



*Without a Doubt* is for anyone who wrestles with the certainty of their faith or if the promises of Christianity are true. Pastor Dean Inserra lays out what the Bible teaches about how to have saving faith in God. You'll learn the clear truth about what a Christian is—and what a Christian is not.

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# THE CONFUSION: WHAT A CHRISTIAN IS NOT

**A**ccording to the late theologian R. C. Sproul, “The main way that people acquire a false sense of assurance of their salvation is by having a false understanding of the way of salvation.”<sup>1</sup> I am an example of someone who wasn’t saved out of atheism, but rather from false assurance. Being falsely assured of one’s salvation is grounded in ignorance, and this is precisely my story and linked primarily with my own church upbringing. I grew up going to church every Sunday, unless I was sick or out of town. Each night, our family would say a memorized

prayer before eating dinner: “God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food.” I owned a Bible, which was given to me after my confirmation at the neighborhood Methodist church, but I don’t remember reading it. I knew about Noah and the ark, David and Goliath, and that Jesus helped a lot of people.

In middle school, a pretty girl invited me to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) “huddle meeting.” I played sports and believed in God, and did I mention she was pretty? So I went. FCA was a great time, and I went every week to the huddle meeting with other classmates. We would hear something the kids called a “testimony” from athletes who played football for the Florida State Seminoles, and I thought it was the coolest.

As the school year went on, it was time for the FCA fall retreat. I had never heard of one of those before. It was a one-day event in a camp-type setting held about an hour from where I lived. The thought of getting on a bus and spending the day with my friends and playing in sports competitions sounded like my type of thing, so I signed up as quickly as my parents agreed to let me go. After dodgeball, kickball, and some relay races, we had our assembly time. The speaker was a large man who had played

professional football, and I remember thinking his muscles were bigger than Hulk Hogan's. He told really funny stories and then started talking about our need to trust in Jesus, that He died for our sins and rose from the grave.

Up until this FCA retreat, if anyone had asked me if I was a Christian, I would have said yes without hesitation. But if you had asked me why I claimed to be a Christian (nobody ever had), trusting in Jesus and that He died for me would not have been my answer. And as for sins? I didn't really have a concept of my sinfulness. I got in trouble every now and then, but I figured the real bad guys were people who were in jail and on the Russian tag team I would watch each Saturday in pro wrestling.

The speaker gave what I now know is called an "invitation" to respond to his presentation of the gospel. At the time, I had never been to an event where the speaker had asked anyone to "come forward" and trust in Jesus Christ. He counted to three and asked people who wanted to be saved from their sins by "giving their lives to Jesus Christ" to come forward. The preacher talked about the blood of Jesus and heaven and hell. He told the packed basketball gymnasium of middle school students that we needed to ask God to forgive us for sinning against Him, repent of

our sins, and become followers of Jesus.

Dozens of students stood up and walked forward to meet with FCA staff members and give their lives to Jesus. I didn't move, because as far as I was concerned, I was a Christian. Sin, Jesus' blood, and my need for repentance were new things to my ears, but I was fairly certain I was okay. My reasoning was simple: I believed in God; I wasn't of any other religion (like Judaism or Islam); I went to church on Sundays; and I was in FCA. I had never thought about trusting in Jesus because nobody had ever told me I needed to do so, but I figured since I went to church already, I was fine and probably had already done all those things.

Then something happened that opened my eyes, truly freaked me out, and changed my life. The speaker said, "There is one more thing I want to share for some of you still in your seats." He then read the words of Jesus from Matthew 7:21–23.

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in

your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?” Then I will announce to them, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!”

I don't remember his commentary exactly, but he shouted that there were people in the room who went to church, came from good families, said a prayer before meals, but had never trusted in Jesus Christ. “You are no more a Christian than someone who doesn't believe in God at all, and that will lead you straight to hell! God will not let sin go unpunished. You need forgiveness for your sins, and only Jesus can give you that forgiveness because He took on the punishment that you deserved, even though He had never sinned.”

I know that's not always the best way to share the gospel, but it certainly got through to me. He gave a second invitation, and I believed he was speaking directly to me. I walked down to the front completely freaked out. I had thought hell was for really bad people who committed crimes like murder, not for someone like me. It is where evil dictators went, not middle-schoolers from nice families who went to church and had a picture in the Olan

Mills church directory to prove it. This muscular, enthusiastic preacher was talking about a Jesus with whom I was unfamiliar. “The gospel,” in my mind, was a kind of music where people wore choir robes and clapped. I had no idea it was about Jesus dying on the cross for me or that His death even mattered. I walked forward, prayed to trust in Christ with a staff member named Walter, and I was angry. Don’t get me wrong, I experienced joy over this great news about my sins being forgiven, but I was upset. How was it that I had been to church my entire life and nobody had ever told me this news?

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I needed someone to talk to me about assurance because I had no idea mine was false. In my eyes, I was headed to heaven when I died because that’s where you go if you’re not a bad person. I didn’t lie awake at night thinking about my relationship with God because I didn’t know I had any reason to worry about it. This is not because I was secure in Christ, but because I didn’t even know what



that meant or why it mattered. As I look back on my childhood, now as an adult, I realize my false assurance was due to my unclear beliefs. I assumed I was a Christian, but that was by culture, rather than by conviction. My assurance was not supported by what the Bible considers an actual saving faith.

If I had a moment like the people who Jesus spoke about in Matthew 7:21–23, I would have advocated for simply being a nice person, that I believed in God, wasn't part of another religion, and practiced some Christian traditions such as going to church on Sunday and saying a prayer with the family before dinner. I'm thankful I sat under preaching that day at the FCA retreat, preaching that wouldn't let my ignorant assumptions go unchecked. My false assurance moved to a belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The security I now felt was based on truth, not on faulty assumptions that claimed to be Christian without any dependence on the saving work of Jesus Christ on my behalf.

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