



## ***Essentials We at Fish For Souls Believe***

By Kurt von Schleicher

Do you believe in God and all the basic tenets of His teachings? Do you claim to be a Christian? If so, what do you base that claim on? Are you hoping that God will grade on a curve—that your good deeds, will in the end, outweigh all your bad deeds and God will somehow let you into His holy Heaven? Regardless of how many hypocrites there are in the Church, do you currently have a personal relationship with the Jesus Christ of the Bible, that came as a free gift from God the Father and was established through real repentance and the obedience of saving faith on your end, with nothing religiously or meritoriously done by you in addition to that?

Despite the vocal outbursts of some atheists today, most people in our great country say they believe there is a God, or at least they say they believe in a supreme being. But do they really believe in the essentials of Christianity and in Christ who claimed to be God—the only Way of salvation for every individual?

### **Recent studies among Americans have shown:**

- ***86 percent believe in God or a supreme being***
- ***75 percent believe in life after death***
- ***86 percent believe in heaven***
- ***77 percent believe in hell***
- ***69 percent believe in a God described as the "all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Creator of the universe who rules the world today."***
- ***Almost nine out of 10 people (87 percent) say the universe was originally created by God.***
- ***Only 9 percent of Americans profess no religion at all.***
- ***More than 80 percent—including 71 percent of college graduates—believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God.***
- ***34 percent believe the Bible is the actual word of God to be taken literally, word for word.***

- ***And most Americans still to this day say they are Christians, with numbers ranging from 77 percent to 86 percent.***<sup>1</sup>

Yet who of us can escape wondering, "*Is all this true?*" when we look at our society's high rates of crime, divorce, and babies being born out of wedlock, not to mention all the other serious social ills. It would appear that, like it does in many European countries, we are now living in a post-Christian land for the most part.

Perhaps you're asking: Maybe I believe in the basics, but Kurt, what even are *the essentials*?

When we talk about the essentials, we are referring to the basic elements that make up and characterize our historic faith, and which separate it from other false belief systems in the earth. There are a lot of dangerous cultic groups and cults out there and we all need to be ready to give their devotees an answer when they come knocking. We have widespread biblical and moral illiteracy today like never before, but our goal is not only to become better worshipers of Jesus Christ, better witnesses and better preparers of other Christians to be evangelistic, we also seek to make people so familiar with the Word of God and the essentials of the Christian faith that when a counterfeit even looms on the horizon, they will recognize it instantaneously.

I really like the maxim Augustine used to quote that originated from a basically unknown German man named, **Rupertus Meldenius** in AD 1627. Regarding different Christian teachings, Meldenius stated: "***In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity.***" That's very profound when you think about it, because we all need to work together and let the written Word of God dictate our faith and practice rather than supernatural experiences, feelings, opinions, speculations, or well-intentioned spiritual leaders ...and yet not cut off other Christians who might hold to a difference of opinion on a secondary doctrine. Some fringe non-essential false doctrines are dangerous (i.e., Many preachers wrongly teach that a Christian can have a demon inside them), but it is still foolish to be done with our brothers and sisters when we agree on all the basics with them. We are all to be vertically dependant on Christ looking to Him to meet all our needs and yet horizontally interdependant so that we can learn the Bible and grow. With all due respect, many strange Christians with dusty Bibles are trying to find spiritual growth in exciting dramatic church meetings with alleged signs and wonders—the type that never help anyone, but there is absolutely no spiritual growth apart from the Word of God! What we really believe will eventually be manifested in our behavior so we've got to believe what's true! We simply need to look to the Lord in this as we love one another and prioritize our beliefs and our relationships. Again, **we don't ever want to break fellowship with other Christians just because we can't come**

**into a full agreement about the periphery doctrines of our faith, that really aren't pertinent to salvation—namely non-essentials.**

Our unity is important, but *nonessentials* need to remain *nonessentials* and *essentials* need to remain *essentials*. Maybe like me, you've experienced a situation where a TV preacher was verbally elevating secondary teachings<sup>2</sup> to the level of cardinal/essential Christian doctrine and then you hear them start to divide with other Christians over these teachings and even encourage others to divide as well. That's so wrong and should be addressed! I remember hearing one mega church pastor falsely teach that if a person believed in awemillennialism (which I personally don't believe is even biblical) that person couldn't be saved. Where do these guys come up with such ideas?

Today we hear religious leaders from prominent Christian denominations falsely say that even Moslems and Mormons will enjoy salvation apart from the Bible Christ. We hear some say that all people and even the devils will eventually be saved and go to heaven. But **it's imperative that real (born again) Christians cling to scriptural truth and form their unity around nothing more than the *Bible Jesus* and the *Essentials*, since essential Christian doctrine forms the only line of demarcation between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults.** Now, as perhaps never before, this line is not just being slightly blurred by false teachers and their teachings, but it is being totally distorted to the hurt and destruction of many. Sadly the tide in evangelicalism is turning away from unity *around* Christ and the essentials to unity *despite* the essentials—unity at any price. To some this sounds sweet and loving, but we aver that truth is more important than unity. Movements within our culture today—cults as well as within the church—are compromising, confusing, and contradicting essential Christian doctrine and it's high time that we live as fully committed Christians, wake-up to our duty, and also open our mouths to boldly spread the Gospel and accurate teachings from the Word of God! Why feel ashamed of what the Bible says?

It is precisely because these essentials have been un-righteously redefined that millions have a completely distorted view of what it means to become a Christian, and to live as real Christians today. Multiplied millions of spiritually sick people who have tremendous value are trusting in themselves or in various whacked forms of religiosity to save them. But we have the Solution, the Answer—the only lasting Cure and we simply need to unselfishly export it to them. Again, several putative “Christian leaders” today, (para-church and local church ministers) exacerbate the cloudiness and I believe unintentionally obfuscate what's orthodox, so we each need to make good use of our time. Of course they will use Christian terminology in their teaching and mix in many true statements (otherwise who would swallow the poisoned part), *but the meaning they pour into many of the words they use is decidedly unbiblical.* Jesus Christ commands us to, **“judge righteous judgment”** (John 7:24). The Bible says,

***“Open your mouth, judge righteously”*** (Proverbs 31:9). Therefore, with these verses in mind, let’s look at the essentials:

**First, we believe in the authority of the Scripture, which is another way of saying that the Bible is God’s inspired, infallible and inerrant Word. It’s the ultimate source for knowledge about God, as well as the definitive guide for our everyday lives.**

**Second, we affirm the existence of a triune God, or one God in three distinct persons--yes, three distinguishable personages.** (In other words we are talking about: a plurality in the divine unity or God’s three-in-oneness. Not three Gods, yet each of these Persons is fully God)—**the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This God is self-existent, eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, righteous, and loving. God created the universe from nothing and He rules over His creation sovereignly including both human and angelic beings.** (Note: Though the term “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible it does belong to that class of terms which are biblical in the sense of expressing clear Scriptural teaching).

**Third, we also hold that man is a physical and spiritual being who is created in God’s image. But because of his sin or transgression, man has lost his fellowship with God. The extent of sin is so great that its effects continue to this very day in the form of cruelty, suffering, and death.**

**Next, by God’s grace, Jesus Christ—who is fully God and fully man—was sent to save us from our bondage to sin. We believe that Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died vicariously for our sins, physically rose from the dead, and will one day return to judge the world and deliver His people. Personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only means by which mankind can escape eternal damnation and judgment.**

**Finally, we recognize the church as God’s ordained institution—a living organism that’s headed by Jesus Christ. The true Church is composed of all believers, and is organized for worship, for fellowship, for the administration of the sacraments, for spiritual growth and support in the Word of God (for there is no spiritual growth apart from the Word), and for the evangelization of the world.<sup>3</sup>**

## *Co-laboring In The Fishing Effort*

***We Choose to Be as Inclusive as Propriety and Conscience will Allow.***

***Fish for Souls*** extends a gracious hand of partnership to any and all churches that are committed to Jesus and the basic orthodox tenets of the Christian faith (listed above)! God being our Helper, we are here to serve the body of Christ as best as we can. Of course Jesus wasn't a Baptist, a Lutheran, a Presbyterian, a Calvary Chapel-ite or even a Charismatic, rather He was a righteous soul-winner who loves us sinners all the same. And that's how we're to be as we properly reach out to the last, the lost and the least with ardent passion! Some Christians, though accountable in a single local church, seem to be transenders, by God's love and grace. I mean they transcend all church and denominational lines without being divisive, abrasive or even compromising with the truth. My under-hero Billy Graham is one such person that I admire. And we applaud him and so many others too who seek to be like that.

We at ***F4S*** also seek to be that way by God's empowering. By faith, we want to sow more seeds, water them well, and reap more harvest as Christ leads us and uses us ...rather than invest endless amounts of time in pulling out all of the weeds on the harvest field, so to speak (I'm speaking here about cast out the tares—those counterfeit Christians, when we can't really tell who there are for sure).

There are also many well intentioned attempts of various Christians today who major on ridding other saints from all their secondary false beliefs before they start working with them in harvesting the ripe crop, as well. But that is not our primary goal at ***F4S***.

Of course sound doctrine does matter to us and we do pray for other believers, not feeling that we are better than any of them. But God has used and will use imperfect saints like us. In fact we trust Him to perfect us in the process. But why waste a lot of time majoring on the minors regarding many periphery tenants when lost people are perishing all around us? Our specific assignment is to: ***"Know Christ well, and make Christ well known worldwide"*** starting on our knees and then doing proactive evangelism.

It's time for us to unify and lovingly work together with other real Christians (and again, I mean unifying around Christ and His Essentials). We can't afford to be distracted away from the best (that's doing God's will) by any vain negativity or even by other good activities and interests.

We at ***Fish for Souls*** seek to bring as many unbelievers (as is possible) face-to-face with Christ's Gospel and His incredible claims. We also seek to bring

together a broad spectrum of churches and saints who will work together for the sake of spreading His Gospel worldwide.

We believe that when the Church sets aside minor differences and prayerfully works together to impact their communities with the Message above all messages, the results can be powerful. To us, the very fact that there are churches in a community willing to work in harmony with each other—that's a powerful witness to unbelievers there, in and of itself. Jesus said, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another**" (Jn. 13:34-35, nkjv).

At **Fish for Souls**, agape Love is the impetus behind our motivation to promote such unity and to adopt this kind of strategy of working with other fishers, especially when doing anything beyond the borders of ministry within just one church. And we want God to get the glory instead of **F4S**.

It is because of this willingness to roll up our sleeves with others and to work cooperatively with all types of believers who represent a very diverse array of theological and traditional views, that some people have opted to diss us or criticize our fishing mission. Yes, unfortunately not all so called Christians have been taught right about the importance of soul-winning in Christ and therefore some oppose our efforts. It's because of this "*guilt by association*" that we do our best to clarify our biblical position and define the limits of our ministry partnerships using the cardinal tenants of the faith (namely the Essentials listed above).

While it would be easy to allow any one of a plethora of different practices or a myriad of different church systems (including even ministry idiosyncrasies, styles and methodologies) to divide or separate us, we have chosen to overlook all non-essential differences in favor of being effective toward the greater work of the Gospel. Gace says: fish together in peace and remember... In non-essentials, total freedom for Christians and in all things, love!

**Just because we want to work across the spectrum of churches, it should never be inferred that we always agree with all their respective practices and interpretations of Scripture. Neither do we believe it to be our (F4S) place in the body of Christ at this time, as an evangelistic-equipping organization, to address all these varying views. Our main aim and intent is to point people to Jesus and clearly proclaim His Gospel in a biblically accurate and relevant way for the purpose of winning sinners to faith in Him!**

To Christians that want to say our strategy and core beliefs are "*negatively compromising,*" because we are allowing potential "*false*" believers, *false*

*teachers*" to be in our midst to hear, we would just like to simply refer them to what Jesus told His disciples in the parable of the wheat and tares.

You know the story, how a farmer went out and planted a crop of wheat, but then his enemy came in after him during the night time and planted tares among the buried wheat seed. Well, the tares, (a.k.a. "darnel" seeds), initially spring up and appear like wheat, but ultimately these plants grow and can choke or uproot the wheat plants.

As you look closely at the Bible context and what Jesus is saying, you will notice He is not suggesting that His disciples (including us) are to be out examining those who call themselves Christians to firmly determine or ask, "*Who of you are wheat and who of you are the evil tares?*" The subsequent logical idea to that kind of thinking among believers would be to think that the tares will totally destroy the church and make it non-existent. This then would lead to us unwisely casting unrighteous judgments before that could happen, regarding who is a "real believer" and who is "a mere poser" (a false convert) and all for the sake of protecting God's Church. And it's the Lord who is good at protecting His Church.

Man looks on the outward appearance so often to make these lame judgment calls. But God alone is the One who can see in the interior heart of a person to tell if they are saved or lost. Besides, the Bible authoritatively commands us, "***Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment***" (Jn. 7:24). We are to judge a person's message in light of the Word for sure. We can be fruit-inspectors and follow the promptings of the Spirit as to who we are to witness to and what we are to say. We can notice deeds done by individuals, but saying who is spiritually lost—that's not for us to judge!

Jesus didn't tell His disciples to judge who would be going to Hell nor did He tell us to inform people that they were going there.

When they said to Jesus, "***Shall we pull out the weeds?***", (i.e. segregate the true believers from the false believers), Jesus replied, "***No, you'll hurt the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds and burn them and to put the wheat in the barn***" (Matt. 13:29-30, nlt).

It would appear that Jesus will one day have some of His angels sort out the real from the fake believers, rather than have Christians do that. And that's the overriding sentiment that guides our fishing efforts when we come into a community for any kind of city-wide outreach. **We are not there to pull out the weeds, cast out the tares, or condemn anyone. We are there to serve, and to sow more seeds in the right way—in love!** Another under-hero of mine, Vance Havner, once warned Christians, "*If we're too busy using our sickles on one another, we're going to miss the harvest.*"

We want you, Christian, to get alone with the Lord and your Bible and thoroughly learn His truth and heartbeat ...that never changes. We want you to pray and gain a burden for people (a deep supernatural heartfelt concern for their future welfare) and together with Him, decide upon all grey areas for yourself (Grey areas? Yes, i.e., should a Christian go to movies in order to be a good example? What style of music should I listen to? What kind of car or house should a Christian possess etc.). I personally never want to try to get any Christian to adopt my personal convictions regarding subjects like these. It's none of my business and cloneliness is not next to godliness.

Of course some people in Christ's Church will always oppose biblical evangelism (which is not a grey area at all) and they will dogmatically hold to rigid positions regarding secondary issues and real grey areas. Some people will more than likely never be satisfied with our simple straightforward fishing strategy (i.e., Get up off your blessed assurance and go tactfully tell people the Gospel—bragging on Jesus Christ!). Some think we get in God's way by obeying His Word. With them we will not **"strive about words"** (2 Tim. 2:14-16, nkjv), or get caught up in their contentious strife and arguments, but we will do our best to **"live peaceably with all men"** as we move forward with our specific calling to: **"Go therefore\* and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."** (Matt. 28:19, nkjv).

---

<sup>1</sup> I found those stats in an article on *WorldNetDaily* on February 25, 2008 and they were put there by Greg Laurie.

<sup>2</sup> Secondary (or non-essential) doctrines deal with subjects like: pre, mid or post tribulational rapture, tongues, gifts for today, frequency of offering communion, the baptism in the Holy Spirit happening on a day separate from the day one gets saved, types of music styles allowed in the churchhouse, choirs with or without robes etc.

<sup>3</sup> Of course a lot more can be said regarding these Christian essentials, and here is some further reading if you would like to make the time for such study: Paul Little's book *Know What You Believe*, R.C. Sproul's *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, also Bruce Milne's *Know The Truth* (IVP).