is the resurrection a part of the Gospel message by which we are saved (see above: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) but the Word of God goes so far as to say that **“if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Corinthians 15: 14).**

7. SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Salvation by grace through faith is taught many times in Scripture:

For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

There are many other verses that teach this fundamental doctrine. In fact, the book of Galatians is devoted to this truth.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ... (Galatians 2:16).

This truth is so crucial that the Apostle Paul wrote:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8,9).

8. OBEDIENCE, THE TEST OF SAVING FAITH

While salvation is by grace through faith, the Bible often teaches that true faith is shown by obedience. Three times James 2 says that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 20, 26). In fact, as Galatians is devoted to the truth that salvation is by grace through faith, so 1 John is written that we may know we have eternal life:

And hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:3,4).

...Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (1 John 3:10).

We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death (1 John 3:14).

Jesus said it this way:

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me (John 10:27).

Saved people are described as those who obey God: **“He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).** Even Galatians, the book of salvation by grace through faith plus nothing, says ungodly people are lost: **“they which do such things [adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, drunkenness, etc.] shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21).**

Jesus commanded us in the Great Commission to preach repentance: **“repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations” (Luke 24:47).** So

while salvation is free, those who continue as unrighteous are unsaved.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

So, while it is abundantly clear that Christians are not perfect, there is still enough of a change in the life of a true believer, so that the Holy Spirit says, **“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world”** (1 John 5:4), and **“he that saith, I know Him and**

keepeth not His commandments, is a liar” (1 John 2:4).

CONCLUSION

The Word of God exhorts us to **“earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3)**. These doctrines are the essentials, the fundamentals of the faith:

- (1) The existence of God**
- (2) The Word of God**
- (3) The deity of Christ**
- (4) The humanity of Christ**
- (5) The substitutional death of Christ**
- (6) The resurrection of Christ**
- (7) Salvation by faith**
- (8) Obedience, the test of faith.**

When the book of Jude instructs us to **“earnestly contend for the faith,”**

it is specifically speaking of contending for the eighth fundamental, obedience.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

And in 2 Peter 2 where we are warned of false teachers who will secretly bring in heresies, the emphasis is on those who live in the passions of their lusts and scorn authority (2 Peter 2:1, 10). So these two chapters (Jude and 2 Peter 2), warning against false teachers, emphasize the ungodly living

more than the heretical teaching of these false teachers.

We have seen that the Bible reveals that certain things are essential. Without them we have no Christianity: the existence of God, the Word of God, the deity and humanity of Christ, His death for us and resurrection, salvation by faith, and the obedience that demonstrates our faith.

However, in our day other issues and doctrines are often exalted to prominence or even treated as fundamentals, such as certain views concerning: the King James Version, contemporary music, hair length, pants on women, views on the tribulation, the local church, eternal security, speaking in tongues, predestination, etc. It is im-

portant to determine whether the Bible emphasizes a certain doctrine, or is even clear on it, or even mentions it at all! We need to concentrate on “the weightier matters” lest we “strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:23,24).

On the other hand, many churches allow members to stay in the fellowship who are continuing in open, flagrant sin. God’s Word is clear that such people should be put out of the church, delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). We are to avoid them:

But now I have written unto you not to keep company; if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater,

or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Corinthians 5:11).

We should not view them as real Christians.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6: 9,10).

Nor should we view “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” who deny the deity of

Christ, as real Christians, or Roman Catholics, if they follow their official church doctrine that salvation is merited by works.

Even those who claim to be born again, often deny one or more of the fundamentals. According to Christian researcher, George Barna, concerning Americans who say they have made a commitment to Jesus and expect to get to heaven because they accepted Jesus:

- 50 percent believe a life of good works gets you to heaven
- 35 percent do not believe Jesus rose physically from the dead
- 26 percent believe all religions are essentially the same.¹

¹ *World Magazine*, December 6, 2003, p. 33.

Those who deny one or more of the fundamentals should not be treated as Christians. As the Word of God says,

Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10,11).

It is important that we know what the fundamentals are. We need to know the difference between a weak, mistaken Christian and someone who is not a Christian at all! Since God commanded us to contend earnestly for the faith, we must be able to tell who is on God's side and who is with the enemy!

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