

# What Are the Essentials of the Christian Faith?

## Introduction to “The Essentials of the Christian Faith” 1439-01

**Attachment(s) for this Lesson:** 0442, “What is Christian Orthodoxy?” Revision 9  
1439-0 Biography of “What Are the Essentials of the Christian Faith?”

**Introductory Statement:** The question that occurs to us up-front as we consider, what are the essentials of the faith, and why are they important. Isn't everything the Bible teaches an essential? Aren't I required to obey all that God has commanded? Absolutely the answer is “YES!”

When I first developed this handout about a dozen years ago, it occurred to me that I had certain responsibilities as a teacher in Christ's church. All that the Scriptures teach and affirm are to be treated seriously. But all Bible Scholars, all Theologians, all denominations, all preachers, all teachers do not believe that same thing about what the Bible teaches. Some willingly choose to believe error. Some believe things because they were raised in their church to believe such things. Some learned it from other teachers, preachers, professors, relatives, and Bible Scholars. If I am to treat God's Word with integrity, honor, and a holy fear, I as a teacher of the Word must use great caution in my teaching. **Consider:**

**James 3:1-2** *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. NASU\**

**\*Used throughout this course unless otherwise indicated.**

There are smart, dedicated, serious minded men in ministry that I disagree with. This calls for humility, that we not be arrogant and/or fail to learn from others who are serious minded teachers.

### I. Objectives of This Course:

1. To know our own weaknesses and limitations with regard to the knowledge of Scripture. To study Scripture seriously throughout our life with the goal of learning how to interpret Scripture well (hermeneutics).
2. To learn to be discerning about truth, about error, and about heresy. Not all error is heresy!
3. To be humble in mind considering the Biblical Truth as we encourage and lift one another up in holiness.
4. To help each of us to avoid becoming a heretic within the Church (Local or Universal).
5. To know when to hold our tongue in correcting others and to know where and how to seek True Biblical Wisdom as we encourage, teach, and lift one another up for Christ's glory.

**Col 3:12-17** *So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. <sup>14</sup>Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. <sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*

### II. What is Biblical Heresy?

#### Definition:

“**Heresy** is a teaching or practice which denies one or more essentials of the Christian faith, **divides Christians**, and deserves condemnation. The term is derived from the Greek word *hairesis*, literally meaning a choice, but referring more specifically to a sect, party, or **disunion**. Luke uses the term in Acts to refer to the sects of the **Sadducees** (5:17), **Pharisees** (15:5; 26:5), and even the Christians - called Nazarenes and *the Way* (24:5,14; 28:22). When **Paul** uses the term in 1 Corinthians and Galatians, **he refers to the divisions which cause strife in the church**, while **Peter** links the term to false prophets and teachers.

While there is a temptation for Christians to label whatever is not in keeping with sound doctrine as heresy, the Bible seems to make the distinction that **heresy is not merely the opposite of orthodoxy**. Rather, **heresy is a**

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divisive teaching or practice which forces those who call themselves Christians to separate from it or face condemnation for it. - - -" [Heresy | Theopedia](#)

**2 John 6-11** *And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. <sup>7</sup>For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. <sup>9</sup>Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; <sup>11</sup>for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.*

The Greek word for heresy as used in the New Testament is not as clear as I would like for this discussion, because this word has become extremely important in the life of the Church including even the early Church:

**Heresy** *αἵρεσις* *hairesis* (Str. 139) **9x** meaning: "Strictly, a choice or option; hence, a religious sect, faction; by implication, discord, contention."

**Heretic** *αἱρετικός* *hairetikos* (Str. 141) **1x** meaning: "one who creates or fosters factions." Titus 3:10

**Titus 3:9-11** *But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. <sup>10</sup>Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, <sup>11</sup>knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*

**Gal 5:16-21** *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>(Str. 139)</sup> <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Of the **9 occurrences** of this word in the Greek New Testament (NASU), **7** are translated as "sects", meaning separate belief systems. **2** are translated as: Gal 5:20 – **factions**; & 2 Pet 2:1 - **heresies**

In this course we will define the essentials of the faith in such a way that will screen out those who teach contrary to the essentials of the Christian faith, while allowing a degree of freedom in doctrines that are important and may reflect "error", but do not necessarily reflect a heretical view. Great Biblical and spiritual wisdom is required here.

**1 Kings 3:7-12 - Solomon's prayer:** *"Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup>Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup>So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"*

**God's reply:** *<sup>10</sup>It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. <sup>11</sup>God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but **have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice,** <sup>12</sup>behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, **nor shall one like you arise after you.**"*

### III. What is Biblical Error?

Biblical error is a Christian understanding of doctrine that falls short of Heresy. It is error in doctrine that is not part of the essentials of the faith. All error is a serious thing within a church and yet error is not to the same degree as heresy. Error touches on areas that are not considered one of the essential beliefs necessary to be considered to be a Christian.

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All the different denominations largely have differences in denominational distinctives and/or practices. They can not be all correct. These differences constitute error, maybe even serious error, but they are not heresy.

An **example** would be:

1. Some believe in infant baptism while we believe in “believer’s baptism”. Either one is right and the other is wrong. It may be possible that both are wrong. But this difference, which reflects at least a substantial error on someone’s part does not disqualify one from being a Christian.
2. A doctrinal belief, which if not believed in would constitute a heresy and therefore anyone holding this view should not be considered a Christian at all would be the doctrine of Christ’s eternal deity. If a person does not believe in the eternal deity of Christ, he is not a Christian, he is a heretic.

**Greek:** *error* *πλαναω* *planao*\* (Str. 4105) 10x meaning: error, deception, deceit. Literally the word applies to something that has wandered from its path.

\* The Greek word from which we get the English word for planet, known as “wanderers”, moving about the sky, not maintaining fixed positions as stars do.

**2 Peter 3:14-18** *Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, <sup>15</sup>and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup>as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. <sup>17</sup>You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, **be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, <sup>18</sup>but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.***

### IV. What is the Need?

- A. Too often the church and church people throw around the word “heresy” towards peoples or groups that are clearly born again, are in Christ, and are saints of the Most High God, because they hold a different view of a doctrinal issue and/or practice their Christianity differently than do others whom they have carelessly accused. **Don’t Do It!**
- B. The very act of being unduly and improperly divisive amongst fellow Christians is in fact heretical. In accordance with our Definition in Section II. above, heresy includes the practice of Christians being **divisive** or causing **disunion** in the body of Christ, the Church. **Don’t Do It!**
- C. To meet **the objectives of this course**, we should have a clear view of the importance of Biblical knowledge and Biblical wisdom (See 1 Kng 3:7-12 above – Section II. above).
  1. To know our own weaknesses and limitations with regard to the knowledge of Scripture. To study Scripture seriously throughout our life with the goal of learning how to interpret Scripture well (hermeneutics). **Do It!**
  2. To learn to be discerning about truth, about error, and about heresy. Not all error is heresy! **Do It!**
  3. To be humble in mind considering the Biblical Truth as we encourage and lift one another up in holiness. **Do It!**
  4. To help each of us to avoid becoming **a doctrinal** or **a behavioral heretic** within the Church (Local or Universal). **Do It!**
  5. To know when to hold our tongue in correcting others and to know where and how to seek True Biblical Wisdom as we encourage, teach, and lift one another up for Christ’s glory. **Do It!**

**See 1 Kings 3:7-12** above at the end of Section II.
- D. To study and learn what “the 12 essentials” of Christianity are, and their critical importance to our discernment. See Attachment **0442, “What is Christian Orthodoxy?” Revision 9**. This is what we will be studying during the next 12 lessons of this course. **Do It!**

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## V. Critical Importance to the Church

In the Fall of 2006 in my previous church in Farragut, I taught a course on False Teaching, Then and Now. At that time I developed a document called What is Christian Orthodoxy? (rev. 0) I did this since I felt that it was critical to have a point of reference as to what is Orthodoxy. What are the essentials that are necessary to identify me and other professing Christians to stand sure in their faith?

Along with a lot of research in developing this document (File # 0442) I routinely asked myself this question. Regarding Christian friends and associates at work, in my neighborhood, at church, etc. where would I draw a line and stop treating them as being a Christian? On what issues would I decide to treat them well as a neighbor, as a co-worker, as a church member/attender, but not as a fellow sojourner in the faith. **Consider:**

**1 Cor 5:9-13** *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; <sup>10</sup>I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup>But actually, **I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother** if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? **Do you not judge those who are within the church?** <sup>13</sup>But those who are outside, God judges. **REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.***

The Church must stand by as salt and light to our own church and to the world at large. The Church must defend the precepts of Christianity. Many “Churches” are no longer Christian today because they have failed to defend the essentials of the faith. Even certain movements within Evangelicalism no longer hold to some of these essentials of the faith.

To be faithful in our Churches we must:

- A. Be faithful to the essentials of the faith.
- B. Teach the essentials of the faith to their members successfully.
- C. Stand against any violation of these essentials of the faith.
- D. Edify and lift up and encourage the un-mature saints in our midst.
- E. Remove “those who have left the faith.”

### Important Quotes

How can a right belief on fundamentals retain the primary importance which Scripture gives to it if, after all, it is not necessary to salvation? How can evangelicalism be said to represent biblical essentials if one regards as Christian and works alongside those who actually deny these essentials? The effect of such broad cooperation, he argues would be bound to promote the doctrinal indifferentism characteristic of the ecumenical movement.

**Iain Murray; *Evangelicalism Divided*; p. 45**

I argue that people who do not believe the essentials of the faith, the things that are essential to salvation, cannot be guilty of schism. They are not in the church. If you do not believe a certain irreducible minimum, you cannot be a Christian and you are not in the church. Have we reached a time when one must not say a thing like that? Have evangelicals so changed that we no longer make an assertion like that?

**Martin Lloyd-Jones; *Evangelical Unity*; p. 249**

Our knowledge is true only in so far as it corresponds with God's revealed truth. We are dependent upon the Word, the Word is not dependent upon us. As Martin Luther stated so clearly, "The objectivity and certainty of the Word remain even if it isn't believed." We have no right to seek refuge in a halfway house of false epistemological humility. To deny the truthfulness of God's Word is not an act of humility, but of unspeakable arrogance.

**Albert Mohler; *Here We Stand*; p. 69**