

Paper # 9: Christians – “Weak” and “Strong”

Why is there one? How to become the other!

The Joyous and Glorious Road to “Full Age” Christian Maturity

In our last paper, “*How can I Know for Sure that I am a Christian?*”, we looked at the results of our “*test*” and “*examination*” as to “*whether you are in the faith.*”

We very carefully pointed out that if you failed or did very poorly on several of the Earmark Questions, it does not necessarily mean that you are not a Christian. It could simply mean that you are a Christian that has continued to subsist on “*milk*” and not progressed to the “*solid food*” of sound Christian knowledge, understanding, and doctrine.

We went on to make the assertion ...

“... that most of our failures in our spiritual life and much of our lack of assurance of and doubts about own salvation come from our remaining at the “*milk*” level of spiritual maturity and never advancing or maturing to the “*solid food*” of “*full age*” Christian maturity.

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 such a thing as a “*Scale of Christian Maturity*” in knowledge, wisdom, 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 that 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*”. By their own neglect of spiritual duties and lack of use of the means of grace, they remain “*babes*” in understanding and are “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*”. “*Milk*” Christians are still Christians, but they have not “*by reason of use [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

Indeed, in the preceding verse to our Hebrews passage the author speaks of their spiritual laziness and sluggishness ...

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

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 likewise admonishes his Corinthian “*milk*” church members.

He still calls them “*brothers*”, i.e., he still recognizes them as his fellow Christians, but he says that they are “*carnal*” instead of “*spiritual*” and 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”.

Paul tells his Corinthian “*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 much remained in the *flesh* and have so neglected their spiritual duties that the *flesh* has 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.

“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 “*by reason of use have [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*” The “*solid food*” Christian has 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 have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”, they are mature enough to know that even as “*strong*” Christians, they owe it all to God’s grace and 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.”

We can identify three kinds of “milk” Christians ...

1. There is the “new” Christian who is in the “*milk*” category simply because they are “*new*” Christians and have not yet had the time to progress in their knowledge, understanding, and sanctification. Hopefully, they will soon rapidly progress from “*skim*” milk to “*whole*” milk to “*solid food*”.
2. 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 the believer’s need to grow in knowledge and sanctification.
3. There is the “weak” Christian who, though they know better, simply do not put forth the effort to pursue God’s will for their sanctification by a diligent use of the means of grace. They are “*spiritually lazy*” Christians. [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 subsist on “*milk*”, as shown by the case of the “*carnal*” 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).

Paul tells them to “*grow up*” to full maturity!

They need to “*grow up*” because there are many false teachers, false prophets and false “*doctrines*” out there and every Christian very much needs to be able “*to discern both good and evil*”. So, it really is no wonder that immature “*milk*” Christians have doubts over their assurance of salvation and over whether they are really Christians at all.

Note: All Christians will at times have some questions as to whether they truly have salvation or really are Christians at all (usually after a fall or a long period of neglect of the means of grace). But “solid food” Christians, strong Christians “who by reason of use have [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” are able to quickly recognize it for what it is and get over it.

Many “milk” Christians, on the other hand, regularly have these doubts and feel them very deeply and never really get over them, having them always hanging around in the back of their minds.

Very importantly, there is nothing that stops “milk” Christians from advancing to the “solid food” of “full age” Christian maturity but their own ignorance (not knowing that they are supposed to advance) or their spiritual laziness (knowing that they are supposed to advance, but not pursuing it).

“Milk” Christians have the very same means of grace and the very same Holy Spirit available to help them as do strong “solid food” Christians. But they continue by choice to subsist on “milk” and, again, have very likely failed or done poorly in several of our “test” areas because they have not “by reason of use [had] their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

So ... What is the REMEDY for the “weak” Christian, the Christian “babe”, and the “new” Christian?

How does a “weak” or “milk” Christian get to be a “strong” or “solid food” Christian?

Well, very simply, they should ...

Start eating “solid food”!

Right! Thanks a lot!

But, what I specifically want and need to know is ...

What exactly is “solid food”?

How do I eat or ingest it?

How, exactly, do I advance from “skim milk” to “whole milk” to “solid food”?

How do I mature to “full age” and have my “senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

We will occupy the rest of our Paper answering those Questions

So, let's take a look at starting out on ...

The Joyous and Glorious Road to “Full Age” Christian Maturity

But, before moving into our discussion, let's first make a few things clear ...

Do I need to have a high IQ to be a “strong” Christian?

No.

Do I need to be wealthy to be a “strong” Christian?

No.

Do I need to be a recognized leader in my community to be a “strong” Christian?

No.

Do I need to be considered a “pillar” of the church to be a “strong” Christian?

No.

In fact, most of Jesus's closest disciples were poor, uneducated men.

But there was a noticeable difference in them ...

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

“... they had been with Jesus”

That's what made the difference ... “they had been with Jesus.”

And that is the “remedy” for the ‘weak’ Christian, the Christian ‘babe’, and the ‘new’ Christian – to “be with Jesus”, to “abide” in Him through the means of grace.

That is the path that must be followed if the a “milk” Christian is to mature into a “solid food” Christian.

But how can we “*be with Jesus*” today?

Our Lord Himself told us exactly how, in no uncertain terms, we can “*be*” with Him today

“Abide in Me, and I in you! As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

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 5:4-5)

We can “*be with Jesus*” by “*abiding in Him*” through the means of grace.

And, Jesus Himself promises us that if we “*abide*” in Him, we can “*bear much fruit*,” and that if we don’t “*abide*” in Him we can do “*nothing*” spiritually good on our own.

Read it again ...

“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)

Yes, it is that simple!

The Christian “*abides*” in and is “*with*” Jesus through a regular and diligent use of the means of grace.

If you seek to “*abide*” in and be “*with*” Jesus through a diligent use of the means of grace, you have God’s promise not only that you will bear “*much fruit*”, but also that God will “*draw near to you*” ...

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

So, if you would attain to the “*full age*” Christian maturity, you must commit yourself to a *pursuit* of it. The “*means of grace*” are what will lead you there.

And while seeking to “*abide*” in Jesus, the Christian should always remember his very close and very personal relationship with each member of the Holy Trinity ...

He has been adopted as a son by God the Father

He is in true spiritual union with God the Son, and a member of His bride, the church.

He is actually indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Adoption

... so, “*abiding*” in Jesus and “*being with Jesus*” will come very naturally to him.

Abiding with Jesus is not hard. But it does take commitment and work!

In reality, all of this is not really an option for the Christian

... because God’s will for the Christian is that they be increasingly “*sanctified*” ...

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (I Thessalonians 4:3)

And it is mainly through the means of grace, chiefly through reading and meditating on the word of God, that we can “*abide*” and “*be with*” Jesus, and become more sanctified. It is just as our Lord prayed to His Father for His disciples ...

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

Again, you must understand the following two truths if you are to progress to “full age” Christian maturity ...

1. On your own you can do “nothing”!

... “*for without Me you can do nothing.*”

You can achieve no increase in spiritual fruit

You can achieve no spiritual good

You can achieve no increase in sanctification, and ...

You cannot grow closer to God so that He will “draw nearer” to you

[Note: We hope that no part of “nothing” is not clear to you]

2. The only way that you can accomplish any spiritual good is to “abide” in Jesus through the means of Grace.

Read it again ...

“Abide in Me, and I in you! As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

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 5:4-5)

If you would mature in the Christian faith from “*milk*” to “*solid food*”, if you would “*bear much fruit*”, you must “*abide*” and “*be with*” Jesus through a diligent and regular use of the means of grace.

THERE SIMPLY IS NO OTHER WAY!

And so, you have a choice set before you ...

You can “*abide*” in Christ through a regular and diligent use of the means of grace and “*bear much fruit*” or you can do and accomplish “*nothing*”.

The choice is yours.

God has provided the “*means of grace*” to guide, help and sustain you as you travel on “*The Joyous and Glorious Road to ‘Full Age’ Christian Maturity.*”

The choice of whether to take them up or not is yours to make.

If you choose to pursue “*solid food*” maturity through a regular and diligent use of the means of grace ...

there are several things you need to do ...

First, you must make an honest self-assessment of where you are right now

Assuming you have “tested” and “examined” yourself as to “whether you are in the faith” and have found that you are “in the faith”, you need to think, and as honestly as you can, answer the following Questions ...

Have I really put forth the effort to regularly and diligently use the means of grace to grow in my sanctification? Have I striven and really tried to progress from being a “*milk*” Christian to being a “*solid food*” Christian?

Have I tried to grow in the understanding and knowledge of the deeper things of God and the principles and truths of sound doctrine?

Have I really cared enough to “*draw near to God*” so that He will “*draw near*” to me?

If any of these are answered “no”, you should not be surprised at spiritual failures or by recurring doubts of your salvation and whether or not you really are a Christian, because, as our Lord has said and warned ...

“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)

Again, you “*abide*” in Christ through a diligent and daily use of the means of grace. If you want to want to grow, develop and mature to “*solid food*”, if you want to progress in knowledge of the deeper things of God and the truths of sound doctrine, you must diligently and regularly “*abide*” in Christ through a diligent use of the means of grace. For, again, “*without Me you can do nothing*”.

Second, if you are to advance from “*milk*” to “*solid food*” ...

You must move beyond merely reading the Bible to immersing yourself in it.

Again, our Lord in His High Priestly prayer, on the night of His betrayal, prayed to the Father concerning His disciples ...

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

Our Lord instructs us here that the best way for us to advance in our sanctification is through a disciplined reading, meditating on, and studying of the Bible.

The Bible is a treasure trove of gold just waiting to be discovered.

We can, simply by *reading* it, find many gold nuggets just lying on the surface. For example, all the truths that we need to know for salvation are easily found by a simple reading or preaching of the word.

Other golden truths lie just under the surface and can, with a little effort on our part and the aid of the Holy Spirit, be unearthed by surface “*strip*” mining (i.e., by *meditation*).

But there are also a number of really deep truths of gold that have to have to be found by sinking deep mine shafts, i.e., they are found by Bible “study”.

How do I go about “studying” the Bible?

By Bible “study” we do not mean spending hours a day hard at work or getting a Seminary degree of some sort.

No, Bible “study” can be as simple as ...

Getting a good “study” Bible and referring to its notes as you read.

Joining a small group “Bible study”

Getting a great daily devotional magazine or book, like ...

Tabletalk Magazine at tabletalkmagazine.com

Morning and Evening – Charles H. Spurgeon’s Devotional Book Classic, 365 Days, in original Old English or current Modern English

Reading some of the great Christian classics like John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Many people thoroughly enjoy Bible “study” through various media presentations. At my church we have a whole library of presentations by Ligonier Ministries. You can go to the Ligonier Ministries website, *Ligonier.org* for more information. You can stream as a “Partner” or visit their store for individual DVD and other Teaching Series.

If your denomination has a set of doctrinal statements or standards, you can read and meditate on or study them. I am a member of the Presbyterian Church in America, a denomination in the Reformed tradition. Our doctrinal standards are the *Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (all with Scripture Proofs)*. The *Westminster Standards* give the best exposition of the systematic truths of the Bible that I have ever seen.

I would especially urge people to read G. I. Williamson’s “*The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*”. It is very readable and provides a most excellent systematic exposition and commentary on Biblical truth.

The “*Thirty-Nine Articles*” of the Church of England, formulated at the time of the English Reformation, are another a good “*study*” source, as are a number of other *Catechisms* put together in the same period.

Third, if you are to advance from “*milk*” to “*solid food*” ...

You must attend a church that has sound Biblical preaching.

You cannot grow into “*solid food*” Christian maturity unless you are being fed “*solid food*”.

Note that Christians are very specifically instructed by all Three Members of the Trinity to seek after wisdom, knowledge and understanding

Our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, in responding to the question, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*” said ...

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38)

So, very importantly, according to our Lord Jesus Christ, among the requirements of “*the first and great commandment*” is that the Christian is to love God “*with all your mind*”.

God the Holy Spirit has told us in Proverbs to ...

“Get wisdom! Get understanding!” (Proverbs 4:5)

Indeed, the book of Proverbs itself personifies “*Wisdom*” as a woman calling “*simple ones*” unto herself for instruction and tells us that it was specifically written to help us

*“To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity” (Proverbs 1:2-3)*

God the Father bids us through the prophet Isaiah to ...

“Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18).

And we have just seen the authors of Hebrews and Corinthians rebuking “milk” Christians for remaining at that level and not having “*their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”.

And so, we see that all three members of the Christian Trinity and the Bible itself actually call us to the pursuit of wisdom, reason, understanding and rationality – not away from them.

Christians are to use their minds for the glory of God and for their own personal advancement in sanctification. The Christian should always be growing in knowledge, understanding and sound doctrine.

That is why you must attend a strong Church with sound Biblical preaching that encourages growth in the knowledge and understanding of sound doctrine.

Just as there are “*strong*”, “*weak*” and “*false*” Christians, there are “*strong*”, “*weak*” and “*false*” Christian churches.

Our Lord Himself pointed this out in His description of the seven churches in *Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3*. These churches are variously described as “*Loveless, Persecuted, Compromising, Corrupt, Dead, Faithful, and Lukewarm*”.

In all of our considerations of Revelation 2-3, it must be kept in mind that both the “*milk*” and “*solid food*” churches, i.e., both the “*weak*” and “*strong*” churches, are still considered to be Christian churches. But the “*weak*” churches are strongly warned by our Lord to correct their deficiencies or cease to exist as a church.

We also note that “*strong*” churches are not “*strong*” on every point and “*weak*” churches are not “*weak*” at every point. Still, our Lord gives very serious warnings to the “*weak*” churches of Revelation, and every Christian church would do well to heed them.

As we shall shortly see, the most dangerous position of all is that of the “*lukewarm*” church.

So, whether we are assessing our own church or are looking for “a church with sound Biblical preaching,” how do we distinguish between “strong” and “false” or “weak” Churches?

Concerning “false” churches ...

We would refer you to our two Appendices ...

Appendix 1: “Concerning Heresy”

... for a look at certain orthodox doctrinal beliefs that one cannot deny and be a Christian or a Christian church.

If any of the points listed here are being preached or even being tolerated at a Church you are attending or visiting, you should leave it immediately.

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

If any of the teachings of the groups listed here are held or being preached at a Church you are in or visiting, you should leave it immediately.

Concerning “*weak*” churches ...

Our chief questions here would be ...

Does your minister preach from the Bible? Does he preach sound doctrine?

Does he regularly mention Christ and call people to come to Christ for salvation?

Does he speak more on social needs and telling cute stories than on the gospel?

Does he refrain from mentioning sin, human depravity, and hell for fear of offending some?

Again, review our two Appendices on heresy and theological orthodoxy to help you “discern” if there are any similarities there with what your church teaches. As we said earlier, “weak” and “false” churches produce “weak” and “false” Christians.

One very important Question that concerns the greatest danger and warning of all from our Lord is ...

“Are your Pastor’s preaching and your Church’s teaching ‘lukewarm’?”

The Apostle John writes concerning our Lord’s warning to the Laodicean church ...

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ‘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 3:14-16)

More than anything else we can learn from reading our Lord’s letters to the various churches of Revelation, we should fully understand and be warned that there is no acceptable middle or neutral ground in sound preaching.

We are very clearly warned that “lukewarm” preaching, preaching that is neither “hot” nor “cold”, does not please our Lord even a little. Rather, “lukewarm” churches and “lukewarm” preaching actually make our Lord sick to His stomach, so much so that He says of them “I will vomit you out of My mouth.” Though “lukewarm” churches, may, like the Laodicean church, still be a Christian church for the time being, they are very strictly warned that their “lukewarmness” will not be tolerated much longer.

Matthew Henry says of “lukewarm” churches and people ...

“... lukewarm professors turn the heart of Christ against them. He is sick of them, and cannot long bear them. They may call their lukewarmness charity, meekness, moderation, and a largeness of soul; it is nauseous to Christ, and makes those so that allow themselves in it.”

The same remedy must be applied here as elsewhere ...

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

If you are not getting the Bible and the gospel message preached in your church, or if your church is “lukewarm” about it, you need to find another church. Do not stay where you are. It is axiomatic that weak and false churches can only produce weak and false Christians. Do not remain there and be one of them.

Fourth, if you are to advance from “milk” to “solid food” ...

You need to understand that studying sound “doctrine” is not just an option for you to consider, but something you are commanded to do.

Indeed, one of the four reasons for which the Bible was given to us, and the first one listed, was “doctrine” ...

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16)

Note well that “doctrine” is held to be a “*profitable*” thing for you to pursue if you are to be “*thoroughly equipped for every good work*”.

But ... What exactly is “*doctrine*”?

“*Doctrine*” is nothing more than an orderly set of statements of what a given denomination believes the Bible teaches on different topics.

That’s all. “*Doctrine*” simply presents an orderly and helpful summary of Biblical teachings to help you grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God and His dealings with men.

Doctrinal beliefs attempt to be faithful to Scripture and understandable to those who read them.

“*Doctrine*” itself is always held under the Bible and *never over* it.

Doctrinal statements should by their very nature be “*systematic*”. Precisely because they are statements concerning God’s inspired word, all “*Doctrinal Statements*” should be internally consistent with each other and never contradictory in any way.

In sum ...

“Doctrine” is “solid food”.

We grow and mature to the “*solid food*” of sound “*doctrine*” ...

By sitting under sound Biblical preaching ...

By a regular and diligent use of the means of grace ... and ...

By regular Bible “*study*” on our own or with others.

But, when all is said and done, the most important Question of all is ...

What does the Bible itself have to say about the Importance, Necessity, and Duty of the Christian to study “Doctrine”?

Well, it actually has quite a lot to say about it.

You should, for instance ...

- 1. Consider again that “*doctrine*” was one of the four reasons given, and the first listed, for which the Bible itself was written ...**

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16)

Note well that “*doctrine*” is held to be a “*profitable*” thing for you to pursue if you want to be “*thoroughly equipped for every good work*”.

- 2. Consider that our Lord Himself spoke of His own use and teaching of “doctrine”, the origin of His “doctrine”, and the importance of “doctrine” in the Christian’s life ...**

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.’” (John 7:16-17)

- 3. Consider that Paul repeatedly instructed Timothy on the critical importance of studying and acquiring doctrine for both himself and his hearers ...**

“Till I come give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” (I Timothy 4:13)

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” (I Timothy 4:16)

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” (I Timothy 5:17)

- 4. Consider that Paul in Romans teaches us about the “*form of doctrine to which you were delivered*” ...**

“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.” (Romans 6:17)

5. Consider again the admonishment of “milk” Christians by the authors of Hebrews and First Corinthians ...

... who say that you should “*by this time be teachers*”, but still need elementary instruction “*in the first principles*” all over again. They both tell you to quit being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*” and to “*by reason of use have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”.

You do that only by partaking of the “*solid food*” of sound doctrine. So if you want to avoid being “*unskilled in the word of righteousness*” and “*by reason of use have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” you must grow into the “*solid food*” of the deeper things of God and gain understanding of doctrinal truths.

Christians should always be learning and growing in knowledge and doctrine.

Concentrating more specifically on the *anti-intellectualism* of our day, which would include a strong aversion to studying “doctrine”, we should ...

6. Consider that our Lord Jesus Christ in responding to the question, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”, said ...

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38)

So, very importantly, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, among the requirements of “*the first and great commandment*” is that the Christian is to love God “*with all your mind*”.

7. Consider that God the Holy Spirit has told us in Proverbs to ...

“Get wisdom! Get understanding!” (Proverbs 4:5)

Indeed, the book of Proverbs itself personifies “*Wisdom*” as a woman calling “*simple ones*” unto herself for instruction and tells us that it was specifically written to help us ...

*“To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity” (Proverbs 1:2-3)*

8. Consider that God the Father, bids us, through the prophet Isaiah, to ...

“Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18).

Clearly, as seen above, all three members of the Christian Trinity and the Bible itself call us unto the pursuit of wisdom, reason, understanding and discernment. We are to use, not set aside, our minds for the glory of God and for our own personal advancement in sanctification. The Christian should always be growing in knowledge and sound doctrine.

9. Consider also that God has given us in His Bible a large section of what is commonly referred to as “Wisdom Literature” – the books of *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Solomon* –

... all of which are majestic in their scope, and which, along with the grand and eloquent exhortations of the great Prophets of Israel and the uplifting and awe-inspiring sayings and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, stand far above the great literature of the world and very far above all other so-called “holy” books.

These five “wisdom” books were put there by God to help you grow in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

So, use them! Study them! Learn “doctrine” from them!

God did not just give us the five Wisdom books to study “doctrine”. No! He has clearly told us that He gave us the entire Bible itself *“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).*

So, use it to develop the “solid food” of “sound doctrine” so that you may “be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”!

One last matter that we need to address concerns the three main objections or roadblocks that churches give to studying “doctrine”

1. *“Our church doesn’t believe in creeds.”*
2. *“We have no creed but Christ. All we need to know for our salvation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified!”*

3. *“I don’t like doctrine and I don’t believe I am required to pursue it!”*

Objection 1: “Our church doesn’t believe in creeds.”

Churches that so boldly proclaim, *“We don’t believe in creeds”*, may sound very pious, but it is simply not true. ALL churches have doctrinal beliefs, whether written down or not. They may deny having a creed, but just wait until you or someone else crosses them on one of their unwritten doctrinal points and you will see just how real and how strong their creedal beliefs really are.

Indeed, they cannot avoid have creedal beliefs, written or unwritten.

Let’s ask them, for example, what they believe about “Jesus Christ” Himself ...

How did He get here? Did He exist before He was born? What exactly is He? Is He God? Is He man? Is He both God and man at the same time? If so, does that mean that His person is a compound mixture of both? What about His nature – Is it of God or man? Are they amalgamated together? How can He possibly save us? What does He represent to the Christian? Can we make drawings of Him? How did He perform His miracles? Does the Holy Spirit proceed from Him as well as from the Father? Is He subordinate to the Father? What exactly is His relationship to the Holy Spirit?

Giving answers to these and many other questions concerning the Person and offices of Jesus Christ will set you pretty well on your way to having a sizeable set of creedal statements or doctrinal beliefs concerning Christ, whether it is written down or not. And this is only one issue.

Objection 2: “We have no creed but Christ. All we need to know for our salvation is Jesus Christ and Him crucified!”

It is true that a correct knowledge ‘of Christ’ and exercising saving faith in “Him crucified’ for your sin is all you need for your salvation. We saw this in the case of the thief on the cross.

But God does not want you to just rest there, stagnate, and never grow and mature in your knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

If you are a Christian, God very plainly tells you that it is His “will” for you is for you to grow in your sanctification ...

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

And, as we have seen, the authors of both Hebrews and Corinthians very plainly tell you that you need to strive to progress on past “*milk*” to “*solid food*” – and admonish you if you do not. They plainly tell you need to mature to “*full age*” and be among “*those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

Objection 3: “But I don’t like doctrine and I don’t believe I am required to pursue it!”

If you “*don’t like doctrine*” and really “*don’t believe that you are required to pursue it*”, then you should reread our Section above titled ...

“What does the Bible itself have to say about the Importance, Necessity, and Duty of the Christian to study ‘Doctrine’?”

And so, the REMEDY for the “milk” Christian, whether a Christian “babe”, a “weak” Christian, or a “new” Christian ...

... is to progress to a higher, deeper, and firmer knowledge of God and the Biblical principles and teachings concerning Him and His dealings with men. All three “*milk*” Christians need to grow up to “*full age*” and “*by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” by partaking of the “*solid food*” of sound doctrine.

The transition from “*milk*” to “*solid food*” is a very awe-inspiring and glorious road to travel.

It does require work, dedication, and perseverance on your part.

But it is also a very freeing and exhilarating road, and coming to better *know* and *enjoy* God is well worth everything you are and will have to put into it.

So ... If you would attain to “*full age*” Christian maturity and “*draw near to God*” so that He will draw near to you, you must make a pursuit of being a “*solid food*” Christian a top priority, for there will always be many other things to deter and distract you from it.

Concerning all of these distractions, always remember the teaching of our Lord ...

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:31-33)

And so, again, you have a choice set before you ...

You can “abide” in Christ through a regular and diligent use of the means of grace, and “*bear much fruit*” and “*draw near to God*”.

Or you can do and accomplish “nothing”.

The choice is yours.

The “*means of grace*” are there to guide, help and sustain you as you travel on “*The Joyous and Glorious Road to ‘Full Age’ Christian Maturity.*”

But, again, transitioning from a “*milk*” to a “*solid food*” Christian will take time, effort and commitment on your part and you have to be willing to commit to it if you want to be successful.

As indicated in the *Parable of the Sower* [Mark, Chapter 4], you will have “*Satan*”, “*tribulation and persecution*”, “*the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things*” all arrayed against you, pressing and vying for your attention.

So, again, you have to take your transitioning to “*solid food*” very seriously. We remember Paul’s earlier instructions to Christians to ...

“... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13)

We are to “*work out*” the implications of our salvation (not salvation itself) with “*fear and trembling*”, i.e., with a great respect for “*God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” We are to take both our growth in sanctification and our transition from “*milk*” to “*solid food*” very seriously. We are to sincerely and earnestly strive for them.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone

[Two Appendices follow]

Appendix 1: Concerning Heresy

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)

Question: Are any of these things taught or held in your church?

If so, you need to leave it immediately.

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 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” 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. 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)

In short, according to Paul, adding the one “work” of circumcision to “*faith in Jesus Christ alone*” shifts one from being a believer in “*faith alone*” for salvation to “*faith + works*” for salvation.

Note well that Paul takes the heresy of adding a single “work” to “*faith in Christ alone*” 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 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)

Another major type of “dead” faith that is very wide in our land today is that of ...

2. 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 really ‘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*”.

They 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 “*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*”.

Without “*fiducia*”, one has only a “*dead*” faith that is of no value at all.

Our Lord reserves his strictest warning for the “*hypocrite*” ...

“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)

We do note that there is a vast difference between a Christian struggling with “*surviving sin*” in his life and a hypocrite “*practicing lawlessness*”.

Another major type of “*dead*” faith is that of ...

3. Those described as “*soils*” two and three, “*stony*” and “*thorny*”, in the Parable of the Sower

“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)

Another category of “false” Christians would be the modern counterparts of the Judaizers of the New Testament which are ...

- 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 fully agrees with what the Roman Catholic Church itself has pronounced as its own strict dogma – that Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are indeed two separate religions ...

In the Council of Trent (1545-63), the last dogmatic council of the Roman Catholic Church, it was ruled and officially adopted – and has 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 also many variations of “*faith + works*” adherents 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 likely 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”*.

They add their own striving and actions to faith in Jesus Christ as the cause of their salvation.

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

Or, on the other hand, they may really mean it.

At any rate ...

If their answer means *“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 it means, *“God did His part, left it up to me, and I have added my part and my work or works to it”*, that is quite another – That is *“Faith + Works”*.

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, sincerity and zeal by themselves are not enough for attaining salvation. Sincerity and zeal must be accompanied by a *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 – a group treated above under “Hypocrites” – 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.

We treat them again here because so many people fear and misinterpret our proof passage ...

“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.

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 (see below) 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).**

This paradigm goes under many different names, but basically teaches “*easy believism*” and “*cheap grace*”. A strong, new variant of it that is found in many liberal churches and on college campuses today is called “*Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*”. The “god” of MTD is there mostly to help build up your self-esteem and help you to feel good about yourself. His one commandment is ‘*Be Nice*’.

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

Another group of “false” believers 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 ourselves ... 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 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.
