

Paper 8: “How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?”

“How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?” is not just a very important Question for Assurance purposes, but is also something that you are very specifically commanded to search out by both the Apostles Peter and Paul

*“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure”
(2 Peter 1:10)*

*“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”
(2 Corinthians 13:5)*

This Paper is intended to help you in your “*examination*” and “*test*”.

We all need to resolve the Question ...

“How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?”

... for three very important reasons:

- 1. Knowing for sure that you are a Christian and that whatever happens to you, you will go to be with God, will be your greatest source of comfort, joy, hope and help in times of prolonged suffering and approaching death.***

All three of your long-time spiritual enemies, the “*world*”, the “*flesh*” and the “*devil*” – but especially the “*devil*” – will relentlessly tell you that you are not a Christian, that you will never be good enough to be one, and that you have sinned away your opportunity to be one. The devil will throw many of your past sins up in front of you as proof. He knows that he cannot take your salvation from you, but he aims to make you think he can in order to trouble you over the matter, and, most importantly, to destroy any testimony that you might give to others during this great period of trial.

But even more pressing than this is our second reason ...

- 2. Not knowing for sure that you are a Christian will greatly affect your attitude and thoughts about God Himself.***

Not knowing for sure that you are a Christian will cause you to have an unbiblical and misdirected fear of God and, very probably, some resentment toward Him. You most certainly will not be able to “*enjoy*” Him as much, or have as deep and loving a communion with Him, if you are not sure that you are His child.

A third reason that we need to resolve our “How Can I Know” Question is that ...

3. ***Our Lord and others have given us numerous strong warnings that “many” will be self-deceived in this area ...***

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

[Note: As many find the Matthew 7:21-23 passage to be very frightening and disturbing, we go into a much deeper look at it in [Appendix 2](#).]

“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

*‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’”*

(Jesus Christ, Matthew 15:7-9)

“But, be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

(James 1:22)

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:1-4)

For all three of the above reasons, we need to take the commands of Peter and Paul to “*diligently*” strive to “*make our call and election sure*” and to “*test*” and “*examine*” ourselves as to “*whether [we] are in the faith*” very seriously.

But before we start our “Test” and “Examination” to answer the Question

“How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?”

... there are FIVE very important concepts on which we must be absolutely clear if we are to get a correct answer to our Question ...

1. We must know the component make-up of a true saving faith, the “*faith*” “*through*” which we are saved, the “*faith*” that gains salvation, and how to distinguish it from a “dead” faith that profits nothing.
2. Whereas our Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells us four times over in John Chapter 14 that the surest test of our “love” for Him is found in our obedience to His commands, we need to know exactly what “obedience” to His commands is, does, and means, i.e., we need to know and assess its nature, motive, and scope.
3. We need to understand that the Christian is still a sinner and we need to know how to discern the very important difference between a Christian “*struggling*” with “*surviving*” sin in his life and an unbeliever entrapped by “*reigning*” sin.
4. We need to get some direction as to the proper manner in which to approach “*testing*” and “*examining*” ourselves “*as to whether we are in the faith*”.
5. Lastly, for purposes of mutual clarity, we need to clearly define some of the terms that we will be using in our Paper. [This is done in Appendix 1.]

Unless these five concepts are clearly and fully understood, taking the test would very likely give us a wrong and deceptive answer – which is why we will spend a great deal of time and space going over all FIVE of them before starting our “Test” and “Examination” itself.

The First Concept that we need to be clear about before starting our “test” and “examination” is ...

The component make-up of a true saving faith, the “faith” “through” which we are “saved” and how to distinguish it from a “dead” faith that profits nothing.

We are told in the Bible ...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

In this verse we see first that we are saved by God’s electing “*grace*”. We see, second, that the *instrument through which* we lay hold of our salvation is “*faith*” – “*For by grace you have been saved through faith*”. We see, third, that our “*faith*” is “*not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*” God is totally sovereign in our salvation. It is by His “*grace*” alone that we have been “*saved through faith*”, which “*faith*” is itself His “*gift*” to us. And, as if it somehow needed to be repeated for emphasis, we are additionally told that our salvation is very specifically “*not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

A true, living, saving faith is absolutely indispensable to our salvation ...

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6)

The Bible tells us of two different kinds of “faith”.

There is a *living, saving “faith”* that attains salvation, and, there is also, as James tells us, a “*dead*” faith, which is a *false faith* that does not attain salvation ...

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17).

In the New Testament, we are told of and warned against the “*dead*” and barren faith of the Pharisee, the Judaizer, and the hypocrite – all of which produce a *false* assurance of salvation.

So it is imperative that *before* we begin to “*test*” and “*examine*” ourselves “*as to whether [we] are in the faith*” we know and understand the component make-up of a living, saving *faith*, the true *faith “through”* which we are saved, and how it differs from the component make-up of a false “*dead*” faith, which does not save.

There are Three Essential Elements or Parts to a Living, Saving Faith

The first “Essential Element” is ...

1. Notitia – There must be an “Object” and a “Set of Propositions” about the Object in which to have faith. You can’t have “faith” in “nothing”.

The second “Essential Element” of a living, saving faith is ...

2. Assensus – We must give our “*Mental Assent*”, or belief, to the truth of the “*Set of Propositions*” concerning the “*Object*” of our faith. We cannot have “*faith*” in something that we don’t believe to be true.

We note that to have a living, saving faith, the object and set of propositions about the object to which we give our “*mental assent*” must be held “*in truth*” and “*according to knowledge*”.

The Apostle John has told us of the need for “*truth*” concerning the object of our faith and the set of propositions about the object of our faith in his record of our Lord’s discourse with the Samaritan woman at the well ...

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”’
(John 4: 22-24)

Paul has likewise told us about the importance of worshiping “*according to knowledge*” as he laments for his fellow Jews ...

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” (Romans 10:1-2)

Thus do we see that *sincerity* and *zealousness* about the object and the set of propositions of our faith are not enough for having a living, saving faith. No, the object and set of propositions about the object of our faith must be true themselves be held in a correct and truthful manner. Unless one worships the “*true*” God “*in truth*” and “*according to knowledge*”, he worships in vain.

We will cover some examples of this when we look at a “*dead*” faith.

Our third “Essential Element” for having a living, saving faith is ...

3. Fiducia – The object of our faith and the set of propositions about the object of our faith must be “*fully embraced*” by us.

By “*fully embraced*” we mean that we must go well beyond a mere intellectual “*mental assent*” to the truth of our set of propositions and come to *fully “embrace”* them, i.e., come to have a firm trust in, reliance upon and active life commitment to them.

Let’s remember that a true Christian is a “*new creation*”. He has been “*born again*”. He has a new regenerate heart, has been adopted as a son by God the Father, is in spiritual union with Jesus Christ, and is actually indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Thus, the living, saving faith of the true Christian will be *transformative* and will affect every aspect of his being – his intellect, emotions, and his will.

In a word, the true faith of a Christian, because of all these changes listed above, will have the component of “*fiducia*”. The true Christian will trust in, rely upon, and make an active life commitment to the object and set of propositions about the object of his faith.

On the other hand, there is also a “dead” faith.

A “dead” faith contains only the first two elements of a living, saving faith – Notitia (Knowledge) and Assensus (Mental Assent). There is no “Fiducia”. Again, let’s keep in mind that we are talking here about the “*dead*” faith of a person *claiming* to be a Christian, but who, in actuality, is not.

Two types of persons mentioned earlier as having a “*dead*” faith are the “*Judaizer*” and the “*hypocrite*”. The “*Pharisee*” does not claim to be a Christian.

Let’s look at the faiths of the “Judaizer” and the “hypocrite” to see why their faith is “dead”

The “Judaizer”

The Judaizer was a Jew who claimed to believe in Christ, i.e., they have Christ as the object of their faith and they also hold to a lot of correct propositions about Him – among them being that He is the Son of God, that He is a co-equal, co-eternal, and of the same Substance as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, that He was born of a Virgin, that He died as our substitute to atone for our sins, and that He has risen from the dead. He believes other propositions as well, but these are enough for our purpose.

The problem of the Judaizer is that He assents to all of this, but then adds to it such that he no longer holds the propositions “in truth” and “according to knowledge”. Misapplied propositions lead to false propositions. The crucial failing of the New Testament Judaizer is

that he thinks that something else is needed, another work of some kind, in addition to faith in Christ, to complete his salvation – in this case, specifically, circumcision ...

“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” (Acts 15:1)

Paul tells us that adding the single “work” of circumcision to faith in Christ as needed for our salvation is heretical in that it – moves one away from God’s “grace”, makes Christ of no value to them, and puts them back under the keeping of the law as their means of salvation. It shifts them from a “Faith Alone” salvation to a “Faith + Works” salvation. Paul writes to his Galatian congregants concerning the matter ...

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who would be justified by law, you have fallen from grace.” (Galatians 5:1-4)

Paul takes the heresy of adding a work to faith in Christ as necessary for salvation so seriously that he actually calls the Judaizers “dogs” and “evil workers” ...

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Philippians 3:2-3)

... and even goes so far as to say that he wishes that they would not stop at circumcision, but would go all the way and castrate themselves ...

“I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off.” (Galatians 5:12)

And so, we see that sincerity and zeal are not enough for salvation in and of themselves. The propositions about Christ must also be held “in truth” and “according to knowledge”.

Confirm again ...

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4: 23-24)

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” (Romans 10:1-2)

The “Hypocrite”

Another major example of “*dead*” faith discussed in the New Testament is that of the “*hypocrite*”. Hypocrites know what the Bible says, but continue to “*practice lawlessness*” in some area, thinking that they can get away with it because ...

They are ‘pretty good overall’, ‘nobody’s perfect’, and they are better than most

They do other works for the church that will surely offset their disobedience in one small particular area

They think that God is not really so “wrought up” over sin after all.

We will later take an in-depth look at Matthew 7:21-23 dealing with the “*many*” who do great works for the church but hypocritically and unrepentantly “*practice lawlessness*” in some area and who will consequently be told by Christ to “*depart from Me*” into hell. We will learn that *selective obedience* is not an option and that Jesus will have all of you or He will have none of you.

This type of “*dead*” faith is very widespread in our country today. It exists because so many churches today never mention ‘*human depravity*’, “*sin*” or “*hell*” for fear of offending someone. No, they teach instead what can be called “*cheap grace*”, “*easy-believism*” and “*Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*”. They teach that one can have Jesus as their “*Savior*”, but not as their “*Lord*”. They sometimes say at funerals, no matter how wicked a life a person has lived, things like “*we can always look back to their baptism*”, as if ‘*once baptized/always saved*’ were true.

The “*hypocrite*” may well have a correct knowledge (Notitia) about Christ and give their mental assent (Assensus) to what may well be a correct understanding of the set of propositions about Christ.

But their faith is “*dead*” because it does not move forward to “Fiducia”. They do not “fully embrace” or make an “active life commitment” to the object and set of propositions about their faith. Their faith is, in reality, nothing more than a “*dead*” and barren mental assent to set of propositions. ‘*Easy believism*’ and ‘*cheap grace*’. No “*fiducia*”.

In fact, James tells us that without “*fiducia*” one has only the “*faith*” of the demons of hell ...

“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!” (James 2:19)

The demons of hell have the first two essentials of a saving faith ...

1. They know and correctly understand the facts and claims of Jesus Christ and His gospel message.
2. They certainly give their mental assent to all the claims about Jesus and the gospel message. [See Matthew 8:28-29.]

Yet, all of this only makes them “*tremble*”, because it stops at mere knowledge and mental assent. It is a “*dead*” faith and is of no value at all.

The Second Concept that we need to be clear about before starting our “test” and “examination” is ...

The overwhelming importance of “obedience” to our Lord’s commands as the surest test of our “love” for Him.

Our Lord Himself stated four times in the space of 10 verses in John Chapter 14 that obedience to His commands is THE surest possible sign of our true “love” for Him ...

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” (John 14:21)

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word” (John 14:23)

“He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:24)

From our Lord’s own mouth we have it four times over that obedience to His commands is THE surest way to tell if we truly “love” Him or not.

So, our first and most important “*Earmark* of a Christian” Question will be ...

“Do you bear proof of your professed ‘love’ of Jesus by striving to obey His commands?”

As we said earlier, this is actually a much more complex Question than it appears to be on the surface, and for us to be able to get a correct answer to the Question, we need to look at and closely assess the nature, motive, and scope of our obedience.

Another reason to explore this particular “Earmark” in great depth is that our Lord repeatedly tells us that obedience to His commands is an area in which “many” people will be self-deceived. [We refer you back to the numerous strong warnings against self-deception in this area given in Reason 2 above.]

So, in order to better assess your STRIVING for obedience ...

WHY do you strive for obedience? WHAT is your ‘heart-motive’ for ‘striving to obey’ Our Lord’s commands?

In the Bible the word “*heart*” refers to the core center of our being. The “*heart*” is the seat from which all attitudes, emotions, and the inclinations of the will arise. So our “*heart-motive*” for striving for obedience is critically important because motives can be good or bad, right or wrong, correct or incorrect.

Regarding our motives for “striving to obey His commands” ...

The ONLY CORRECT MOTIVES for striving to obey Christ’s commands are those of love and thankfulness to Him for what He has done for us and because He is our God

An INCORRECT MOTIVE for striving to obey Christ’s commands is that you think it adds something to or in some way helps in attaining and/or maintaining your salvation. This is totally incorrect because, as we have seen, salvation is by God’s “*grace*” alone, comes “*through faith*” alone, and is very specifically “*not of works, lest anyone should boast*” ...

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The PRIMARY MOTIVE that people have for coming to God in the first place is that they fear going to hell. This is a legitimate reason for *initially* coming to God and one that He accepts. Fear of being a sinner and going to hell is a good fear that drives you to Christ for salvation. And, God will most certainly accept and save any person who sincerely comes to Him with that motive.

But, as C. S. Lewis has pointed out, even though God accepts us for that motive, it is not exactly flattering to God to be chosen just as an alternative to hell. So, after fear of going to hell has driven you to Christ for salvation, fear of going to hell is no longer a correct motive for striving for obedience. The Christian should have no fear of hell. Jesus has paid the full price for all of your sins and God, being a just God, would never punish you again for something that He has already punished on Christ. God may exercise loving Fatherly discipline on you, but, even then, it is always corrective and never punitive.

Perfect love casts our fear. The Christian should rest secure in the assurance of His salvation not only because Christ has borne the penalty of all his sins for him, but also because God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to his account such that when God looks at the Christian, he sees not the sins of the Christian, but the righteousness of His own dear Son. Thus we have the most wonderful truth of all – The foundation of the Christian’s salvation, and assurance of it, stands outside of himself and is as solid and sure as the righteousness of Christ Himself.

The Christian should, therefore, strive for obedience to Christ’s commands, not out of fear of hell, but out of love and thankfulness for what God has done for him.

Another complicating aspect of answering our very crucial Earmark Question ...

“Do you bear proof of your professed ‘love’ for Jesus by striving to obey His commands?”

... concerns the scope or extent of your obedience to His commands.

The Question here is “Do you strive to obey ALL of His commands?”

It is very important for you to understand that ...

Christ will have ALL of you, or He will have NONE of you.

Even treasured sins must die. We are strictly warned against self-deception in this area ...

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (I Corinthians 6:9-10)

God will work long and hard with you to help you eradicate and forsake your remaining indwelling sin. He will stick by you in setbacks and falls. But He absolutely will not allow you to unrepentantly “*practice*” any sin.

Do not think that hard work or even great works in other areas of the church will somehow compensate or make up for continued practice of one cherished sin in another area. Hear the word of our Lord ...

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

[Note: We are not talking here about a Christian falling into a sin and repenting of it. No. We are talking about a “Christian” regularly and unrepentantly “practicing” a sin.]

Know for sure that you will not get away with *practicing* any sin because God will not be “*mocked*” ...

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Galatians 6:7-8)

If you would know the seriousness of God’s attitude toward sin, then simply look to Jesus hanging on the cross, brutally scourged, beaten, and spit upon, and God pouring out the full measure of His wrath against sin on His own Son who bore it in your place.

That is how serious God is about our sin.

That is why our Lord Jesus tells us, concerning favored sins, to “*cut it off*” ...

“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (Matthew 5:30)

[This, of course, is not to be taken literally, as an act of self-mutilation, because sin originates and springs from the “heart”, not the hand. Our Lord is symbolically telling us that we are to deal radically, severely, and swiftly with our sin. You are to immediately “cut it off and cast it from you”.]

So, how can you successfully “cut it off”?

Well, let’s read the rest of our I Corinthians 6 passage quoted above ...

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, not idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (I Corinthians 6:9-10)

You can change and forsake your treasured sin.

But you cannot do it by yourself.

Remember what our Lord told you about your relationship with Him ...

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

The “much fruit” which you can bear is that of the fruit of the Spirit ...

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

But you must “abide” in “Him” to attain it, for you on your own “can do nothing”. I hope that no part of “nothing” is not clear to you.

You “abide” in Jesus through a regular and diligent use the means of grace (Bible reading and meditation, prayer, worship, and so on).

Do that and then you will be able to say along with Paul ...

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13)

Again, always remember two things ...

1. Partial obedience is disobedience.
2. “Do not be deceived” about maintaining a cherished sin ... for ... again ...

Christ will have ALL of you, or He will have NONE of you.

The Third Concept that we need to be clear about before starting our “test” and “examination” is ...

The very important difference between a Christian “*struggling*” with “*surviving*” sin and an unbeliever entrapped by “*reigning*” sin

The dominion of sin over the Christian has been broken ...

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:14)

But the remnants of broken sin (termed “*the flesh*”) continue to indwell the Christian, and oppose his continuous spiritual warfare for holiness and against sin ...

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another; so that you do not do the things that you wish.” (Galatians 5:17)

Thus does the Apostle Paul write ...

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Romans 7:18)

“*Simul Justus et Peccator*” – wrote Martin Luther about the Christian – which means that the Christian is “*saved but still a sinner*” or “*righteous but still a sinner*.”

And so, though “*saved*” and “*righteous*”, the Christian is still a sinner and must engage in a *lifelong struggle* against sin and for holiness. This struggle is and will continue to be a very intense struggle, *especially so* during periods of long-term suffering and approaching death.

The fierceness of the Christian’s struggle with the remaining elements of broken sin that continue to indwell him, i.e., “*the flesh*”, is well testified to by the personal experience of the Apostle Paul recorded in Romans 7:21-25 ...

“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my

members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:24).

And so, the Christian will often experience and be weighed down by a consciousness of their own sinfulness, their unfaithfulness to God, and their many failings to do and be what a Christian should do and be.

Like Paul, they will often cry out ...

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

But, like Paul, they can also cry out ...

“I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

It is a very interesting irony of the Christian life ...

... that as the Christian draws nearer to God, he will come to more and more clearly see the enormity and depth of his sin, but will, at the same time, also come to more and more clearly see the enormity and greater depths of God’s grace, mercy, and love for him, and will, as a result, come to rejoice all the more in the love of God and in the assurance of his salvation.

Thus, when “*testing*” and “*examining*” ourselves “*as to whether we are in the faith*”, we must keep in mind that the Christian is “*Simul Justus et Peccator*”, still a sinner, but that there is a very important difference between a Christian “*struggling*” with “*surviving*” sin and a non-Christian or a self-deceived “*Christian in name only*”, entrapped by “*reigning*” sin. The Christian should go to God, confess, and repent of any sin, but should never despair of their salvation.

The Fourth Concept that we need to be clear about before starting our “test” and “examination” is ...

To get some clear direction as to how we should approach “*testing*” and “*examining*” ourselves “*as to whether we are in the faith*”.

There are Three Rules of “Testing” and “Examining” ourselves that we always want to keep in mind ...

First, the aim of ‘testing’ and ‘examining’ yourself is a positive one.

You are out to find positive evidences of God’s grace working in your life. You are not out to engage in morbid introspection over your failures to perfectly keep God’s law – which failures will always be there.

Second, you are out to look at the general direction of your Christian walk over the years, and not dwell on particular failures or falls.

Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son to assure you of God’s full forgiveness and your full restoration to the joy of your salvation upon true repentance from even the most abominable of sins.

Third, if you are presently locked in a severe struggle with a particular sin like pornography or anger, we would again remind you that there is a very big difference between surviving sin in a Christian’s life and reigning sin in an unbeliever’s life.

For a Christian to say “There is a particular sin with which I struggle very much and very often” is quite different from an unbeliever saying “There is a particular sin which has mastery over me and which I have not been able to overcome or do anything about”.

[We note that Christian could never truthfully make the “unable to overcome statement” since one of the promised “fruits of the Holy Spirit” is “self-control.” Confirm Galatians 5:22-23.]

The **Fifth** thing we need to do before starting our “test” and “examination” is ...

For the sake of clarity, clearly define some of the terms that we will be using throughout our Paper.

This is done in Appendix 1 (which you might review before beginning your “test” and “examination”).

And so ...

1. *With our knowledge and understanding of the three vital components of a living, saving “faith” and how to tell it from a “dead” faith*
2. *With a true grasp of the nature, motive, and scope of faithful obedience to Christ’s commands (the surest “Earmark” of a true Christian)*
3. *With our understanding of the difference between a Christian “struggling” with “surviving” sin and an unbeliever entrapped by “reigning” sin*
4. *With an understanding of the correct way to approach our “test” and “examination”*
5. *With our important terms defined ...*

We are at long last ready to begin our “test” and “examination” to answer the Question

“How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?”

The Rest of our Paper will be divided into two Parts ...

Part I: “Testing” and “Examining” yourself so as to “make your call and election sure” and know “whether you are in the faith.”

Part II: Looking at and Assessing the Results of your “Test” and “Examination”

So ... Let’s begin Part I with a question ...

Exactly how do we ‘diligently’ strive to “make our call and election sure” and “test” and “examine” ourselves as to “whether we are in the faith”?

Well, God, good Father that He is, has given us a number of Biblical “Earmarks” (standards) by which we may “test” and “examine” ourselves “as to whether [we] are in the faith.” So, we will use them.

We stress again the necessity of approaching our “test” and “examination” with much prayer.

If you get confused at any time along the way, you can pray to God for help ...

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)

... and can also approach a trusted Christian friend or officer in your church.

Before starting, let's once again, very quickly, review our three rules on how to approach our “test” and “examination”

First, the aim of ‘testing’ and ‘examining’ yourself is a positive one.

You are out to find positive evidences of God's grace working in your life. You are not out to engage in morbid introspection over your failures to perfectly keep God's law – which failures will always be there.

Second, you are out to look at the general direction of your Christian walk over the years, and not dwell on particular failures or falls.

Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son to assure you of God's full forgiveness and your full restoration to the joy of your salvation upon true repentance from even the most abominable of sins.

Third, if you are presently locked in a severe struggle with a particular sin like pornography or anger, we would again remind you that there is a very big difference between surviving sin in a Christian's life and reigning sin in an unbeliever's life.

So, let's start our “test” and “examination” to “make your call and election sure” and to know “whether you are in the faith.”

As stated earlier, our first and most important “Earmark” of being a Christian is ...

1. Do you bear proof of your professed ‘love’ for Jesus by striving to obey His commands?

Again, let's be sure to note that the Question is not “Do you keep all of God's commands at all times?” – because nobody other than Jesus Christ ever has or ever will do that. No, the Question for the Christian is ...

“Do you desire and strive to keep His commands?”

This is a very important and very critical question for two reasons ...

First and foremost, it is extremely important because our Lord Himself stated four times in the space of 10 verses in John Chapter 14 that obedience to His commands is THE surest possible sign of our true love for Him ...

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.”
(John 14:21)*

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word” (John 14:23)

“He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:24)

From our Lord’s own mouth we have it four times over that obedience to His commands is THE way to tell if we truly “love” Him or not. For our Lord, our obedience to His commands is of overwhelming and critical importance.

A second reason that it is such an important Question is that our Lord repeatedly tells us that obedience to His commands is an area in which “many” people will be self-deceived. Again ...

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

*‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’”*

(Jesus Christ, Matthew 15:7-9)

“But why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?”
(Jesus Christ, Luke 6:46)

Below are three considerations to help you assess the area of your obedience ...

1. *What is your general attitude toward obedience to Christ’s commands ...*
 - a. When you sin against God and His word, do you just accept it and shrug it off because, after all, “We’re only human!”?
 - b. Do you, whenever you sin against God go to your heavenly Father in repentance and love and seek His forgiveness and help? Do you ask Him to help you love Him more and to help you strive more fervently against sin?
2. *“Why do you strive for obedience? What is your heart’s motive for ‘striving to obey’?”*
 - c. Do you strive to obey Christ’s commands out of love and thankfulness to Him for what He has done for you and because He is your God?
 - d. Do you strive to obey Christ’s commands in any measure because you think it adds something to or in some way helps in the attaining or maintaining of your salvation?
 - e. Do you strive to obey mostly because you are afraid of losing your salvation and going to hell?
3. *“Do you strive to keep ALL His commands?”*
 - f. Yes
 - g. No

Your answers should have been ... “b” ... “c” ... “f”

If those were not your answers or if you have some questions about the considerations themselves, it does not necessarily mean that you are not a Christian. But it does mean that you should go back and read or reread our previous discussion on the complexities of our Earmark Question # 1 and give it some more thought.

Biblical Earmark Questions 2 and 3 have to do with the “*means of grace*”

Again, the “*means of grace*” are the means by which God’s grace is extended to and received by His children. God’s children communicate with Him through prayer and He communicates with them through their reading and meditation on His word.

The “*means of grace*” include, but are not limited to ...

Reading and meditating upon God’s word, prayer, worship, and partaking of the Sacraments ...

Our attitude toward and use of the means of grace is the best barometer by which to measure our spiritual state of health. For, if we do not actively and diligently pursue the means of grace, our heart and affections for God will grow cold and we will, at best, devolve into a weak and ineffective believer. Our spiritual decline, to be sure, starts off very slowly, but it picks up speed as time passes by.

So, our second Biblical Earmark Question for determining “*How Can I Know for Sure if I am a Christian?*” is ...

2. Do you desire to worship God?

It is very important for us to remember that a new Christian is a radically changed person, so much so that the Bible says that he is in actuality a “*new creation*” ...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

As a “*new creation*”, the Christian has by God’s sovereign grace ...

been given the “*gifts*” of “*repentance*” and saving “*faith*” and exercised them

been formally and legally adopted into the family of God.

is in true spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Christ

has a new regenerate “*heart*” that will prompt him to love God and strive for holiness and against sin, and ...

actually has God the Holy Spirit indwelling him.

Given all this, one can easily see how the Christian is a “*new creation*” that will desire to worship God. Very simply

“We love Him because He first loved us.” (I John 4:19)

One obviously cannot have undergone all the changes mentioned above and show no signs of wanting to worship God. Being a “new creation”, the new Christian will desire to worship God both privately and corporately with his fellow Christians.

So, “*Do you desire to worship God?*”.

If you can get along without Him rather easily from week to week or for long periods of time and if you have no real desire to worship God privately or jointly with His people; you very likely do not yet know Him.

Our third Biblical Earmark Question, a Question which also deals with the “*means of grace*”, is ...

3. Do you desire to pray and read your Bible?

If you are a child of God you will desire to communicate with Him in prayer and hear back from Him through His word.

Again, this does not mean that there will not be times of barrenness and inactivity in your spiritual life. But, overall and through the years, have you desired to pray to God and read His word?

Charles Spurgeon wrote concerning prayer ...

“A prayerless soul is a Christless soul. Prayer is the lisping of the believing infant, the shout of the fighting believer, the requiem of the dying saint falling asleep in Jesus. It is the breath, the watchword, the comfort, the strength, the honor of a Christian. If thou be a child of God, thou will seek thy Father’s face, and live in thy Father’s love.”

The same can be said concerning reading God’s word.

So you desire to read your Bible and pray to God?

It is a sure sign of spiritual *deadness or decay* if you have no desire to pray to God and read your Bible.

Our Lord Jesus warned the Laodicean church against “*lukewarmness*” (or, “*indifference*”) toward God, a very deplorable condition ...

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So, then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:15-16)

Spiritual “*lukewarmness*” makes our Lord sick to His stomach. It is a sure sign of spiritual “*deadness*” if you have no time to spend with God at all. It is a sure sign of spiritual “*weakness*”, a weakness that you very much need to work on, if your time with God has become just another rote item to be mechanically checked off of your “to do” list and be done with for the rest of day.

Our Lord warned us in the Parable of the Sower about the “*thorns*” of this life, about “*the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things*” which “*entering in choke the word*” and make us *unfruitful and lukewarm* in attitude. We must be on constant guard against them or we will be lulled to sleep and ruin.

If you are *decaying* or becoming *lukewarm* in your attitude towards prayer and your Bible, go to Christ, tell Him of it, ask His forgiveness, and ask Him to, by His grace, restore you to constancy and fervency in your use of the means of grace. He will help you if you diligently seek His help. And you must seek it daily.

Our next Biblical Earmark of a Christian is ...

4. Do you love God's people?

Shortly before His crucifixion our Lord said to His disciples ...

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Though we should have good feelings toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, we also need to realize that Biblical “*love*” is not a sappy emotional feeling. No. Biblical “*love*” is active. It is wishing good for your brothers and sisters in Christ, praying for them, and actively reaching out to serve them in various ways.

So, do you “love” your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Our fifth Biblical Earmark for “Testing” and “Examining” ourselves as to “whether you are in the faith” is ...

5. Do you truly and sincerely forgive others when they ask your forgiveness?

This is an especially critical test of the genuineness of our faith.

In fact, our Lord makes our forgiving of others the conditional basis of His Fifth Petition when giving us His Lord’s Prayer ...

*“And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)*

... in that we actually ask God to not forgive us if we do not forgive others, and He so stipulates ...

*“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your
trespasses.”*

The whole passage in full context reads ...

*“And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your
trespasses.”*

(Jesus Christ, Fifth Petition, Lord’s Prayer, Matthew 6:12-15)

Confirm also ...

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (Jesus Christ, Mark 11:25-26)

Matthew Henry comments ...

“Those that come to God for the forgiveness of their sins against him, must make conscience of forgiving those who have offended them, else they curse themselves when they say the Lord’s prayer. Our duty is to forgive our debtors” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Matthew 6:12-15)

John Calvin comments ...

“Unless God pardon us every day many sins, we know that we are ruined in innumerable ways: and on no other condition does he admit us to pardon, but that we pardon our brethren whatever offenses they have committed against us. Those who refuse to forget the injuries which have been done to them, devote themselves willingly and deliberately to destruction, and knowingly prevent God from forgiving them.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XVI. Page 330)

God does not actually base His forgiveness of our sins on how well we forgive others, for all of our sins were forgiven at our Justification when God imputed them to Christ on the cross and also imputed the righteousness of Christ to us as our covering. But He does give us a valuable earmark of whether one is a Christian or not.

Let us note John Calvin on the matter ...

“‘As we forgive our debtors.’ This condition is added, that no one may approach God and ask forgiveness, who is not pure and free from all resentment. And yet the forgiveness, which we ask that God would give us, does not depend on the forgiveness which we grant to others: but the design of Christ was, to exhort us, in this manner, to forgive the offenses which have been committed against us, and at the same time to give, as it were, the impression of his seal, to ratify the conscience in our own forgiveness ... Christ did not intend to point out the cause, but only to remind us of the feelings which we ought to cherish towards brethren, when we desire to be reconciled to God. And certainly, if the Spirit of God reigns in our hearts, every description of

ill-will and revenge ought to be banished.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XVI. Page 327)

And so, though God does not actually base His forgiveness of us on how well we forgive others (we are justified by “*faith alone*”), He does forcefully and fearfully instruct us that an unwillingness to forgive others who have asked our forgiveness, and bearing resentment and hatred towards them, is a sure earmark of whether we are a Christian or not. He also points out the attitude we ought to have towards others if we desire to be reconciled to God and likewise gives us confidence in our own salvation when we willingly and readily obey His condition.

The Christian himself is reminded that should they be tempted to bear grudges and resentments it will seriously hinder and block their prayer life and the full extension of God’s sanctifying mercy and grace to them ...

“God will not be ready to hear us, unless we show ourselves ready to grant forgiveness to those who have offended us.” (John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XVI. Page 330)

We owe many “*debts*” to God each day through our sins of commission and omission. If God is willing to freely forgive us our multitude of sins, we ought also to exercise a loving willingness to forgive others.

Our Lord also taught the need to forgive others in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, who was himself forgiven much but would not forgive even a little in return. His condemnation and punishment were swift and thorough ...

“Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:32)]

So, let us always remember that the Christian who is forgiven much must be willing to forgive much himself. So, again, our Biblical Earmark Question # 5 for you is ...

Do you truly and sincerely forgive others when they ask forgiveness or do you hardheartedly refuse to forgive and bear grudges?

Earmark Question # 6 of being a Christian is ...

6. Do you increasingly bear the “fruit” of the Spirit in your life?

If you are a Christian, you will bear the “fruit” of the Spirit in your life ...

Our Lord said ...

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

In the parable of the sower, our Lord tells us of the “good ground” hearer ...

“But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” (Mark 4:20)

Paul tells us in Galatians what the “fruit of the Spirit” is ...

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Have you increasingly borne the *fruit of the Spirit* in your life over the years?

Earmark Question # 7 of being a Christian is ...

7. Do you desire and seek to do “good works” for God and to “serve” His church?

This is very important question because Paul tells us that every true Christian WILL produce good works

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

James tells us the same thing concerning the necessity of good works as a sure sign of our salvation ...

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)

If you are a Christian, you have a special gift from God to use for the benefit of His church. It may be something as simple as a ministry of prayer, a very important ministry, and one in which the old and infirm can participate to great effect. It could be working in the kitchen ... greeting people ... working in the nursery ... working with children ... and so on.

So, “Do you seek to do good works?” “Do you desire to serve God’s church?” “Are you exercising your ‘special gift’ for the glory of God and the good of His church?”

[Note: “Good works” are the fruit and not the root of a living saving faith. Just as a living healthy tree will produce good fruit, but the fruit can in no way be said to have produced the tree, so a living saving faith will produce good works, but the good works can in no way be said to have produced the faith or be a joint cause with it in one’s salvation. Good works are the evidence of a living saving faith, not the root or cause of it.]

Biblical Earmark Question Number 8 is ...

8. Do you “fear” God and revere God’s name?

There is a proper Biblical “*fear*” of God that is a mark of the Christian ...

*“But on this one will I look:
On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit,
And who trembles at My word.” (Isaiah 66:2)*

It is very important to note that the Christian’s “*fear*” of God IS NOT the servile fear of a slave or the trembling fear of the unregenerate of God’s punitive wrath to come.

No, it is, rather, THE PROPER awe and respect of a creature for his Creator and of a Christian for His holy, perfect, sovereign and all-powerful God. It is the holy “fear” of Isaiah and Job as they beheld first-hand the transcendent majesty of their God, who is a “*consuming fire of holiness*” (Isaiah 6:1-7; Job 40:1-5; 42:1-6). It is the comforting fear of a

child for a dearly beloved parent that he knows has his best interest at heart and will discipline him for his own good if need be.

The Christian's "*fear*" of God does not engender to bondage, but is a *reassuring* fear of love and trust of our God and Father. It is a fear that "*casts out*" all other fears that "*torment*" ...

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:18)

So ... Do you properly "fear" God and reverence His name?

Our ninth Biblical Earmark Question is ...

9. Do you "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy"?

I think that I can safely say that after idolatry the greatest complaint of God against His people throughout the Old Testament was a profaning of His Sabbath Day.

It is true that the *ceremonial* and *judicial* aspects of the law of God have found their fulfillment and completion in Christ and have passed from the scene – with only some "*general equity*" provisions of the judicial law remaining. But the *moral law* of God, summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, and written by the very finger of God Himself, is just as much in effect today as it ever was.

Indeed, reverencing the Sabbath Day was a "creation ordinance" and not a creation of the Law. We see this in the description of the "*seventh day*" given in the Genesis 2 creation account ...

"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it he rested from all His work which God had created and made." (Genesis 2:2-4)

We would also note that strict Sabbath observance was in full effect long before the giving of the law. We see this in the instructions for the gathering of manna in the wilderness ...

"And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he

said to them, ‘This is what the LORD has said: “Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD.”’”

“Then Moses said, ‘Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.’”

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; ... So the people rested on the seventh day.’” (Exodus 16:22-23; 16:25-26; 16:28-30)

The seriousness with which God took Sabbath Day violations even before the giving of the Law can be seen in that such violations were punished by the death penalty ...

“Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath Day ... Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.’” (Numbers 15:32, 35)

So ... Do you “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy”?

Biblical Earmark Question # 10 of being a Christian is ...

10. Do you at least try to accept God’s sovereign dispositions (health, wealth, and otherwise) in your life without grumbling or complaining about them, which, in reality, is grumbling and complaining against God Himself?

The Christian can certainly ask God, as did the Apostle Paul, to remove “the thorn in the flesh”, whatever it may be. But, if God does not remove it, can you maintain faith that God still loves you, knows what is best for you, and accept the condition as such if it be God’s will for you?

This Earmark Question is all about trusting God.

Is He worthy of your trust?

If you believe that God is good, that God is all-wise and incapable of error, that God loves you with a very deep love and has shown you the proof of His love by sending His Son to die

on the cross for you, if you believe that God will always do what is best for you, then can you not simply trust Him?

Even when fully trusting Him, the Christian can, of course, still continue to pray for God to remove pain, suffering, and other afflictions from them, but they must always pray after the manner of our Lord ...

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)

In all afflictions you need to trust God and the truth of His Word, and not yourself and your own thoughts and feelings.

You are an adopted member of God’s family. He is your heavenly “Father” and He wants you to bear the family image. He directs you toward holiness and sanctification, and if that conflicts with a degree of your happiness, He, in His wisdom and love, will choose the better portion for you – that of increased holiness and sanctification ...

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)

Our Biblical Earmark Question # 11 is actually a series of additional questions

11. Below are an additional “ten questions designed to help you decide if you are entitled to assurance” ...

The questions are taken from the book *How Can I Be Sure I’m A Christian? What the Bible Says About Assurance of Salvation*, by Donald S. Whitney, pages 111-114. Commentary on each of his ten questions can be found in his book. Note particularly well Question # 2 ...

The “ten questions” are

Do you intensely desire assurance?

Do you sometimes grieve that you do not love Jesus enough? Are you ever troubled by the coldness of your heart toward Christ? Do you ever groan inwardly, 'Lord Jesus, I hate it when I express love for other things more than you'? Only a Christian thinks like that.

Do you often wish God would change you so that you would always obey Him and never sin again?

Do you think salvation is more important than anything else in the world?

Do you ever seriously desire to trade places with a rich, famous, or attractive person you know is not a Christian?

Would you willingly and habitually sin against God if you could get whatever you wanted in return?

Which would you really prefer: God, Christ, the Spirit, grace, glory, holiness, and Heaven; or all the money, pleasure, fame, houses, lands, possessions, and anything else you could name in the world?

Do you admire godly people more than rich, famous, athletic, or attractive people?

Would you be content to live without hearing sermons, praying, reading the Bible, or worshipping God in public?

Would you be willing for Christ to claim you completely as His own?

Our last Biblical Earmark Question deals with the issue of doctrinal Orthodoxy and Heresy ...

12. Last but not least, there are certain orthodox doctrinal beliefs that one cannot deny and be a Christian ...

Every organization has standards which must be held for one to be a member of that organization – medical, legal, accounting, etc. It is no different for being a member of the Christian church. The church has throughout the centuries identified heretical teachings and strictly warned against holding them, under pain of excommunication.

Now, we are well aware that the thief on the cross ...

... did not have a complex doctrinal theological system worked-out when he said to Jesus, *“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).*

No, he made a very simple declaration of faith in Jesus as the Son of God dying for his sins and asked Jesus to accept him as a disciple. That was a simple and sincere expression of his faith that was sufficient for his salvation.

So, let's be very clear about what we are and are not saying here ...

We are NOT saying that the list below are things that you have to have worked out and understand before you can be saved.

We ARE saying that these are crucial fundamental truths that you cannot later come to deny and be a Christian.

Essential beliefs that one cannot deny and still be a Christian would include ...

A sound and firm belief in the Authority and Inspiration of the Bible

A Trinitarian view that there is but one God existing in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three being eternal, co-equal and of the same substance.

The Virgin Conception and Birth of Jesus Christ

That Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully Man – and led a sinless life of perfect obedience to God's law

That Jesus Christ made a perfect and complete atonement on the cross for the sins of His elect, an atonement to which nothing can be added in any way, shape or form

That our Justification/Salvation is by faith alone and not by any admixture of faith and works

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

That all who have died and will die (together with those who will be taken up alive at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ) will face a final day of judgment after which they will either enter into heaven to be with the Lord or be eternally consigned to hell

If you hold any of the above beliefs to NOT be true, the church throughout the ages declares you to be guilty of heresy. You need to go to God and ask Him to help guide you into the truth of the matter. If you diligently seek His truth, you will, with His help, find it ...

“... for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

[Note: We have listed in Appendix 3 some additional Self-Deceived Groups who think themselves to be Christians, but are not.]

We said earlier that ...

Paper 8: “How Can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?”

... is a two-part Paper

We have just finished Part I of Paper 8:

How to “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

... and will now take up Part II:

Looking at and Assessing the Results of your “Test” and “Examination”

Part II: Looking at the Results of your “Test” and “Examination”

Well, how did you do?

How did your “test” and “examination” go?

It is important to note that if you failed or did very poorly in several of the Earmark Test Questions, it does not necessarily mean that you are not a Christian. It could mean that ...

1. You are a “milk” Christian

2. You have a “*tender conscience*”
3. You are a “*recovering Pharisee*”

Let’s look at all three of these situations ...

If you failed or did very poorly in several of the Earmark Test Questions, it could mean that ...

1. You are a “*milk*” Christian

A “*milk*” Christian is a Christian that has continued to subsist on “*milk*” for his Biblical nourishment and has not progressed to the “*solid food*” of sound Christian knowledge, understanding, and doctrine.

Indeed, we would say that most of our failures in our spiritual life, our lack of assurance and our doubts of our own salvation come from our remaining at the “*milk*” level of spiritual maturity and never advancing to “*full age*”, to the “*solid food*” of grace, knowledge, understanding and sound doctrine.

What exactly do we mean by that?

Well, to refresh our memories, the author of Hebrews tells us that there are great differences in different Christian’s spiritual maturity levels ...

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

Paul in a similar vein writes to the Corinthians ...

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal”. (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

And so, we see that there is a “*Scale of Christian Maturity-Levels*” in knowledge and understanding, a scale that spans from “*milk*” Christians to “*solid food*” Christians.

There can of course be wide variations of maturity within both the “*milk*” and “*solid food*” categories themselves. For example, within the broad category of “*milk*” Christians, there can be “*skim*” *milk* Christians, who have not advanced very much at all in their Christian maturity level and “*whole*” *milk* Christians, who have perhaps advanced a great deal but still continue to subsist on “*milk*”.

The author of Hebrews firmly admonishes “*milk*” Christians because, by now, considering the time and opportunities they have had, they should be “*teachers*” of others, but, instead, they themselves “*need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God*”. Indeed, in the verse preceding the Hebrews passage, the author speaks of their spiritual laziness and sluggishness ...

“... *you have become dull of hearing.*” (Hebrews 5:11)

By their own neglect of spiritual duties and their lack of use of the means of grace, they remain “*babes*” in understanding and are “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*”. “*Milk*” Christians have not “*by reason of use [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” and they thereby open themselves up to all kinds of spiritual problems.

Of “*milk*” Christians Matthew Henry has said ...

“Those that are babes, unskillful in the word of righteousness, must be fed with milk; they must be entertained with the plainest truths, and these delivered in the plainest manner ... Christ despises not his babes; he has provided suitable food for them. It is good to be babes in Christ, but not always to continue in that childish state; we should endeavor to pass the infant state; we should always remain in malice children; but in understanding we should grow up to a manly maturity.”

Paul still calls his Corinthian church members “*brothers*”, i.e., he still recognizes them as his fellow Christians, but he puts the blame for their spiritual immaturity squarely on their own shoulders ...

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal”.

[Note: “*Carnal*” means pertaining to or characterized by the flesh.]

Paul tells the “*skim milk*” Christians that their small advancement in sanctification has left them too much under the control of their old *flesh*, too much under the remnants of their old “*carnal*” corruptions. They are Christians and still have the Spirit of God, but they have so remained in the *flesh* and have so neglected their spiritual duties that the *flesh* has at times prevailed over the promptings of the Spirit of God and they have remained “*carnal*”. This is especially lamentable because they had set under Paul’s ministry for a long time, but seem to have not really tried to grow in grace and understanding. As we said above, by remaining “*milk*” Christians, they open themselves up to all kinds of problems.

“*Solid food*” Christians, on the other hand, are Christians who have matured to “*full age*”. They are no longer “*babes*”. They have moved well beyond “*the first principles of the oracles of God*” and have “*by reason of use have [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*” “*Solid food*” Christians have grown and matured in the things of God.

“*Solid food*” Christians would never boast of being “*solid food*” Christians because they have “*by reason of use ha[d] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” and are mature enough to know that even as “*strong*” Christians, they still need daily spiritual nourishment through the means of grace. They take seriously Paul’s warning, also written to the Corinthians, to ...

“... let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (I Corinthians 10:12)

John Owen says concerning “*solid food*” Christians ...

“Those of ‘full age’ have their understandings enlarged and their minds settled in the knowledge of Christ and the mysteries of the gospel... ‘Strong meat’ [i.e., “solid food”] belongs to these; that is, it is to be provided for them and proposed unto them, and that because they have ‘their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.’ This is to have our understanding and mind, through constant, sedulous study, meditation and prayer, hearing of the word, and the like means of the increase of grace and knowledge, to become ready, fit, and able to receive spiritual truths and to turn them into nourishment for our souls ... It is an evidence of a thriving and healthy state of soul to have an appetite for the deepest mysteries of the gospel or most solid doctrines of truth, and to be able to profitably digest them.”

... which is why the authors of both the Hebrews and Corinthians passages sternly admonish “*milk*” Christians for remaining where they are and not progressing from “*milk*” to “*solid food*”.

We can identify three kinds or types of “*milk*” Christians ...

There is the “new” Christian, who is in the “*milk*” category simply because he is a “*new*” Christians and has not yet had the time to progress in his knowledge, understanding, and sanctification. Hopefully, he will soon begin a rapid progression from “*skim*” milk to “*whole*” milk to “*solid food*”.

There is the Christian “babe” who remains on “*milk*” because he is simply unaware that he needs and is supposed to progress in his sanctification through a diligent use of the means of grace. It is truly sad how many churches do not stress growth in knowledge and sanctification. “*Milk*” churches produce Christian “*babes*” and “*weak*” Christians.

There is the “weak” or “lazy” Christian who, though they know better, simply do not put forth the effort to pursue God’s will for their sanctification through a diligent use of the means of grace. [Grandma called it “*sloth*”.]

To be sure, all three groups, “new” Christians, Christian “babes”, and “weak” Christians, are true Christians, but for various reasons they remain at the “*milk*” maturity level.

Those who continue to subsist on “*milk*”, as shown by the case of the Corinthians, are in a dangerous and precarious position, for they leave themselves open to the lies and delusions of the “*world*”, the “*flesh*” and the “*devil*”. Indeed, Paul warns them in Ephesians that they

“... should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning and craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things unto Him who is the head – Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15).

There are many *false* teachers, *false* prophets and *false* “doctrines” out there and all Christians very much need to be able “*to discern both good and evil*”.

So it really is no wonder that immature “*milk*” Christians at times have doubts over their assurance of salvation and even over whether they really are Christians at all.

It is important to note that there is nothing that stops “*milk*” Christians from advancing to the “*solid food*” of “*full age*” except their own spiritual neglect and laziness. “*Milk*” Christians have the same means of grace and the same Holy Spirit available to help them as do strong “*solid food*” Christians. But they continue to subsist on “*milk*” by choice and have very likely failed or done poorly in several “*test*” areas because they have not “*by reason of use [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

Note: Please see our Appendix 3, titled ...

“But I hate DOCTRINE”!!! I don’t even like the sound of the word! All I care about is Jesus and I don’t need a bunch of side issues distracting me from Him!

A second reason that you might have failed or done poorly on several of our Earmark Questions could be that ...

2. You have been misled by an overly-tender “*tender conscience*”

Now, it is a good thing to have a “*tender conscience*” that wants to recognize sin for what it is, where it is, and to properly forsake and repent of it. And it is a good thing to have a “*tender conscience*” that seriously wants to obey God out of love and thankfulness. But it is not a good thing to let a “*tender conscience*” override the clear word and teaching of God on the matter of your having an assurance of your salvation.

When all is said and done, your thoughts and actions must be guided by Biblical truth (sound “doctrine”) rather than by feelings or false narratives.

Lastly, if you failed or did very poorly in several of the Earmark Test Questions, it could mean that ...

3. You are a “*recovering Pharisee*”

“*Recovering Pharisees*” are those who can intellectually accept that they should have a full assurance of their salvation, but who still require a long time to shake off and overcome the emotional feelings of their old ways of legalistic thought.

Many of our “*recovering Pharisees*” come from or are still in churches have taught that one cannot have an assurance of their salvation in the first place and that if one should presently have salvation (whether they know it or not) they can lose or forfeit it by their actions.

We have seen in Paper 7 as well as in this Paper that these are false teachings that will not stand the test of Scripture. These beliefs are mostly held by those who believe that Jesus died only to make their salvation “*possible*” and that it is up to them to turn the “*possible*” salvation provided by Jesus into a “*real*” salvation for themselves. If you choose for God, you will be saved. If you do not choose for God, you will be lost. It’s all up to you. [And, by the way, while you are making up your mind, God Himself rather pathetically sits on the sidelines and waits to see what you will do.]

Most people who adhere to these teachings will readily admit that if it really is up to them to turn Jesus's *possible* salvation into a *real* salvation for themselves, then it is also possible for things to go the other way around and that they can lose or forfeit their salvation because of things they do.

This whole line of thought is not only unbiblical, but it also does grievous and irreparable damage to any concept of God's sovereignty over anyone's salvation or His having any real omniscience concerning it.

We would also refer you to our HATHQ Question # 10 for a more complete discussion of this issue.

Make no mistake about it, “milk” Christians, Christians with “overly-tender consciences” and “recovering Pharisee” Christians – are still Christians.

But all three of these types of Christians tend to have needless recurring concerns, even if they passed their “test” and “exam” with flying colors, about their assurance of salvation and whether they are really Christians or not.

Let's first restate that though the Christian *ought* to have a full assurance of their salvation, it is not a necessary part of salvation itself to have it. Many fine Christians don't have an assurance of their salvation now and many will never come to a full realization of it (which does not in any way affect the fact that their salvation is nonetheless assured by God Himself).

Assurance of salvation is actually a gift of God that will be given to those who “diligently” search for it through the means of grace and will not likely be given to those who deny or disbelieve that it can be had.

[The solution here is for one to be Biblically re-educated in this matter. We would recommend a reading or rereading of our Paper # 7 – “On Attaining a Full Assurance of Your Salvation” – a Paper that is thoroughly immersed in Scripture references.]

At any rate ... If you passed the test but still question whether you are a Christian or still do not have an assurance of your salvation, you should first remember that you should not have these “*fears*” at all, for ...

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:18)

You should remember, second, that the way for you to come to realize and accept God’s “perfect love” for yourself is through a diligent use of the means of grace.

To do that you should ...

1. Immediately go to God, thank Him for helping you to pass the test and exam, and plead with Him to help you take Him at His word and accept the results of your test and exam.
2. Plead with Him to help you be more diligent in your pursuit of the means of grace. For it is only by a diligent pursuit of the means of grace that you will come to attain and maintain a full assurance of your salvation.
3. Cry out along with the father of the child in Mark 9:44 ...

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

4. Review the “Five Truths” mentioned in the next section of our Paper.
5. Read through all nine of our Papers and make a “Summary Sheet” of “bullet points” that are especially important and meaningful to you concerning an assurance of your salvation, and review it regularly.
6. When you have done all this, make a decision, write it down on a note card, read it regularly and stick by it. The decision is ...

‘In the future, when doubts about my salvation come up, I will review my “Summary Sheet”, take God at His word, remember all that I have learned, and not listen to my own feelings or the murmurings and accusations of Satan over the clear teaching of the word of God on the matter.’

... and pray to God to help you live by that statement.

There is still one category that we have yet to consider

**Whereas our Lord warned us that “many” will be self-deceived in this area,
we do have to consider that ...**

**If you did poorly or failed several of your Earmark tests, it could
actually mean that you need to give some serious consideration as to
whether you really are a Christian or not.**

You need to seriously reflect upon, consider, and ask yourself ...

Have I moved past a mere mental assent to a set of propositions about Jesus and salvation? Do I lack “*fiducia*”? Have I come to “*fully embrace*” Jesus Christ and the set of propositions about Him – Have I fully “*trusted in*”, “*relied upon*” and “*actively committed myself*” to Him and to being His follower?

Do I regularly read my Bible and commune with God in prayer?

Do I regularly worship God in private and corporately in church?

Am I a “*hearer*” of the word only, and not a “*doer*”?

Do I “*practice lawlessness*” in any way? Is there a treasured sin that I refuse to give up? Do I “*practice*” fornication, adultery, homosexuality, viewing pornography? See I Corinthians 6:9-11 for a more detailed list.

Have I *really cared* whether I progressed in my sanctification or not?

Am I fully counting on faith in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation, or do I still feel that I have to add something else to it?

If you have any concerns in this area, you should ...

1. Immediately go to God in prayer,
2. Confess your concern to Him,
3. Ask His forgiveness and pray for Him to help you become a true Christian and walk like one.

And, after sincerely doing this, you should always remember “Five Truths” ...

First, Jesus promises you acceptance if you sincerely come to Him ...

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37)

As does the Apostle Paul ...

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” (Romans 10:13)

Second, you need to remember that it is not the strength of your faith, but the object of your faith, that saves you.

We saw earlier that Matthew, quoting Isaiah, tells us that even the most fragile of professions of faith will be accepted by Jesus, for ...

*“A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench” (Matthew 12:20)*

You cannot get more tender and fragile than a “*bruised reed*” or “*smoking flax*”.

Third, you need to remember that it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to your account that is the basis and foundation of your salvation and not what you do or have done.

The foundational assurance of your salvation stands outside of yourself and is not dependent upon what you do or have done. When God looks at you in judgment or otherwise, He does not see your sins and failures, which Christ has fully atoned for on the cross, but sees instead the righteousness of His own dear son imputed to your account.

Fourth, you need to remember that every member of the Holy Trinity had a part in and is bound up with your salvation.

As a Christian, you have been personally and legally adopted as a “*son*” by God the Father, you are in very active spiritual union with God the Son, and you are actually indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, who not only “*keeps*” you but also “*seals*” and “*guarantees*” your salvation. In short, the whole Trinity stands behind, by, and with you in the guarantee of your salvation. Nothing can shake it. Never think that anything can.

The Fifth thing that you need to remember is that the way to grow in love, obedience, and assurance of your salvation is through a diligent use of the means of grace.

Our Lord Himself prayed to God the Father concerning His disciples ...

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” (John 17:17)

So, immediately, start “*diligently*” applying the means of grace in your life!

Closing it all out ...

**Hopefully, in “*testing*” and “*examining*” yourself,
you have found much cause for rejoicing ...**

We would remind you again, that if you are off in a few of our “Earmark” Questions, it does not necessarily mean that you are not a Christian. It could be that you are simply a “*milk*” Christian, a Christian *with an “overly-tender conscience”* or a “*recovering Pharisee*”, all of which have some areas on which they need to work.

**That is exactly why you “*test*” and “*examine*” yourself in the first place;
to gain an assurance of your salvation and to uncover areas that
you need to work on to progress in your sanctification.**

Remembering the “Five Truths” listed above, if you passed the test and examination, then accept the results and thank God for them and ask Him to help you improve what most needs to be improved.

Also, immediately throw off the deceitfulness and foolishness of your own thoughts and feelings and the misrepresentations and lies of the devil on the matter of assurance. Be guided instead only by the word of God when it comes to a full assurance of your salvation. Be guided by that, and that alone ...

“For the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:5)

Do that and then you will be able to rejoice and say with the Psalmist ...

*“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of your mercy,
Because of Your truth.” (Psalm 115:1)*

Do that and then you will be able to “know” and “enjoy” your God
both “now” and “forever”

Note: Our next Paper is titled ...

Paper # 9: *From “Milk” to “Solid Food” – The Joyous and Glorious
Road to “Full Age” Christian Maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14)*

A Paper which thoroughly discusses ...

*“What is the Remedy for the ‘milk’ Christian, the “overly-tender conscience”
Christian, and the “recovering Pharisee” Christian?”*

Two Appendices follow ...

Appendix 1: A more in-depth look at the Matthew 7: 21-23 passage which
many people find to be extremely worrisome

Appendix 2: Self-Deceived Groups Who Think Themselves to be Christians,
but are Not ...

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God alone

Appendix 1: Here we take a more in-depth look at Matthew 7: 21-23, a
passage which so many find to be very worrisome

In Matthew 7:21-23 our Lord warns us very clearly and very strongly that one can doubly profess to love Jesus, calling Him “*Lord, Lord*”, can be a pillar of the church, and can render great and miraculous service in His name – and still not “*know*” Him, or, worse’ not be known by Him ...

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

Again, to many people this is one of the most fearful and terrifying passages in the Bible. They read it as saying that one can strive very hard to be a dutiful and obedient Christian and work to do much for God’s church, yet still be sent to hell for something they are not even aware of. But that is nowhere near what is being said here.

Let’s state first that one should never run from a difficult or frightening passage and treat it as if it did not exist. No. They should rather study and meditate upon the passage, and they will usually find it to be instructive, helpful, and, in the end, comforting to them.

This passage simply teaches that you cannot strive for obedience to Christ’s commands and do great works for His church, and then use that as a pretense to unrepentantly “practice lawlessness”, i.e., practice a cherished sin, in another area.

It tells us that there is no such thing as selective obedience that allows us to obey in general, yet still unrepentantly “practice lawlessness” in another specific area such as fornication, adultery, viewing pornography, homosexuality, sodomy, and so on.

Our passage simply states that selective obedience is not obedience at all and reaffirms what our Lord has said elsewhere ...

“... why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)

You simply cannot pick and choose which commandments you will obey and unrepentantly “*practice*” other ones and be excused because of all the work you have done for the church.

No, you must strive to obey ALL of our Lord’s commands. You absolutely cannot have a special reserved sin that you regularly and unrepentantly “*practice*” and be a Christian. Again, it is as we said earlier, “*Christ will have ALL of you or He will have NONE of you.*”

Let's look at Matthew Henry's commentary on Matthew 7:21-23 ...

Again, Matthew 7:21-23 reads ...

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

Matthew Henry says,

"We have here the conclusion of this long and excellent sermon, the scope of which is to show the indispensability of obedience to the commands of Christ

"He shows, by a plain remonstrance, that an outward profession of religion, however remarkable, will not bring us to heaven, unless there be a correspondent conversion ..."

"Now this is his will, that we believe in Christ, that we repent of sin, that we live a holy life, that we love one another. This is his will, even our sanctification. If we comply not with the will of God, we mock Christ in calling Him Lord, as did those who put on Him a gorgeous robe, and said, 'Hail, King of the Jews'. Saying and doing are two things, often parted in the conversation of men."

"They think they shall go to heaven, because they have been of good repute among professors of religion, have kept fasts, and given alms, and have been preferred in the church; as if this would atone for their reigning pride, worldliness, and sensuality, and want of love to God and man"

"Let us take heed of resting in external privileges and performances, lest we deceive ourselves, and perish eternally, as multitudes do, with a lie in our right hand."

"Note, It is possible for men to have a great name for piety, and yet to be workers of iniquity; and those that are so will receive the greater damnation. Secret haunts of sin, kept up under the cloak of a visible profession, will be the ruin of hypocrites. Living in sin nullifies men's pretensions, be they ever so specious."

Possible self-delusion in this area is why both Paul and Peter command us to ...

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure"

(2 Peter 1:10)

*“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”
(2 Corinthians 13:5)*

A true Christian can neither rest easy in any sin, nor unrepentantly “*practice*” it for long without having devastating consequences or regret – witness the case of King David.

This is why striving for obedience to ALL of Christ’s commands is such a strong sign of one’s being a “*true*” Christian, and why the unrepentant long-term “*practice*” of ANY sin is a sure sign of their being a “*false*” Christian.

Remember that our Lord has warned us that “MANY” will be self-deceived here.

Confirm also the warnings of Paul and James ...

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7)

“But, be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)

So, again – very simply – do you strive to keep God’s commandments? ALL of them? Selective obedience is not an option. Remember, “*Christ will have ALL of you or He will have NONE of you.*”

Appendix 2: Self-Deceived Groups Who Think Themselves to be Christians, but are Not, would Include ...

1. The “Judaizers” of the early New Testament period

The Judaizer was a Jew who claimed to believe in Christ, i.e., they have Christ as the object of their faith and they also hold to a lot of correct propositions about Him – among them being that He is the Son of God, that He is a co-equal, co-eternal, and of the same Substance as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, that He was born of a Virgin, that He died as our penal substitute to atone for our sins, and that He has risen from the dead. He believes other true propositions as well, but these are enough for our purpose.

The problem of the Judaizer is that He assents to all of this, but then adds to the existing propositions such that he no longer holds them “in truth” and “according to knowledge”. Misapplied propositions lead to false propositions. The crucial failing of the New Testament Judaizer is that he thinks that something else is needed, another work of some kind, in addition to faith in Christ, to complete his salvation – in this case, circumcision ...

“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” (Acts 15:1)

Paul writes to his Galatian congregants and urges them to “*stand fast*” concerning the matter of adding the “work” of circumcision to faith in Christ as being necessary for salvation. Paul tells them that adding the single “work”, that of *circumcision*, to faith in Christ as needed for our salvation is heretical, in that it – moves one away from God’s “grace”, makes Christ of no value to them, and puts them back under the keeping of the law as their means of salvation. It shifts them from a “*Faith Alone*” salvation to a “*Faith + Works*” salvation. Confirm ...

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who would be justified by law, you have fallen from grace.” (Galatians 5:1-4)

Indeed, Paul takes the heresy of adding a work to faith in Christ as necessary for salvation so seriously that he actually calls the Judaizers “*dogs*”, “*evil workers*”, and “*the mutilation*”, and urges us to “*Beware of*” them ...

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Philippians 3:2-3)

... and, indeed, goes so far as to say that he wishes that they would not stop at just circumcision, but would go all the way and castrate themselves ...

“I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off.” (Galatians 5:12)

And so, we see that sincerity and zeal in and of themselves are not enough for salvation. The propositions held about Christ must also be held “in truth” and “according to knowledge”. Confirm again ...

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4: 23-24)

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” (Romans 10:1-2)

2. The “Hypocrite”

Another major type of “dead” faith is the faith of the “hypocrite”. Hypocrites know what the Bible says, but “*practice lawlessness*” in some area anyway, thinking that they can get away with it because ...

... they are ‘pretty good overall’, ‘nobody’s perfect’, and they are better than most

... they do other works for the church that will surely offset their disobedience in one small particular area

... they think that God is not really so “wrought up” over sin after all.

This type of “dead” faith is very widespread in our country today. It exists because so many churches today never mention ‘*human depravity*’, “*sin*”, or “*hell*” for fear of offending someone. No, they teach instead what can best be classed as “*cheap grace*”, “*easy-believism*” and “*Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*” (i.e., that God is there to help you develop your self-esteem and His one commandment is “*Be Nice!*”).

These groups often teach that one can have Jesus as their “*Savior*”, but not as their “*Lord*”. They sometimes say at funerals, no matter how wicked a life a person has lived, things like “*we can always look back to their baptism*”, as if ‘*once baptized/always saved*’ were true.

The “hypocrite” may well have a correct knowledge (Notitia) about Christ and have given their mental assent (Assensus) to a correct understanding of the set of propositions about Christ.

But their faith is “dead” because it does not move forward to “Fiducia”. They never move past a mere “*mental assent*” to a set of propositions about the object of their faith. They never come to “fully embrace” or make an “active life commitment” to the object and set of propositions about their faith. And so, their faith is, in reality, nothing more than a “dead” and barren mental assent to set of propositions. They have ‘*easy believism*’ and ‘*cheap grace*’, but no “*fiducia*”.

The Apostle James tells us that without “*fiducia*” one has only the “*faith*” of the demons of hell ...

“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!” (James 2:19)

The demons of hell have the first two essentials of a saving faith ...

1. They know and correctly understand the facts and claims of Jesus Christ and His gospel message.
2. They certainly give their mental assent to all the claims about Jesus and the gospel message. [See Matthew 8:28-29.]

Yet, all of this only makes them “*tremble*”, because for them it necessarily stops at mere knowledge and mental assent. It has no “*fiducia*”, and is therefore a “*dead*” faith and of no value at all.

Other self-deceived groups of those who think themselves to be Christians, but are not, would include ...

3. Those described as “*soils*” two and three, the “*stony*” and “*thorny*” ground, in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-9, 13-20)

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow ... Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.” (Mark 4: 3,5-7)

“The sower sows the word ... These likewise are the ones on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among the thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” (Mark 4:14, 16-19)

These are those who hear and profess to believe and even receive the Word “*with gladness*”, but there is not depth to their belief and they fall away at the first sign or persecution or are easily lured away by “*the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things*”. Their belief is very shallow and never progresses past a mere mental assent to a set of propositions concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is no sign of *fiducia* at all. Their faith is “*dead*” and is easily cast aside.

Another category of “false” Christians, very similar to the Judaizers of the early New Testament, would be ...

4. Those who think that they need to add their own work or works to faith in Christ for salvation, i.e., those who believe that salvation is not by “faith alone”, but by “faith + works”

The “*faith + works*” salvation category would include the Old Testament Pharisees, the New Testament Judaizers, and their modern-day counterparts, Roman Catholics.

Let’s note that including “Roman Catholics” in the “false” Christian category only, and fully, agrees with what the Roman Catholic Church itself has pronounced as its own strict dogma.

In the Council of Trent (1545-63), the last dogmatic council of the Roman Catholic Church, it was ruled and dogmatically adopted, and has been ever since been rigidly held, that anyone who claims to be saved by “*faith alone*” (the bedrock tenet of Protestantism) rather than by “*faith + works*” (the bedrock tenet of Roman Catholicism) is condemned and considered to be “*anathema*” (i.e., “*cursed*”) by the Roman Catholic Church.

So, evangelical Protestants only agree with Roman Catholics themselves that their religion and ours are, indeed, two different religions.

There are many variations of “*faith + works*” adherents to be found even among evangelicals (usually without their realizing it). They are those who, if you were to ask them the *Evangelism Explosion* question ...

“If you were to die tonight and at the gates of heaven God should ask you ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’, what would you say?’”

... would answer something like “*because Jesus died for my sins and I have tried to live as good a life as possible and to serve the church as much as possible*”.

In most cases these are simply confused “*faith alone*” believers who will reject the “*faith + works*” mentality that they espoused when it is explained to them.

If by their answer, they meant ...

“My works are the proof and evidence of my salvation and not any part of the cause of it”, that is one thing – That is “Faith Alone”.

But if they meant ...

“God did His part, and I have added my part and my work or works to it”, that is quite another thing – That is “Faith + Works”.

[Note: We would refer you here to our Question # 9: “What are the main differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics? Are they really all that important?” for a much fuller discussion of the issue.]

Our fifth category of “false” Christians, is another category that we mentioned earlier ...

5. Those who may have a “zeal” for the one true God, but “*not according to knowledge*”, and not held “*in truth*”.

As we saw in the cases of the Judaizer and Roman Catholic, that sincerity and zeal by themselves are not enough for attaining salvation.

No. Sincerity and zeal must be accompanied by correct and true knowledge of God.

We saw Paul lamenting the lostness of his fellow Jews for this very reason ...

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:1-4)

Likewise, Jesus Himself tells us that His worshipers must worship Him “*in spirit and truth*”

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)

Again, sincerity and zeal by themselves are not enough for attaining salvation.

The object of our faith and the set of propositions about the object must be held “*in truth*” and “*according to knowledge*”, i.e., they must be held correctly.

6. Another group of “false” Christians are the “many” who claim Jesus as “*Lord, Lord*”, appear to be pillars of the Church, have done many wonderful acts in His name, but who still “practice lawlessness” in one form or another.

Our Lord tells us ...

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:21-23)

Many people consider these verses to be among the most frightening in Scripture. But they totally mischaracterize them and miss their real meaning.

Note closely the key phrase “you who practice lawlessness” at the end of the passage. This passage simply says that one may do many great works for the Church in the name of Christ, but if they unrepentantly “*practice lawlessness*” (i.e., if they unrepentantly “*practice*” any sin, including *fornication, adultery, sexual immorality, homosexuality, and sodomy*), then, according to our Lord they are false Christians and will be told by Him to “*depart from Me*” into hell.

[We also refer you back to Appendix I for more discussion.]

Again, Jesus tells us that He will have ALL of you or He will have NONE of you.

The Matthew 7:21-23 passage is really no different from other passages in which our Lord and others warn those who think they can get away with *only selective obedience* to His commands ...

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God.” (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

Another variant set of “false” Christians are ...

7. Those who believe in the “carnal” Christian theory ...

The “carnal” Christian theory believes that one can have Christ as their Savior, but not as their Lord. The “carnal” Christian theory holds that as long as you have at some point either been baptized, professed faith, joined a church (even though you never attend it), prayed the sinner’s prayer, or in some other way verbally stated a belief in Christ, you are eternally saved and can live any way you want to live and still go to heaven.

It is a gross understatement to merely say that the “carnal” Christian theory and all others like it are utterly unbiblical. In truth, they are soul-destroying theories straight out of hell and will land you there if you continue to believe them.

One can understand the desire to comfort the family of a wicked person who has died. But to give *false* comfort to the family by saying something like “*We can always look back to his baptism*” is a lie that is exceeded in its wickedness only by the evil potential it has for others hearing it to follow the very same path to hell.

We would remind the “carnal” Christian that our Lord stated four times in John Chapter 14 that obedience to His commands is the surest possible sign of our true love for Him ...

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

*“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.”
(John 14:21)*

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word” (John 14:23)

“He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:24)

For our Lord, our obedience to His commands is of overwhelming and critical importance.

Again, if you wish to see the seriousness of sin to God, simply look to the cross.

Another group of false Christians would be ...

- 8. Those who would disavow belief in the “carnal” Christian theory itself, but still take a “milder” variant form of it by holding God to basically be a nice old grandfatherly type who, tough he really doesn’t want people to sin, will, in the end, just overlook their sin and let us all into heaven anyway (because that is what they would do, and God must certainly be much like them).**

Adherents here vary widely but have much in common with the easy believism, cheap grace and Moralistic Therapeutic Deism groups mentioned earlier. Their basic view of God is “*not according to knowledge*”.

We would give the same reminders to this group as to the “carnal” Christian group.

A final group of “false” believers that we would mention are ...

- 9. Those who believe in the “*Prosperity Gospel*”.**

The main teaching here is that you should come to God because He wants to make you wealthy, healthy, and happy. Usually you can get started on the road to all three of these by casting some seed-money (or, “bread”) upon the waters of their church treasury.

We would point out that the *Prosperity Gospel* is wholly antithetical to the teachings of Scripture and to the lives of the saints recorded therein, including our Lord Jesus Himself.

The only correct reason to flee to Christ is the realization that you are a condemned sinner in need of a Savior, and not that you want to be wealthy, healthy, and happy.

Well, by this point you may be saying, “I’m a little confused!” ...

– which is very understandable given that some of these “*false*” groups can at times very closely resemble “*true*” Christian groups in appearance (i.e., they can *walk the walk* and *talk the talk* and *give correct answers* to many of the questions). They are often separated from true Christians only by subtle nuances and hard-to-discern differences that only God can know for sure – which, again, is exactly why both Peter and Paul tell us to

“diligently ... test ... [and] ... examine yourselves ... as to whether you are in the faith.”

If anyone is “*confused*” by all this in their own self-examination then let him take the advice of the Apostle James ...

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)

You can also approach a trusted and knowledgeable Christian friend or officer in your church.

Again, all of this is why we have said all along that “testing” and “examining” yourself “as to whether you are in the faith” should be approached with much prayer.

Soli Deo Gloria

[Glory to God Alone]