

# Are you really a Christian?

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**Bible Text:** 1 John  
**Preached on:** Wednesday, December 12, 2012

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You might want to call me an evangelist. Let me tell you what an evangelist is. If you have ever been to a sheep farm, any sheep farmers, by any chance? Sheep farmer, sir? Really? Been to one, okay, close enough. You've been to a sheep farm, there are basically three characters at a sheep farm: you've got sheep, of course; then you've got yourself a shepherd who is supposed to take care of the sheep, and he does that by gently using his rod of authority to guide them into green pastures, to take care of them and to make sure that they are protected, but sometimes the sheep, well, they don't always do what they are supposed to do and so they call in the third character which is the sheep dog. Now the sheep dog is the one who will run over the backs of the sheep, if necessary, bark and even bite the sheep to get them to go where the shepherd wants them to go, and the reason that they have that relationship is, you see, if the shepherd is too severe and too harsh with the sheep, they'll scatter and they'll go and look for somebody who's a little bit nicer. The sheepdog doesn't care so the sheepdog comes in and just bites them, the sheep do what they want, and then the sheep still love the shepherd. That's what a church is like basically. We are sheep, you've got your pastor shepherds, and I am your sheepdog. I am here this morning to bite you, that's what I am, and then I'm going to scurry back to Minneapolis and you can love your shepherds. That's how this is going to work out.

But please know this: as I come to bark and bite at you this morning, I want you to understand my motivation and why I perhaps bring this morning a challenging word, a convicting word. It's because of my concern for you for two reasons. One reason is biblically. Jesus said some things that were just downright scary. Jesus said that in a church just like this, there would be wheat and tares growing up together. In other words saved people and not saved people growing up together, and he said don't try to pull out those tares because sometimes it's hard to tell the difference which is which. Then he said there would be wise virgins, foolish virgins, saved/unsaved, good fish/rotten fish, and so if Jesus' words are accurate, and I believe they are, in this room it is not only probable, it is likely that we have got some tares and some rotten fish and some foolish virgins.

And I speak from experience. I used to be a rotten fish myself and so that is the second reason I bring this to you with a great deal of concern. It's from experience. I studied to be a pastor and I did some math and I went to prep and college study to become a pastor, and over the course of seven years, we went to chapel, I figured this out, 2,800 times. Twice Monday through Friday, once on Saturday, and then church on Sunday. 2,800

times. I went to church almost 3,000 times, studying to be a pastor, and I am telling you I was a hypocrite. I was unconverted. I was unregenerate because nobody ever shared with me what I would like to share with you this morning. So that's my heart. I'm concerned because I know it for a fact what it is to be a hypocrite and to be a false convert.

So here's what I would like to do this morning. You probably didn't come to church to take a test but we're going to take some quizzes today. God was very kind when he wrote the Bible. In the book of 1 John, and if you have a Bible, I'd invite you to turn it open to 1 John 5:12 or 13. You don't need to turn there, go to 1 John 1 but 1 John 5 says this, "I write these things, I write the preceding five chapters, so that you can know you are saved." Then throughout the course of 1 John, it gives us 10 signs that we can know we are a Christian and so I would like to take us through those 10 signs. This is a test to see if you are really a Christian, is what it is. It's a biblical test. You don't answer on a piece of paper. You don't pass them forward to me. I am certainly not your judge. I do not grade them nor does your pastor nor does your spouse. You and God, you are going to do what the Bible says we should do and that is to examine ourselves to see if we are in the truth, and let's see where you are at. Between you and God, cold, lukewarm or on fire.

1 John 1:7 says this, "But if we are living in the light of God's presence, then we have fellowship with each other." If you're a Christian, you like hanging out with Christians. That's it. You just like to. It's not that you don't have pagan friends. You can have those, those are fine. We all do. We work with them. We maybe even live with them. We can love them and we should but those people who are saved, there's something special there.

2. 10 point test to see if we are in the truth. Verse 8 of 1 John 1, "but if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Now this is not a mere acknowledgment that, "Oh yeah, of course, yes, I'm a sinner. I do some things." No, no, no, it's more than that. This is, "I recognize to my core I don't just have a God shaped hole in my heart, I have got a filthy, wretched, despicable, abominable heart, and if anybody knew what was really going on inside, I would be ashamed and crumble. That is what I am."

3. 1 John 2:3, "And how can we be sure that we belong to him? By obeying his commandments. If someone says I belong to God but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth." May I ask: do you know the 10 Commandments? Do you strive to keep the 10 Commandments?

4. 1 John 2:15, "Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you." If you love the world, boy, in America this is a tough one, is it not? If you love the world. It doesn't mean that we live in a tent in the middle of a field with one change of clothing, it's going to be a love for the world. God's enemy, the world system. We love the stuff of the world. We are at odds with God.

5. 1 John 2:23, and this is kind of a theology quiz. "Anyone who denies the Son doesn't have the Father either, but anyone who confesses the Son has the Father also." Do you

know who Jesus Christ is? This is a stunner. Maybe it seems like, "Well, of course we do." I can't tell you how many people I run into and I'll say, "Hey, do you know who Jesus Christ is?" "Oh sure, yup." Who is he? "Oh, he's the Son of God." Terrific, is he God? "No, he's the Son of God." So you don't believe that Jesus Christ is God himself in the flesh, a Trinitarian, three persons distinct, separate, yet one, coexisting, coeternal? If you do not understand that Jesus, or dare I say a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon understanding of Jesus Christ who believes that Jesus and the devil are brothers because they are simply children of God, you don't have the Father. We've got to know who the right Jesus is and 2 John is loaded with the understanding. If you don't understand good theology of who Jesus Christ is, you're not believing in the right God. You might as well believe in a carved idol. You've got to have good theology about Jesus Christ.

6. 1 John 3:2, "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns." We can't wait to see God, it's as simple as that, not because we are tired, weary, we would rather clock out, this has not been going well, I want to go home. No, no, no, this is, "I can't wait. I can't wait until he touches down on Mount Zion and I get to see the Savior face-to-face. I can't wait."

7. 1 John 3:9, we're going to wait on that one and come back. It's hard, it's a hard word.

Let's do question 8 in our 10 point test. 1 John 3:14, let's skip, "If we love our Christian brothers and sisters, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life." Not only do you like to fellowship with Christians, we love them. We just plain love them and it shows and people know it.

9. 1 John 4:6, "But we belong to God, that is why those who know God listen to us." Christians love preaching, teaching, hearing the word. We love it.

10. 1 John 4:15, "All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them and they live in God." May I ask you: when was the last time you proclaimed Jesus Christ intentionally, not waiting for somebody to come up to you and ask you about the hope that lies within you because you've got something about you? I don't know if that's ever happened to you, by the way. Not once. Apparently I've got the wrong look on my face or I don't have beatific glow of some sort. Nobody has ever walked up and said, "Excuse me, you just seem special." Maybe I need to work on something, but it just doesn't happen. You intend, "I know that person. She's not saved. I'm going to proclaim Jesus Christ and I'm going to make it happen." Bill Bright says 2% of Christians do. If we fail to proclaim Jesus Christ being the Son of God, we don't live in God.

Charles Spurgeon said, brace yourself for this one, Charles Spurgeon said, "If you do not have a passion to see lost souls saved, you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that." You know, when I heard that, I wasn't sure of my fate either and I said, "I'm going to prove it. I'm going to prove it. I'm going to get out in the streets and start talking to people about Jesus Christ and I'm going to look like an idiot. I don't care. I don't have a choice. How can I not? I've got the words of life, how can I not share? How can I not?" Imagine a

doctor who knows the cure to cancer but he's too busy furthering his studies to share it with people. Cursed doctor! We have the words of life.

The last one, remember we skipped number 7. We're going to go back to 1 John 3:8, "When people keep on sinning," uh-oh, "it shows they belong to the devil." Now that is as clear as it could possibly be stated but we need to know this. There is Greek language involved here. This doesn't mean that Christians never sin, this means if you keep on sinning, "Good morning, I'm planning my sin and away I go." The next day comes and around I go again, and it can be marked by, you pick your sin, you pick it, lust, pornography, lying, cheating, embezzling, grumbling, not praising God, whatever it is, you are earmarked by a lifestyle of sin. Please hear this, the Christian walk, you know it's not about perfection but it is about direction and if you're not moving in a direction of holiness, you're not in the truth.

So if you aren't growing by God's Holy Spirit dwelling in you, you don't have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in you, it's simply not optional for the believer. How holy should you be? This is really easy because you're thinking, "All right, how holy? You know, you just finished 10 points, pal. What's the curve here? Where is God going to grade this?" I don't know. I don't know the answer. I don't know if it's you've got 2 out of 10, I don't know if you have to get 10 out of 10. I don't know because they stand alone and yet they stand together. I don't know but here is what I do know: we should be holier than we were last year. That's it. Just more holy, moving in that direction, never reaching perfection until God redeems us but moving. Are you holier than you were last year? Don't know? Ask your family. That's a toughie. Ask your kids. That's brutal but you'll know. They know. They can see it. They know. You know. God knows.

There is the 10 point test, how did you do? Lukewarm? Hot? On fire? How did you do? Nobody says, nobody shares. Between us and God, how did you do?

So here's the question for us this morning: how do you get on fire for God? How do you get better on your score? How do you become one of those Christians that desires the word, that loves the brethren, that can't wait to see the Lord, that loves preaching, that proclaims your faith, that has good doctrine, that knows that they are a sinner and is so grateful to God? How do you get on fire? I'm going to share that with you this morning because I think God has given us some biblical examples and if we can figure out what happened to them, I would suggest to you each and every person in this room could walk out of here today on fire for God. Not squishy, Laodicean, lukewarm who will be spewed out of the mouth of the Savior on Judgment Day, on fire if we can understand God's way of getting on fire.

Ready to go? Here it is. Three guys in the Bible, James, Jude, Joseph of Arimathea. James and Jude, half brothers of Jesus Christ. John 7 says they didn't believe in Jesus. Imagine that. They didn't believe. They were living with God and they didn't believe in him. Hard hearts. But something happened and they went on to write two books in the Bible and they both began the same way. "James, a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ." Whoa, they went from bitter brother to bondservant. How

did that happen? What changed? If we can figure out what changed them, it will change us too. One wonders if they just didn't want to bend the knee to their brother. If you've got an older brother or sister, boy, submitting. Do you have an older brother or sister? I mean, can you imagine worshipping your older brother? Talk about humility. If that's what it's about, they had to get humble somehow.

There's a third guy in the Bible who was kind of the same way. His name is Joseph of Arimathea. The Bible says he was a secretive believer. Any secretive believers in here? "Yeah, I'm a Christian but, please, if I bring it up at work, I could lose my friends here and if people at school knew about me, they would think that I was one of those weird people and I might not be as popular, I might not get the promotion. I'm a Joseph of Arimathea Christian," because he was a religious leader and he had all the prestige but he was a secretive believer. But something changed and he jumped out of the closet of Christianity, went to Pontius Pilate and said, "I want to take down the body of the Son of God." Now you talk about being bold. That's being bold. There is no going back at that point.

Why did he do that? What happened? We've got to learn it and I'm telling you, it will change us. It will make it radically different. Ready? You all know the answer too: the cross. It's the cross. It's the cross that changed them. You see, they were good Jews, you know they were good Jews, James and Jude, they grew up in the house of Mary. You know they knew the Scriptures. Joseph of Arimathea, religious leader, they knew the Scriptures and they got the cross and if you're squishy in your walk, it's because you don't get the cross yet.

Isaiah 53, if you'd like to turn there. I'll read it to you but if you'd like to follow. I am certain that James, Jude and Joseph of Arimathea knew Isaiah 53. Starting in verse 3, "He," didn't know who it was. This by the way, is 700 years before Jesus Christ came to this earth. What a book. What a book. "He was despised and rejected. A man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised and we did not care, yet it was our weaknesses he carried, it was our sorrows that weighed him down. We thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins but he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped and we were healed. All of us have strayed away like sheep, we have left God's paths to follow our own, yet the Lord laid on him the guilt and sins of us all." That is the message of the cross right there and we've got to get it.

I wonder if you know both lessons of the cross. Most of us know one lesson but there are two lessons at the cross. Here is lesson 1 from the cross, ready? God hates sin. Have you heard about this yet? God hates sin. We don't hear about it a lot these days in modern-day evangelicalism, it offends people. It can make people not like you. God has created a place called hell for people who break his laws, and I would argue with you and plead with you this morning, if you do not believe that it is real, please make sure you are right. He has prepared a place for lawbreakers called hell and it's everything that Jesus described it as. He talked about hell twice as much as he talked about heaven. A lake of

sulfur. Weeping. Gnashing of teeth. Where the worm never dies. It's true. It is there and most people are going because God hates sin and he won't have it in his presence. He won't. He will not tolerate it. He will not put up with it. He is a clean room.

Are there things that God cannot do? Yep. God cannot have sin in his presence. He is so good and so pure and so holy, he can't have sin around him. Want to see an example in the Bible? Consider the high priest. Once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest was to go into the Holy of Holies where God's presence would be to atone for the sins of the people. Did you know what they did with the high priest? Put little bells around his robe and they'd tie a rope, tradition says, to his ankle because he would have to purify himself, go into the Holy of Holies, and if he had not purified himself correctly, do you know what God would do with the high priest? Boom, dead, because he can't have sin in his presence. What's up with the bells? Well, while he was in there, he would be slain and the people outside if they heard the bells tinkling, they knew he was alive. If the bells stopped, they'd take the rope and pull him out because they didn't want to go in either because our God is a consuming fire and he hates sin. He can't have sin. And you're thinking, "Oh, that God. That's the Old Testament God." Ask Ananias and Sapphira that God struck dead for lying. He has not changed from the Old to New Testament. He hates sin and on the day of judgment he will pour out his anger and his wrath on everybody who refuses to repent, who practices evil deeds and lives for themselves, and I am here this morning because in 2,800 chapel services, nobody ever told me this, that God hates sin.

And I never understood the other lesson of the cross. Oh yeah, it's good news. "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." That's good but it's only when we understand the depth of our sin that the second lesson of the cross becomes amazing, that despite what we are, what we've done, God died to save us anyway? Whoa. If you don't think the cross is magnificent, you've got some self-examination to do. You've got to look at yourself and see yourself not the way you compare yourself to the neighbor because we can all find, I mean, just by looking at this guy I can tell I'm better than this guy. You know, we have a tendency to just compare ourselves and you laugh, I know I'm better than you too because I'm self-righteous and I'm filled with pride. We must compare ourselves to God's standard to see how much of that sin we possess.

So here we go, test 2. Ready? Another 10 point test. We're going to take another test to see how much of the thing that God hates we possess. Where is God in your life? Here's a question for you that is penetrating: is Jesus Christ precious to you? That's a great question, isn't it? Is he precious and dear to you? Is he really really the focal point of your affections? May I ask how many days you've woken up like I used to do, never thanking God, never bowing my head for the food that he has provided, never giving him the honor that he's due, thanking him for my wife and children? Thanking him, usually having a horrible thought life. Instead of thanking him, I was filling my brain with filthy thoughts.

What about making a graven image? Have you ever done that? You're thinking, "No, that's Hinduism. They make little graven images and they put them on a fireplace." No,

I'm not talking about that. Here's how you and I can make a graven image, we do it this way. "You know, that preacher that was in town on Sunday, the guy from Minneapolis, and I'm glad he's gone, my God wouldn't do that. My God is not angry at sin and my God is not wrath filled, and my God isn't going to send anybody to hell." Do you know what? You're correct. Your god isn't going to do that because your god doesn't exist. It's a figment of your imagination. The God of the Bible is wrath filled and he's angry at sin every day, and I plead with you to consider he will crush sinners on the day of judgment. He will crush them because we didn't put him first. We did all the stuff, we did all the things that we just delighted in and we love it and we seek it and we serve it and we never stop and go, "Thank you for doing this." Every smell we should go, "God, you're so good to us." Every breath we should thank him for life and we don't, instead we love the gifts and we never say thank you to the Giver and he does not like it.

Taking his name in vain. Oh yeah, cursing, swearing, absolutely. How about calling yourself a Christian and then acting like somebody who's not a Christian and the world gets to go, "Yeah, some Christian, blaspheming the name of the Lord." His name is so holy.

You see, this is what nobody ever told me and I'm here to plead with you, I know I'm getting a little severe, I can't help it. Nobody ever shook me, "He's holy. He's holy, don't you get it? He's not just going, 'Oh, whatever.'" All liars will have their part in a lake of fire. Now if you can do something else with that verse, knock yourself out. I can't figure out anything else to do with that. He's keeping tabs. Every secret sin done in darkness is known to him. The one who made the eyes, shall he not see? He knows it all and he is storing up wrath for the day of wrath.

We have been rebels to our God. This is his story, this is his plan for his glory and we've been chasing all the stuff that he has given us so we would look up and instead we just look inward and do it all for ourselves. We don't desire his word, keep the Sabbath perhaps the way that we should. We've dishonored our parents, young people. "Honey, I mean it. 1, 2. I mean it, 2 1/2. 2 3/4. 2 7/8. 3. You do it, and I mean it!" You're sinning against God. Do it when you're told. It's a sin against God and he knows it and he's keeping tabs and he's not going to forget when you're 70. He will not forget the sins of our youth. And we adults, we did it too. I was the biggest snot on the block, I'm telling you. God hasn't forgotten. Well, he has now but that's another deal.

Murder, haven't done that, but these laws that God gave to us were given for a reason. They were not given so that people should respond and go, "Yeah, I can keep those and earn God's favor." That's what every other world religion is about. Every other world religion says, let's keep God's favor and we can earn our way there. All of them. The law was not given for us to earn our way to heaven. The law was given so that we'd go, "God, we can't do these things. Please save us! Send Messiah!" But the Jews missed it. They didn't get it. They responded to the laws and said, "Let's get together and write more rules about the laws so that we can figure a way to keep it and go to heaven someday." They missed it, so Jesus comes along and in the Beatitudes he takes the law and he turns up the heat on it and he turns up the focus and he turns up the spotlight, and instead of just

saying, "Thou shalt not murder," he said, "You've heard it said thou shalt not murder, I say call your brother a fool and you're in danger of the judgment." They should have gone, "Oh, I've done that all the time." "You've heard it said of old, thou shalt not commit adultery. I say if you look at a woman with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart."

It should be a burden that crushes us. The Jews missed it, I beg you not to miss it. I beg you not to miss it. The Beatitudes are the 10 Commandments squared. Be perfect even as your Father is perfect, and it should crush us all. Lying and taking things that don't belong to us and coveting and desiring things, it should bury us and we should take this little 10 point test and go, "God, I have failed miserably and you have every right to send me to hell. It is reasonable. It is just." And he should do it to me first and to all of us. It's right.

People go, "Well, hell is not that bad." No, it's that bad and more. I had a kid say to me once, "Well, you know, can you comprehend how hot the surface of the sun is?" No, but that's not as hot as hell. Why? Because God hates sin. And if that were the end of it, quite honestly we all should go and kill ourselves. I mean, really, quite honestly, or we should all go and live like the devil and be Epicureans and just eat, drink and be merry and enjoy the finest things because when we die, that's the end. But that's not the end. That's just lesson 1 of the cross. But I will say this, if we don't understand lesson 1, we will never appreciate lesson 2.

I wonder if your Christian walk is a little flimsy, it's because you haven't spent enough time focusing on lesson 1. "Oh, what I've done to God. What I have done to my God. How I have lived for me, me, me. The filthiness of my life." Dwell there. Let it crush you and then when you can hardly breathe, consider the second lesson of the cross. Turn and look to the Savior dying on the cross because God so loved this filthy, foul, sinful, rebellious world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life. That's not good news, that's stunning news. That's shocking news.

Do you know how somebody died on a cross? If you saw the "Passion of the Christ," it isn't even close. It wasn't even close. Most men did not make it to the cross. They would whip them with a cat of nine tails with the leather and the glass and the nails in it, it would tear through the skin, tear through the muscles and the organs would just go right out their back. Jesus Christ knew your thought life. Jesus Christ knew about you and your 10 Commandment test and he went, "I'll do it. I'll do it. I'll do it because I love them."

What amazing love, how can it be? Thou, my God, would die for me? Die for me? You could understand it if maybe we were all good. We're not all good. We're all bad and he died anyway. Amazing. When he died on the cross, the hanging, remember your back all torn up, you're on the wood, you can't breathe because you are slinking down and you try to push yourself up which just rubs against the back, and you push yourself up because you can't breathe. It's like when you're in a swimming pool and you try to go from the shallow end to the deep and and keep your neck above the water. Have you ever done



that? The water comes up and you stretch. That's what happens on a cross, you get pulled down and everything gets pulled up and you can't breathe and you suffocate and you die, and the Bible says in Isaiah 53:10, it was God's good plan to crush him. God planned it. God planned it. It was God's plan to bruise his only Son. God was pleased to bruise. God was pleased. That image that you have in your brain right now of a Savior dying on the cross with the nails, by the way, which didn't go through the front of the feet because the nails aren't long enough, they think they had the criminals straddle the cross so that they could bang the nails through the Achilles. That's how you hung on the cross. His Son, his beloved Son. Would you give your son for anybody? I've got to confess, I wouldn't give my child for anybody. God gave his Son for us and the Bible said it pleased God to bruise his only Son. Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Because he hates sin but he loves us.

So it pleased God to pour out his wrath as the payment for us so that we could respond and go, "God, thank you! Save me!" so that the entire world for all eternity would go, "What an amazing God!" Never has anybody done anything so kind, the King stepping off of his throne, entering in with the rebellious servants and dying to save them. This is God's prearranged plan so that he could be glorified to the max. There is no better way for God to be praised than for you to get saved so that he can forgive you, so that everybody can go, "Do you believe what a God that is? He saved Todd. He saved Josh. He saved you. What a God! What a good God!" That is history.

That is God's plan and that is his intention. Please know this: you will be glorifying God, you will glorify him in heaven because you repented and put your trust in Jesus Christ and you will praise him forever because you will be demonstrating God's kindness to you, a sinner, or you will glorify him in hell. Make no mistake about it. We will all be glorifying God. This is all for him. You see, we are so self-centered we think it's about us. We can't help it. God says, "No, it's really all about me and you'll glorify me in heaven because I have forgiven you or you will glorify me in hell as the smoke of your torment rises before the throne of the Lamb for eternity." He's going to get glorified and I'm here this morning to beg you please, please, he's a good God, he's a kind God, what does he need to do to demonstrate his love for you but by dying for you? He's a kind God. He's a patient God. He should be crushing us right now but he is waiting. Do you know why 2 Peter 3 says? He wants you to come to repentance and the knowledge of the truth. He wants you to be saved so bad he died for you. Oh please, do not reject this marvelous marvelous offer of amazing kindness. Don't reject it. Today is the day of salvation. He gives us time. He's a good God. Do you have to give up your life? Yes, but you'll get God instead.

Now as we close, I want to challenge you even further. I realize that this has been a lot and I want to challenge you even further. I don't know your conversion story and I am not your judge. I can't express that enough. I can't stand here and say you're going, you're going, and you're not going. That's not my job and I wouldn't know anyway. But I'm a little concerned that these days some people have responded to a Gospel presentation, they were told to do something that maybe isn't biblical. The response to the Gospel is you die to you. You've heard the term born-again, right? How do you get born-again? You don't climb back up into your mother's womb, you die to you spiritually. "God, I'm

done. I am done with me. I am dead to me. I want nothing more with me." And God says, "Now you're ready because I'm going to get all the credit for this. You're not going to come to me on your terms, you're coming on my terms and now I will save you." When we repent and put our trust in Jesus Christ, "I'm sorry, I trust you."

But sometimes we are told to do things and I wonder if you were told to do something and maybe your Christian walk has not been what it's supposed to be. As gently as I can, I've used these terms myself. I simply would like to make maybe some corrections. Have you been told to just believe? I was, that's what I was told, just believe. The demons believe and they tremble. We must repent also. Imagine you committed adultery, you go back to your wife and say, "Honey, I just want you to know I believe in you." No, "I'm sorry. I'm done. Have me back, please." Repentance and faith. A broken heart and a contrite spirit.

We've been told that we should ask Jesus into our heart. Well, does Jesus come and dwell in our hearts? Yes, he does. Yeah, the question is how does he get in there? I wonder how many people in this room, I would almost take it to the bank you've asked Jesus into your heart six, eight, 10 times, and he doesn't seem to stay. You haven't repented and put your trust in him. You haven't died to you so that he can make you spiritually reborn.

What about this, sometimes we're told we have a God shaped hole in our hearts, only Jesus can fill it, so we give it a try. We do have a God shaped hole in our heart, we have way more than that, we've got a filthy, wretched, diseased heart and he'll cleanse it, he'll clean it and make it new and give us a new heart with new desires when we repent and put our trust in him.

Sometimes people will use fruit as a draw card. Come to Jesus and you'll get sometimes it's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness. Does he give us those things? Yes, but if we come seeking the fruit, well, we don't get the Giver of the gift.

Sometimes people will say, "Come to Jesus and your marriage will be healed." Well, the Bible actually says something different. There's a pretty good chance your marriage will get wrecked, "houses will be divided because of me."

Sometimes people say, "Come to Jesus and your kids will grow up better." So you try it. That's not what the salvation message is. Repentance and faith.

"Come to Jesus and you'll get healed." Might God heal you? Yes. Might God kill you? Yes, for his glory.

There is no promise. The only promise that the Bible shows me is trials, temptation and persecution. Ask Paul. What was Paul's wonderful plan for his life? Shipwrecked. Beaten. Stoned. Killed one time, came back to life. Persecuted everywhere he went. Did he miss out on the wonderful plan? It's not about that. It's not about our plan, it's about his plan, but we endure through those things because we have God and his forgiveness in an afterlife if we will repent and put our trust in him.

Make Jesus our Lord and Savior. We can't. He is. We are living in rebellion to him. We must submit to him.

Accept Jesus. All wrong. Couldn't be more wrong. Accept Jesus, you're talking about having it backwards. He needs to accept us and he will. He's kind if we will repent and put our trust in him.

Some people say it's easy to believe. The formula is easy, repent and trust, doing it is not. You have no idea what you are looking at. You have no idea what I was. You talk about I don't care how much pride you have, sir or madam, I had way more than you. Self-righteous to the gills. I had to get low. It's about being low before God and God says, "Now I'll save you because I'm going to get the credit for it." I can't earn it. You're not going to get any credit. "You'll get low and I'll be exalted." When we repent and trust.

Now, this is a toughie. I'm going to challenge you on this and we'll wrap up. Making a decision for Jesus, this is a tough one. Have you made a decision for Jesus? Did somebody tell you, "Make a decision and become a Christian"? I'd like to challenge that. See if this makes sense to you: do I think people can make a decision? I do think that. We can make a decision. We can accept the teachings of the Bible: God is sovereign, he is holy, he is just, he will judge the world in righteousness, and Jesus Christ died on the cross, shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins, if a man will repent and put his trust in Jesus Christ, his sins will be forgiven and he will inherit eternal life. I believe we can decide that that is true but that's as far as it goes. We can decide it's right, submit to God, humble ourselves to him, call out to him for mercy, and then he will decide to save us. He is going to get all of the credit.

You're thinking I'm just being a little picky on this. Have you got a kid? "Oh, dad, my side hurts. My side hurts." You just take him to the doctor, "Hey, do whatever you think you need to do. Whatever method, that's fine. Do whatever. Knock around in there for a little bit." No, no, no, you want a surgeon who is surgically accurate and sharp and we're just talking about an appendix here. The Gospel of our God is specific. Read Leviticus. You don't think God is specific about the Gospel? Repentance and faith. If we come thinking... You see, when we make a decision, we're in the driver's seat, "Okay, God, I've decided." Wrong. Get out of the driver's seat and let God make that decision to save us and he will.

We have got to be completely done with us. How do you get there? How do you get there? Simple and yet so hard. Simple and so hard. Consider the tests that we've taken this morning. This is it. In the privacy of your own heart, get alone, I'm not an altar call kind of guy, I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand. Get alone in the privacy of your heart. You know if you are saved or not. You know. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. It's radical. It's different. You know it and so does your family because you're different now, and if they don't know, something's wrong. So you know. So get alone with yourself and with your God. Please, I beg of you, do the heavy lifting. Examine your life. You know. You know what you've done. I know. The thoughts, the deeds, the

actions, the lack of praise, the lack of thanksgiving to God. Dwell on it. Let it crush you and let it bury you and when you think that you can't stand anymore because of your filthy sinfulness, take a look at that cross and your God hanging there to forgive you of your sins and it will break your heart and you will cry out to him, you will cry out to him, "God, I'm sorry. I didn't know. I didn't know how much you hated sin. I didn't know how much you loved me. Would you please have me? Would you please forgive me?" And he's good.

That's the heart that God desires, a child-like faith, not a critical, "Well, I'll be in control of this." No, little baby faith that just looks up and goes, "God, you're big. You part seas. You put men in whales. You created the earth in six days. You died on a cross. O God, you're huge and I love you. Please save me." And he's good and he will and you'll know it and you'll be on fire and you'll never fall away. I'm telling you, you'll never be snatched from his hand because he'll seal you with his Holy Spirit. It's the sign, the seal of his covenant. And he will save you unto the day of redemption and you will stand before him and you will inherit eternal life not because you're a good person but because you're a bad person who's been forgiven by a good God. And we'll get to enjoy and reign with him. Do you know that we get to reign with him? Do you know that Jesus describes serving that in heaven, he's going to serve us? Do you know that? Your God, serve us. I should be on my face before him, fearful of looking up at this God and he says, "I'm going to serve you because I'm so good."

Please let him save you today. Please let him save you. He died to prove his love for you. Today is the day of salvation. If you don't know, please come to him. Please, he's a good God.