

Exposing False Faith

Are You a Christian?

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My heart is anxious, burdened, encouraged, excited, all of those mixture of emotions and feelings, to do a short series on the topic of biblical salvation and to answer a couple of questions. What is the key to being a Christian? Are you a Christian? Those are two pretty fundamental questions worthwhile for us to consider and not as easily answered rightly as you might suspect or assume. Let me illustrate with a couple of illustrations as we begin from personal ministry. One very remote, one very personal and direct and immediate to all of us here at Truth Community Church.

Several years ago, long before the founding of Truth Community, I had opportunity to preach at a church in the Middle East. I believe it was in Beirut, Lebanon, where I preached this message and I've never forgotten it, not because of anything remarkable that happened, but because of something rather mundane, I guess you might say, that happened. I now wish that I had served them better. I now wish that I had had better wisdom at the time for the occasion than what I had back then. I was trying to make a good point, I suppose. I remember telling them that it was a noble thing to be a Christian. There was a stunning lack of response to that and there's, congregations are all different, some congregations are expressive in their response. They'll nod and smile at you and let you know that they're with you and that they're following along. Others are more sedate, let's say, less responsive, and you really don't know what's happening in anyone's heart when you're preaching. But I could just tell that there was a complete disconnect between the theme which I was saying and the way that it was received back then because it is noble to be a Christian and true Christians shouldn't hear that and respond in a way that, respond as if you hadn't said anything important to them. I don't blame them, I blame myself, but just to be very clear here, The problem was, I think, when I look back on it, I think the problem was that my failure in that opportunity of ministry was I made assumptions and I didn't define my terms. I made assumptions that they and I meant the same things and understood the same things by the terms that I was using. I was speaking about the nobility and the privilege of being a biblical, born-again Christian, to be on the receiving end of divine grace, to be delivered from Satan into the kingdom of his dear Son, God's dear Son, of course, to be delivered from hell, to be delivered from the dominion of sin, to be free from the demands of the law in the sense of trying to justify ourselves by law, being condemned by the law, and in Christ to be free from all of that and to have glory filling your soul. That is a noble position, but looking back on it and thinking, I could be wrong in what I'm about to say, but I'm pretty confident that what I'm

about to say has some validity to it, for some in that audience, the term Christian had a different meaning to them. It's an ethnic term, a cultural term. If you're not a Muslim, if you're not an Arab, if you're not a Jew, then you must be a Christian. You know, you just have these, you know, you have these different categories and, you know, it's a cultural ethnic term that they use, Christian in that sense rather than in the biblical way that I intended it to be. And so if that's true, then it would explain why we were ships passing in the night that didn't understand each other in that occasion.

Something analogous; the analogy will appear remote to some of you, but it's not remote in my mind at all, and it's not remote thematically at all. Something analogous happened at Truth Community Church a few years ago, not in response to one particular message, but there was a period of time going back a few years ago where Truth Community Church, by every outward appearance, was starting to blossom. We were having record attendance. People were filled with smiles and happiness as they came to be with us. And in the midst of that outward appearance, there was at least one, perhaps others, who were starting to suggest to me that we're in the midst of a true revival here. Speaking of revival, not in the sense of evangelistic campaigns like Billy Graham used to do, and like some churches still do, you know, they schedule a series of meetings and call it revival; that's not biblical revival, which is a whole other matter. But the idea that there was a real work of the Spirit of God that was happening and that, you know, the outward signs and the outward attendance was a sign of an inner work of the Spirit of God among many, many people. I wasn't buying it. I wasn't buying those optimistic interpretations of the outward phenomenon we were seeing and I couldn't even put my finger on it really at the time. I just said, and the proof of this, the proof that I'm telling you the truth in my understanding at the time was that Andrew Snelling and I were having a private meal together and in the midst of that, I said to Andrew these words, this is almost a direct quote. I said, "Our church is not as healthy as it appears." And he agreed with me. And sadly, subsequent events showed that judgment to be correct, showed it to be accurate. And I'm not going to rehearse what happened. I aim to edify today. I aim to be forward-looking today. But now that things have seemingly settled down from the interim period that I'm alluding to, I want to take advantage of it for the benefit of your souls and for the benefit of the future of our church. I want to step back, I want to step back from the exposition that we've been doing and the different events that are surrounding the life of our church right now and ask a couple of key questions, critical, vital, fundamental questions that when I say them, part of the problem is going to be there's going to be an inward sense among many that says, "But we already know this. I already know the answer to that question. I already know these things." And what I want to answer eventually later this month is I want to answer the question: what is the key to being a Christian? What is the key to being a Christian? I want to ask another question: are you a Christian? Those are two really fundamental questions. Those are the most fundamental questions of them all, really. In general, what's the key to being a Christian, that broad question, and then an application question, are you a Christian? And starting from those that are of the youngest age, still sitting on their parents knee in the midst of the service, to those that are maybe in their 60s, 70s, or 80s, we need to be able to address these questions, address them in love, address them clearly, and without apology.

These are vital, vital questions and I had planned this to be a two-part series and I started to write an introduction to the first sermon and to the two-part series that I had prepared. It was going to be a nice two-part series and then we could get back to Revelation, which is what everyone wants me to do. But then I started to write this three-minute introduction and I couldn't stop. I couldn't stop writing critical things down that were necessary to introduce a two-part series on what is the key to being a Christian and are you a Christian? I started writing this introduction and my pen took on a life of its own and just line after line after line and verses after verses that needed to be addressed. I realized and I thought about that message in Beirut and the complete disconnect that took place, at least from my perception. I thought back on some of the history of Truth Community Church with sorrow and thought and saw that there's a disconnect here. And I suppose it is always a challenge for a pastor, for a Bible teacher to, you know, let's put it this way, you do not have the capacity as a teacher to make sure that the plug is connected to the outlet and so that the energy and the truth and the compulsion of the word of God is connecting to the hearts of those that you're speaking to. I understand people come in, they've had difficult weeks, there's a lot of different distractions, there's a lot of different sorrows and the things that have been on my mind throughout the week are not the things that have been on your mind throughout your week. I get that. But it makes it all the more important for us to slow down and to talk about and to define our terms here and so what we're going to do, what we're going to do is we're going to kind of reverse engineer this. We're going to reverse engineer this and rather than starting with the ultimate questions, which is what strict logic would say that you would do, we're going to save the ultimate questions for the end and kind of start with the issues that would keep you from grasping and understanding and relying on false assumptions in the way that you interpret what you're about to hear over these next few weeks.

What we need to do is we need to expose false faith using Scripture as our guide. We need to uncover and smoke out, as it were, false hope in terms of these questions, what's the key to being a Christian, are you a Christian, and I want to clarify the very simple term, what does it mean to be a Christian? What does that term mean? How do we define that? What do we look at to understand? How is it? How is it, and it sounds like I'm picking on the congregation in Beirut. I'm not at all. It's just an illustration. But how is it, how is it, beloved, how is it that people who claim the name of Christ could hear about the nobility of being a Christian and hear the gospel of Christ presented to them and respond with dead eyes and a non-responsive Spirit, if these are living realities in their hearts? How can that possibly be? That makes absolutely no sense. That cannot be. That cannot be. How can it be, bringing it home, how can it be that after 90 minutes of worship, godly songs of the faith, music, prayer, Scripture reading, and an exposition of Scripture, how can it be that the aftermath of that is a quick transition into worldly conversation about passing matters as though we had just watched back-to-back episodes of Andy Griffith without any impact of, and I like Andy Griffith, but how can it be that you can transition from the benediction and just immediately just having conversations that are just, you know, that have nothing to do with what just transpired? That's what I was observing in that time in the recent past. When the Spirit of God is at work, if you're having trouble following me here, when the Spirit of God is truly at work and the word of God is truly impacting hearts, that becomes the dominant theme of thinking, of

conversation, and life response, and when a congregation can just act like nothing just happened on a consistent basis, then there's a disconnect that the pastor has a responsibility to try to address.

Now I think things have gotten better in the subsequent two or three years. I do think that, but I need to clarify what we mean when we're talking about the term Christian and so I have 14 points of clarification. I told you my pen got started and I couldn't stop, 14 points of clarification today and probably next week. But to go to that and to help you see that this is an enduring, prevailing issue for the advance of the word of God and for congregations to take seriously in their life, I want you to turn to Hebrews chapter 2 for just a moment. Hebrews chapter 2, beginning in verse 1, where the writer of Hebrews, after just extolling the superiority of Christ to angels, and in a book that is designed to extol the superiority of Christ to Moses, to the Old Testament sacrificial system, to the high priest, and on and on it goes, he makes this statement in chapter 2 verse 1 that should act to soften all of our hearts to the theme that is before us. He says,

1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

We must pay much closer attention. We must not despise the fundamental things of the faith, of Scripture. We must not despise fundamental questions of what is the key to being a Christian? What is the foundation of that? Are you a Christian? We need to pay closer attention to these things and so, beloved, what I want to do today is to give you a message titled, "Exposing False Faith." Exposing false faith. For the most part, for the sake of time, I'm going to quote Scripture rather than necessarily having you turn to it, as is our normal custom, and what I'm going to do is, the points here, seven points today, seven points next time, they're all going to be in the form of questions, seven points that are giving you questions. And what we're doing here is this, I'm asking a question that's very clear in my mind. Are you a Christian? When I ask that question, are you a Christian, but I realize, especially in a congregation of our breadth and different levels of experience, different, you know, people are new, people are visiting, people are, you know, have been here for a while, people come from all kinds of different backgrounds. People come from a Mormon background, people come from a Catholic background, people come from a Nazarene background, people come from other backgrounds of the Worldwide Church of God, and I say all of these things in love and with sympathy, I'm not poking at anybody here by being specific. People come from charismatic backgrounds, people come from seeker-sensitive backgrounds, moralistic, therapeutic deism. And so when we gather together, speaking broadly, speaking as a unit, not just today, people come with all kinds of presuppositions about what the term Christian even means and so if I ask a question according to biblical presuppositions, are you a Christian, and you answer from that question from different presuppositions that you've

had baked into your mind and heart over many, many years, we're not even communicating. We are just talking past one another and it makes it easy for us to just think we're happily gathered together and the kingdom of God is advancing and then events show that it was something else that we were experiencing together.

Now, at one level, you know, you could be a pastor and just be content with that and let the numbers grow and all of that, but that's not what we're supposed to do, is it? We're not supposed to just be content with outward appearances. We need to get to the inner reality. And it reminds me of a third illustration that has nothing to do with anything, but this is one of my favorite memories of my prior career, which is now over 30 years ago when I was practicing law. I was doing a deposition of an expert witness on some kind of issue and as expert witnesses like to do, he was evading my questions. I would ask him one question and he would answer a different question. And you go back and forth on this. You play this little game of jujitsu. And you know, you're back and forth and all of that. And I was tired of it. I was not having anything to... I wasn't going to have anything more to do with it and he had a kind of a self-contented smile on his face as I asked another question and he evaded the question. And finally there were only four or five of us around the conference room table and I literally pounded the table with my fist and I hit the table and I looked at him and I said, "That is not what I asked you, is it?" And the shock of that changed the direction, and we were able to have a profitable, friendly time together after that, and we both accomplished what we needed to do.

Now I'm not pounding the table in carnal anger like I was back then, I guess, here, but I want you to understand that when I ask the question, are you a Christian, some of these answers that people tend to give, that's not what I'm asking. That's not what the Bible is asking. That's not what the Spirit of God is prompting your heart to consider in response, and so when I ask the question, are you a Christian, beloved, I am not asking these questions that follow, okay? There is a distinction between the answer to the question, are you a Christian, that question is different from the questions that are about to follow. So, I hope that's clear. So when I ask, are you a Christian, I am not asking you this. I am not asking you to answer this question, number one, I am not asking do you believe in God? I'm not asking that question. Those are two different questions because, you see, beloved, a general vague belief in God does not make anyone a Christian. It's not enough to say that you believe in God and think that answers the eternal question of infinite magnitude, are you a Christian? Those are two completely different questions. And to say yes, I believe in God does not answer the question of whether you're a Christian or not.

James chapter 2 verse 19. James chapter 2 verse 19 makes this famously clear. James tells his readers, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-- and shudder! You believe that God is one, you do well, but even the demons believe and shudder. The demons aren't saved, that's his point. It's good as far as it goes to believe in God, but that doesn't answer the question that's before us here today. Simply believing in God doesn't make you a Christian any more than it makes those demons redeemed spirits by believing in God and knowing about his existence. That has nothing to do with it, really, because the concept of what people mean by the very term God itself is a whole other matter. And the sad truth, beloved, is that the vast majority of people that believe in

God believe in a god of their own making, one of their own imagination. These are the people that believe that everyone's going to heaven, that certainly they're going to heaven, that God is, you know, God is just he's all love and everybody's going to be in heaven in the end. That's a false god of their own making, but they could say on the basis of that that they believe in God. That's not what I'm asking. I'm not asking do you believe in God, I'm asking are you a Christian? Different question.

Secondly, have you said the sinner's prayer? Have you said the sinner's prayer? Not asking that question because, beloved, there is no formula prayer that you can pray that guarantees an automatically by rote operation that makes you a Christian. There's nothing like that and, you know, we're living in the aftermath of many decades, if not a century or more, of revivalistic practices that condition people to think that way and it's a massive undertaking to dislodge that from people's minds. You know, you gather together at a crusade, the evangelist tells you to come down here and you show forth your decision for Christ and lead them in a prayer, you know, and they're just responding to crowd manipulation techniques that have nothing to do with the work of the Spirit of God in their heart, and yet because they walked an aisle, because they raised a hand, because they signed a decision card, for decades people have said therefore you are a Christian. I'm not asking the question whether you've said the sinner's prayer, whether you walked an aisle in the past. That's not related to the question. People ask Jesus into their heart every day without any spirit of repentance about it at all. And beloved, if you ask Jesus into your heart, and we don't use that language here, that's not biblical language at all, I'm just borrowing the language in order to illustrate the negative point. If you asked Jesus into your heart at some point in the past, but you did not make a break with your sin, you kept your sin, you kept control of your life, you kept autonomy in your life, you're not a Christian no matter how many times you said that prayer.

Let me give you a couple of verses just to help illustrate the point. In Psalm 66 verse 18, the psalmist says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." You can pray and God not listen. The simple fact that a man – listen, this is so important – the simple fact that a man prays even to the God of the Bible does not in any way obligate God to hear and answer and to give him what he says. Doesn't work that way. A man who comes with sin in his heart, unrepentant, does not have the ear of God and has no promise of God to hear and to do what he says. The psalmist says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." People who come and ask Jesus into their heart without any spirit of repentance, just following the crowd techniques or just wanting a momentary relief from a troubled mind without a complete reorientation of their life toward Christ, prompted that it is a work of the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean anything. And so when I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking if you've prayed a prayer like that. We're asking something completely different. We're not even in the same galaxy right now.

Proverbs 28 verse 13 says, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Proverbs 28 verse 13, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them," that one and that one alone, "will obtain mercy. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for they and they alone belong to the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they and they alone will be comforted." You see, there's this, if you think about it in mathematical terms, if you think about there's a world, there's a unit of people that pray, there's only a subset that pray repentantly, that seek God humbly on his terms not on their own. Scripture makes that division clear. Modern church practice has blurred that to the point of indistinguishability. We need to distinguish it here.

One of the things, if you read anything about so-called modern revivals, you read about the ministry of large-scale crusade evangelism where thousands and thousands of people would gather to hear evangelistic messages, beloved, when you read just a little bit closer, when you look just a little bit deeper, you realize that not everybody, not at all, did everyone who comes forward at such times, were they actually saved. Oh, the organizations would report numbers of people who came forward and made a decision for Christ; that goes all the way back to Finney in the 19th century. And the numbers, and how can you argue with these numbers as people are responding like that? Well, it's not difficult to see through that and realize that it's not at all what it appeared to be because routinely, as a matter of established fact from the organizations and the preachers themselves, the common testimony was most of those decisions had no lasting impact. The churches weren't suddenly filled with new converts. Follow-up indications would indicate that the people kept on living the way that they had always lived before. It was a small subset of those who responded to begin with. You know, you have a stadium of 100,000, maybe 4,000 people come forward. Everybody wants to cry out revival. Then you look at those 4,000 a few months later, you look at church, you know, what happened after the tent came down and they went someplace else with the traveling roadshow, you realize that it's an infinitesimal fraction. Is that biblical conversion? If you've read your Bible, you know that's not biblical conversion. Scripture says, Philippians 1:6, when God begins a work, he continues it. If there was salvation, true conversion at the beginning, it would continue. People don't return to their old way of living if they've actually been converted by the Spirit of God through faith in Christ. But for decades, we were conditioned to see those responses and to equate it with salvation because someone prayed a prayer, but then they went on, after the lights were turned off, they went on living the same way.

And so, beloved, when I ask the question, are you a Christian, just understand I'm not asking if you've prayed the sinner's prayer. I'm not asking if you prayed at your mother's knee when you were three and you don't really remember it, and asked Jesus into your heart at your well-intentioned mother's knee. I'm not asking you that question. That might be an interesting, sentimental discussion for us to have, but we're talking about something different when we ask the question, are you a Christian? That question requires a different answer with different kinds of considerations and so, not asking do you believe in God, not asking if you've said the sinner's prayer, thirdly, I'm not asking you this, I'm not asking you this, I'm not asking you do you attend church? I'm not asking if you attend church when I'm asking if you're a Christian. And beloved, it's a good thing, it's right and necessary to believe in God, it's good and necessary to pray, but we're asking a different question right now. In one sense, it's a good thing to attend church. There's so many ways to qualify that that it's hard for me to even say that without going on a 10-minute tangent.

You've heard this statement. I don't know who first said it. It certainly wasn't me. But someone said walking into a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than walking into McDonald's makes you a hamburger. There is not a conversion – listen, beloved – there is not a conversion from death to life, from Satan to Christ, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, there's not a conversion that happens simply because you walk through a door or change your geographic location on a weekly basis from the physical structure of your home to the physical structure of a church. That outward dislocation of your physical presence doesn't mean anything by itself, standing alone.

Scripture makes this abundantly clear. For example, 1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us." 1 John 2:19. John's describing a reality that was evident even in the first century. The apostle was pointing to people who for a time had associated with the true church of Christ and by every outward appearance seemed to be one of them. Jesus spoke about this himself in his parables when he talked about wheat and tares, that the wheat and the tares, they look alike and can be side-by-side and it's not until the fruit comes forth that you're able to make the distinction, but for a time you cannot tell the difference. John's describing that as he writes near the end of the first century to a body of believers that were troubled by those who had left the church, were trying to draw them out of it also, and in order to protect the flock, John says, "They went out, but they weren't real. Yes, I understand," John says, so to speak. He says, "I understand that they were with you, they were among you, it looked real, but it wasn't real, as shown by the fact that they left and they embraced a different theology, they embraced a different Christ, says they were never real to begin with." The fact that John's saying, and I'm talking in the first century context here, the fact that they went out showed that they were never real to begin with because if they were real, they would have continued in what they professed to believe. And that is just an outworking of what I alluded to earlier from Philippians 1:6, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. God starts a work and he finishes it without exception and so the mere fact that you're attending church right now doesn't answer the question, are you a Christian? Scripture points to those who were not true Christians despite gathering together with believers for a time, maybe even for an extended period of time.

Church attendance standing alone proves nothing. So if I ask you the question, as I'm going to do in a couple of weeks, are you a Christian, don't come with that stock answer. Don't come saying, "Yeah, I believe in God." That's not the question I'm asking. Don't come saying, "Yeah, I prayed the sinner's prayer back in the day." That's not what I'm asking. Don't tell me about, don't stand before God and talk about your church attendance. That's not what I'm asking, is it? Did you notice how gently I tapped on the pulpit just then? I'm in perfect control of my emotions this morning for a change. Not asking that question.

Now, for some of you, I'm sympathetic if this is starting to make you uncomfortable. I'm very sympathetic with that because it's unsettling to start to realize that the things that you've always assumed and equated as being a one-to-one correspondence, Christian this,

Christian that, to realize that there's actually a wedge between those things that perhaps you hadn't fully understood, fully realized. I'm sympathetic with that. But beloved, what kind of doctor would be a good doctor and who withheld the true diagnosis of terminal cancer from you simply because he knew it was going to make you uncomfortable? No one would commend a doctor for doing that but I can tell you by sad personal experience, that's exactly what a lot of people, if not what most people want from a pastor. "Tell me what I want to hear." I've been shocked over the past several years at the number of people who had the audacity to try to dictate what the pulpit should be saying. It's shocking to me. And, you know, when you try to dictate the answers to the questions that are being asked, you know, you're setting aside Scripture and just saying, "I just want to hear what I want to hear." Well, I can't do that. I've got a higher responsibility. As one has said, it's not my job to say things that please you. It's my job to tell you the truth and the truth is that when you ask the question, are you a Christian, it's not, do you believe in God? It's not, have you said the sinner's prayer? It's not that you attend church that answers that question.

Fourthly, when I ask, are you a Christian, I am not asking this, are you moral and patriotic? Are you moral and patriotic? In our times, there are those who want to wrap their religion around the American flag; that's always been a problem for many decades and you talk about true Christianity and people want to talk about political issues and political protests and talk about the flag. That's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about, are you a good American? We're not talking about do you insist upon, you know, avoiding government interference in your life? We're not talking about that as if that was what it meant to be a Christian. Do you know why we're talking about some of these things? It's because it's what I've seen here. That's why this is not an abstract discussion to me. In the past century in American evangelicalism, it was common to join faith with patriotism, you know, and famous preachers would rail as much against Communism as they would proclaim Christ. And even today, and there are all kinds of political consultants who want you to think this way, because it's to their benefit in fundraising and elections for people to think in their minds that a good citizen who votes must be a Christian. That's not it. You can be a respectable patriot and be a child of Satan. You don't have to be throwing bombs on college campuses to show that you're not a Christian. Respectable morality does not make a Christian. Zeal for certain things, zeal for your ethnicity, zeal for your country, zeal for different things proves nothing in response to the question that we're asking.

The Apostle Paul says about the Jews in Romans 10, verses 2 and 3, Romans 10:2 and 3, he says, "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." This is Romans 10, verses 2 and 3, "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." People define what it means by a Christian, "I'm religious, I go to church, I vote, I have conservative values that determine how I vote, therefore, I'm a Christian." No, drop the "therefore." All that you've told me is what your political practice is. You've told me nothing about the inward state of your soul by pointing to those things. I'm asking a different question. You can talk about that if you want to, but we're not talking about the same thing. That's the problem.

The next one is even more surprising and unsettling. We've covered do you believe in God? Have you said the sinner's prayer? Do you attend church? Are you moral and patriotic? Those aren't what we're talking about. The fifth one is, do you think that Jesus is Lord? Do you think Jesus is Lord? Beloved, your personal opinion about Jesus, standing alone, what you say with your mouth about Jesus, standing alone, that's so critical, standing alone, your personal opinion about Jesus does not save you. Scripture makes this abundantly clear from the lips of Christ himself. In Luke 6:46, he said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" Why this bifurcation between what your lips say and what your life does? The reality is missing, even though you call me Lord. In Matthew 7, he says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Now look, beloved, don't you find that a little unsettling? Isn't it disturbing to see how easily people assume things, assume one reality, and wake up in eternity to a different reality? Beloved, Christ himself taught that to take his name on your lips without a corresponding life conversion, an expression of obedience that springs from genuine faith, to take the Lord's name like that is to take the Lord's name in vain. It's a vile form of blasphemy to name him as Lord outwardly and yet to live in rebellion to him. Christ himself said he will send many to judgment who used his name here on earth. So when I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking do you think Jesus is Lord. That's a different question altogether.

Now sixthly, when I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking this, I'm not asking were you born into a Christian family? Were you born into a Christian family? With sorrow, I remember a conversation like this that goes back long before I even met Nancy. I remember asking someone that question, are you a Christian, and the answer was, "Well, I was born a Christian." I was born a Christian. That's not what Jesus taught. We shouldn't talk that way. When you're asked, are you a Christian, it's not asking about the faith of your parents; whatever other sympathies I may have with spiritual lineage, who your ancestors are, who your parents are, means nothing if you're not born again. It's not that you were born physically with a certain family connection that was confirmed later on after examination in a church. That's not what it means to be a Christian. The New Testament makes this point repeatedly, and you see throughout Scripture how people relied on their ancestral lineage to prove the fact that they were spiritually fine and belonged to the kingdom of God.

John the Baptist rebuked this very self-same spirit in his preaching In Matthew 3:9, when he preached to the Jews, he said to them, "do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." As he was preaching, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," there were those in the audience saying, "Cool the jets, man." Not that they knew what jets were back in that day. "We're children of Abraham. Don't you know who we are? Don't you know who I am?" That spirit is alive and well today. I cannot tell you how often the spirit of that without the exact words have been expressed to me in ministry, "Don't you

know who I am? Don't you know who my family is? Who are you to say anything to me about anything?"

Jesus, through his apostle John, in the gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, says this, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name," the name of Christ, to them "he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." It's not that they had certain blood, physical blood flowing through their veins because of who their parents were that made them a Christian. And you little ones, five, six, seven years old, you're old enough to understand, even now, eight, ten, twelve years old, you're old enough to understand, even now, that the fact that your parents are Christian does not mean that you're a Christian. Scripture says you must be born again. You must be born again. Only birth by the Holy Spirit places one into the family of Christ, not simply being born into some idea of a covenant family. You have to be born again. And so when I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking who your parents are or were. It has nothing to do with the answer.

Seventh and finally, when I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking this, I'm not asking do you practice religion? Do you practice religion? Nathaniel and I did not coordinate his opening with the message, but I want you to turn to Isaiah chapter 1 in this regard on our final point here. If you read the Old Testament prophets, you'll find that they hammered home this principle repeatedly upon their listeners. They were speaking to the covenant nation. They were speaking to those who had received the word of God, the prophets belonged to them, the promises belonged to them, the Old Testament system, the sacrificial system. It all belonged to them as Jews and yet the prophets repeatedly told them, "Don't trust in your religion. In fact, your religion joined with the hypocrisy of your life simply qualifies you for judgment."

And so in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 11 we read this, "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats." Today you could go on and say, "I do not delight in wafers and lit candles and other things." Verse 12, "When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations-- I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly." Notice what he's talking about. Notice what his point is. Notice who Isaiah was speaking to, people who were practicing religion even according to revealed principles. He says, "Your religion means nothing when it's joined with such hypocrisy of life." Verse 14, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands," in prayer, "I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood." The point for today, beloved, is this, their ritualistic religion said nothing about the true state of their souls. They gloried in their sacrifices and their rituals and the routine that they went through. They gloried in that and in most emphatic language, at the start of the book of Isaiah, God says, "Forget about that, we need to talk about something else." Verse 16, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good;

seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." In other words, what God is saying is, "Bring forth an integrity of life that is consistent with the faith you profess to possess."

What can we say about all of these things so far as we sum up for today? Beloved, if you're going to answer the question, are you a Christian, you have to know what Scripture says about being a Christian and realize that it may be different from what you've been conditioned to think all of your life. It may be a dislocating experience to answer that question honestly, and the older you get, the more difficult it is to deal with dislocating questions. But in all of these questions and the others that we'll address next week, these seven questions that I've addressed, in all of them there's a tinge of self-righteous, uninformed assertion of what's true about me and about what I do. "I believe in God. I said this prayer. I was born into a certain family." And beloved, you're not going to get anywhere until you've learned to separate yourself from those kinds of answers to the most important question of them all, are you a Christian? As we close today, the key to Christianity is not self-effort. It's not what you have done or even necessarily what you believe. The key to Christianity is the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we will explain more in days to come. The call of the gospel is not an affirmation of your self-righteousness. Let me say that again, the call of the gospel is not an affirmation of your self-righteousness. The gospel comes to you and says you have no righteousness of your own. The call of the gospel is a call to repent and follow Christ. True salvation has spiritual effects on everyone who truly believes. And so, beloved, as we continue in this series in the few weeks to come, understand I'm not willing to make assumptions about your soul and we need to explore these things. Eternity awaits. We better get this right.

Let's pray together.

Father, certainly not our desire in any way to unsettle those who have true faith and who truly belong to you. And for those who truly belong to you, Father, I trust that your Spirit has worked a sense of amen in their hearts as false views of faith are held up to the light of Scripture. Father, I pray for those unsettled, perhaps offended by such direct teaching from your word and, Father, like Saul, help them to lay down the weapons of opposition to the true Christian faith, him as he carried forth orders to imprison and kill Christians, they with their resistance and self-righteousness. Father, help us to lay down the weapons of resistance and supply to our hearts by your Holy Spirit instead a teachable spirit that desires your glory and truth above all else as we go forward in the days to come. We commit this to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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