

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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R. C. Sproul on Saving Faith

John W. Robbins

One of the reasons the Gospel has disappeared from conservative Baptist and Presbyterian churches is the failure, even refusal, of their teachers to take their ideas from Scripture. One cannot properly teach or effectively defend the central Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone unless one knows what both faith and justification are. R. C. Sproul has had enormous influence in Reformed circles, and unfortunately he is an example of the serious confusion about saving faith found in conservative churches. His ministry, Ligonier Ministries, has promoted some of the spokesmen of the Neolegalist movement in its publications and conferences. His son, R. C. Sproul, Jr., is affiliated with Douglas Wilson's Neolegalist denomination, the Confederation of Reformed and Evangelical Churches. Sproul's mentor, John Gerstner, was a lifelong disciple of Thomas Aquinas, the official philosopher of the Roman Catholic Church, and Sproul is as well. (In May 2001 *The Trinity Review* published an essay refuting Dr. Gerstner's ludicrous claim, published in *Tabletalk* magazine, that Thomas Aquinas was a Protestant.) But what many do not understand is that the theology of all these men has been corrupted by their Roman Catholic philosophy. Here is an illustration of that pernicious influence – philosophy corrupting theology – from R. C. Sproul's 1996 book, *Now That's a Good Question*. Dr. Sproul's essay is also published at the website of Ligonier Ministries. My comments are interspersed.

What Is Faith?

SPROUL: I think the whole concept of faith is one of the most misunderstood ideas that we have, misunderstood not only by the world but by the church itself.

ROBBINS: Dr. Sproul is absolutely correct. Faith is indeed an idea misunderstood by both the world and the church.

SPROUL: The very basis for our redemption, the way in which we are justified by God, is through faith. The Bible is constantly talking to us about faith, and if we misunderstand that, we're in deep trouble.

ROBBINS: Dr. Sproul is correct that the Bible constantly speaks of faith, and pastors and churches are in deep trouble because they have not listened to the Bible. In this essay, Dr. Sproul himself fails to quote anything the Bible says about faith.

SPROUL: The great issue of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was, How is a person justified? Luther's controversial position was that we are justified by faith alone. When he said that, many of the godly leaders in the Roman Catholic Church were very upset.

“Godly Roman Catholic Leaders”

ROBBINS: Oddly, without warning or explanation, Sproul suddenly changes topics, from faith to justification. Please note well the adjectives Sproul uses: Luther's position on justification, which is in fact the Biblical doctrine, is “controversial,” but leaders of the Roman Catholic Church are “godly.” Sproul does not describe Luther or his doctrine as “godly,” nor does he describe Roman Catholic leaders or doctrine as “controversial.” He says “godly leaders in the Roman Catholic Church” were “very upset” at Luther's “controversial position.” This is not history; this is propaganda for Rome.

SPROUL: They [that is, “godly leaders in the Roman Catholic Church”] said, Does that mean that a person can just believe in Jesus and then live any way they want to live? In other words, the Roman Catholic Church reacted fiercely because they were afraid that Luther's view would be understood as an easy-believism in which a person only had to believe and never had to be concerned about bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

ROBBINS: Rather than defending, or even explaining, the Biblical and Reformational doctrine of justification by faith alone – Sproul does not describe it as “Biblical,” or “correct,” but merely as “Luther's position” and “Luther's view,” as though the idea of justification by faith alone had originated with Luther – rather than defending justification by faith alone from the charge of antinomianism, as Paul does in *Romans*, Sproul denigrates justification by the

pejorative label “easy-believism.” In so doing he tries to make Rome’s murderous opposition to the Reformation understandable. This is inexcusable in any theologian, especially one who claims to be Reformed.

By Faith Alone: Only Believism

As a matter of Biblical fact, and contradicting what the Roman Catholic Church and R. C. Sproul say, all a sinner must do to be saved is to believe the Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life”; “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”; “the just shall live by faith”; “for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”; “by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”; “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law,” and so on. The Bible clearly and emphatically teaches that a sinner is saved by belief of the Gospel alone, “apart from the deeds of the law.” That is why the blasphemous charge of antinomianism arose against the Gospel in the first place. If Paul and the other apostles had taught a false gospel of faith plus obedience as the way of salvation, the charge of antinomianism would never have been brought against them. Neither Rome nor many so-called “Reformed” theologians seem to understand that salvation is not a result of good works; good works are a result of salvation. It was that difference that divided the Christians from the Romanists in the sixteenth century, and it is that difference that divides the Christians from the Romanists in the twenty-first century.

SPROUL: It was crucial that those who were involved in the Protestant Reformation carefully define what they meant by saving faith. So they went back and did their studies in the New Testament...

ROBBINS: Sproul’s account makes it sound like the Reformers did not know what they were talking about: After the Reformation began, after “godly leaders of the Roman Catholic Church” had properly reacted to the Reformers’ controversial “easy-believism,” the Reformers had to go back and study the New Testament. This is not history; it is fiction.

SPROUL: ...specifically on the Greek word *pistein*, which means to believe, and they were able to isolate three distinctive aspects of biblical faith. The first is the Latin term *notitia*: believing in the data or the information.

Latin Fiction or Greek Truth?

ROBBINS: Let us ask what should be an obvious question: Why does Sproul suddenly shift from Greek to Latin? How does he get the Latin word *notitia* from the Greek word *pistein*? The Bible was not written in Latin. From *pistein* one can get cognate Greek words, Biblical words such as *pistis* and *pisteuo*, but not *notitia*. The word

notitia is not found in the Greek New Testament, but might be found in its Latin mistranslation called the Vulgate, which is the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. But Sproul has told us that “those who were involved in the Reformation” “did their studies in the New Testament.” The Reformers did not rely on a Latin mistranslation; they studied the Greek manuscripts. The Latin terms and analysis of faith that Sproul provides are not derived from Scripture, but from some other source.

Ironically, Sproul even gets the Latin wrong. *Notitia* does not mean “believing in the data or the information.” It refers to understanding, not believing. Sproul’s account of saving faith is not taken from Scripture; it is incoherent; and it begins with his misunderstanding of both the Greek word *pistein* and the Latin terms he prefers to use.

SPROUL: It’s an intellectual awareness. You can’t have faith in nothing; there has to be content to the faith. You have to believe something or trust someone.

ROBBINS: Notice that Sproul here uses the verbs “believe” and “trust” interchangeably, as synonyms. This is both good English and sound theology. Belief, that is to say, faith (there is only one word in the New Testament for belief, *pistis*) and trust are the same; they are synonyms. If you believe what a person says, you trust him. If you trust a person, you believe what he says. If you have faith in him, you believe what he says and trust his words. If you trust a bank, you believe its claims to be safe and secure. Strictly speaking, trust is belief of propositions in the future tense, such as “he will be good to me” or “this bank will keep my money safe.” This is important, because Sproul’s incorrect analysis of saving faith, his splitting it up into three parts, the third part being trust, depends on denying that belief and trust are the same thing. But here he correctly implies they are the same by using the words interchangeably.

SPROUL: When we say that a person is saved by faith, some people say, It doesn’t matter what you believe, just as long as you are sincere. That’s not what the Bible teaches. It matters profoundly what you believe. What if I believed that the devil was God? That wouldn’t save me. I must believe the right information.

ROBBINS: This is absolutely true. Saving faith is belief of the truth, not falsehoods; and not just any random truth either, but the truth about Jesus Christ and his work. Correct information is crucial to saving faith. The Gospel message, the Good News, is essential. Notice that news, information, doctrine, teaching, is always and only intellectual and propositional. It is meant to be understood. It is not felt, experienced, or emoted.

SPROUL: The second aspect of faith is what they call *assensus*, or intellectual assent.

ROBBINS: Who are “they” that divide saving faith, like all Gaul, into three parts? The New Testament writers did not do so. Sproul has not quoted a single verse from the Bible supporting his speculations about faith. Christians in the

pews need to realize that theologians who substitute Latin terms for Greek and divide saving faith into three elements are not exegeting Scripture; they are reading into it something that is not there. Perhaps that is why they use a language that is not there either. This is ventriloquism, not exegesis, and the ventriloquists make the Biblical authors speak the language of the Latin Church.

Misrepresenting James, Denying the Power of the Gospel

SPROUL: I must be persuaded of the truthfulness of the content. According to James, even if I am aware of the work of Jesus, convinced intellectually that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died on the cross for my sins, and that he rose from the dead I would at that point qualify to be a demon.

ROBBINS: Here Sproul's theological ventriloquism is blatant, for James says no such thing. Notice that Sproul does not actually quote James; he puts his own words into James' mouth. Here is what James actually says: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!" James says nothing about any demon believing that Jesus "died on the cross for my sins, and that he rose from the dead." James mentions only belief in one God – monotheism. Since belief in one God is belief of one true proposition, James says, "You do well." But monotheism is not saving belief because it is not about Jesus Christ and his work.

What is even worse than Sproul's gross misrepresentation of James is his denial of the power of the Gospel. The belief that Sproul says "qualifies [him] to be a demon" is, according to the Holy Spirit, the Gospel: "Moreover brethren, I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved..... For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Paul says these propositions are "the Gospel," and that by them, "you are saved." To the Romans he wrote: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17). Sproul, contradicting Paul, says that these propositions qualify anyone who believes them "to be a demon."

SPROUL: The demons recognize Jesus, and the devil himself knows the truth of Christ, but he doesn't have saving faith.

ROBBINS: Keep in mind that Sproul is discussing *assensus*, not *notitia*. According to Sproul, the devil is completely orthodox, at least on the doctrine of salvation: "The devil himself knows the truth of Christ" and this is not just "intellectual awareness" (*notitia*), but also assent

(*assensus*). The devil himself assents to the "truth of Christ." The devil himself "knows," "is aware of," and is "convinced intellectually" of the "truth of Christ." But still "he doesn't have saving faith." So in Sproul's soteriology, understanding and believing the "truth of Christ" cannot save. *Notitia* plus *assensus* together do not constitute saving faith, and they have no power to save. One can understand and believe the Gospel and still go to Hell, according to Sproul. This is a complete rejection of what the Bible teaches about faith and salvation.

Trust and Obey

SPROUL: The crucial, most vital element of saving faith in the biblical sense, is that of personal trust.

ROBBINS: Sproul here introduces a third element of saving faith, "personal trust." This, he says, is the most important of the three. One would have thought that the "crucial, most vital element of saving faith" is the Gospel, the Good News, but Sproul says it is not. According to Scripture, it is the Gospel that saves us. The Gospel is "the power of God for salvation." James, whom Sproul grotesquely misrepresents, refers to "the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls." The Word is effective, powerful, and saving. But Sproul says that the "crucial, most vital element of saving faith...is personal trust." Earlier he used the words "believe" and "trust" interchangeably, as synonyms. Now, he says, personal trust is one element of saving faith different from and in addition to both understanding and assent.

SPROUL: The final term is *fiducia*, referring to a fiduciary commitment by which I put my life in the lap of Jesus.

ROBBINS: Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to put our life "in the lap of Jesus." No one, including, I suspect, Sproul himself, knows what this bizarre figure of speech means. The Scriptural command is to believe the Gospel, and the Gospel is Good News, that is, information, propositions, about Christ Jesus: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." "The words that I speak to you: They are Spirit and they are life." There is not a word in the Bible about the lap of Jesus.

SPROUL: I trust him and him alone for my salvation.

ROBBINS: To trust a person, as we saw earlier, is to believe what he says, and to believe what he says is to trust him. In other words, there is no such thing as "personal trust" that is different from or better than understanding and believing his words. The unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day had fabricated a doctrine of non-propositional "personal trust" (they anticipated the twentieth-century Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and many other theologians), and Jesus rebuked them for it: "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:45-47). Jesus makes it clear, by using the phrases in apposition and inter-

changeably, that “believing Moses” means “believing his writings,” and “believing me” means “believing my words.” The apostate Jews professed a “personal trust” in Moses, even though they did not believe his writings. They praised the prophets, decorated their tombs, and did not assent to their doctrines. The apostate Jews, like many contemporary theologians, tried to separate persons from propositions. They trusted Moses, but they did not believe his writings. They praised Moses and refused to assent to his propositions. For that refusal to assent to Moses’ words they were damned.

In the Biblical sense, and in ordinary language, to trust and to believe are not two different mental actions, and any Jewish or Latin theology that tries to make them so is not Biblical. In Sproul’s soteriology, it is not possible to “trust Christ and him alone for my salvation,” because the “most crucial, vital element of saving faith,” the element that makes it saving, is not Christ at all. Instead, some undefined and perhaps undefinable psychological state that is neither understanding nor assent, but is different from both, is crucial and vital. If this psychological state is the “most crucial,” then we must make sure we “trust,” and “trust enough” to be saved. We must focus, not on Christ, but on our own psychological state. Salvation is swallowed up in subjectivism.

SPROUL: That is the crucial element, and it includes the intellectual and the mental.

ROBBINS: Sproul’s confusion deepens. Is trust a third distinct element in faith or not? If it is a distinct element, it cannot include the other two. Further, are “the intellectual and the mental” different? If so, how? To this point, Sproul has distinguished three elements in saving faith: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. He says that demons and men can both understand and assent to the Gospel and still go to Hell. Now he says that *fiducia* “includes” the “intellectual and the mental.” If that is the case, then *fiducia* seems to be synonymous with *faith*, the term Sproul is supposed to be defining. If that is the case, Sproul has not offered a definition of trust or saving faith, but a tautology. If *fiducia* includes all three elements, *fiducia* is *fides*, and we still don’t know what faith is.

What Is the Heart?

SPROUL: But it [personal trust] goes beyond it [“the intellectual and the mental”] to the heart and to the will so that the whole person is caught up in this experience we call faith.

ROBBINS: First, in the Bible there is no difference between the heart and the head (or mind). When God created man, he made only two things: his body and his mind (see *Genesis* 2). God breathed into the body of dirt, and man became a living soul. It is man’s mind that is the image, the breath, of God. Mind, soul, heart, spirit are not different parts of man; they are synonyms. Further, the will is not a separate faculty; what confused theologians and

philosophers have done is surreptitiously to change an activity of the mind, willing, into an entity, the will. (They have done the same thing with remembering.) It is the “whole person,” that is, the mind, who wills and remembers. The Bible does not teach nineteenth-century faculty psychology; it teaches that man is a unitary creature. It is the heart, the man himself, that thinks, reasons, plans, wills, remembers, and suffers. Man is a unitary creature, not several distinct faculties. Look up the verses on heart and head. Gordon Clark did so, and he published the results in his book *Religion, Reason and Revelation* 45 years ago. Theologians, pastors, and seminary professors have been ignoring his analysis of hundreds of verses ever since. Sproul’s account of saving faith is wrong because he does not derive it from the Bible nor base it on the Biblical view of man.

Second, saving faith is not an “experience” that Christians get “caught up in.” Scripture knows nothing of Sproul’s experientialism. Saving faith, according to Scripture, is understanding and assenting to the Gospel. It is understanding propositions – such as “Jesus died on the cross for the sins of his people” – and agreeing that those propositions are true. No natural man can believe the Gospel. Some natural men cannot even understand it. God alone gives men the gift of belief, and such belief is entirely an act of the mind. The mind, that is the whole person, understands, and the mind, the whole person, agrees. That is why Scripture refers to salvation as “coming to the knowledge of the truth” and emphasizes the importance of thinking, preaching, and understanding the Word. There is no command in Scripture to get “caught up in” any experience in order to be saved. There are many commands in Scripture to understand and believe the Word of God. Saving faith, contrary to what many theologians say, is simple child-like faith. It is simply understanding the Good News and accepting it as true.

“Faith” in the Reformed Confessions

Sproul (like all Elders in the PCA and OPC) has solemnly sworn that he believes the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. But the *Westminster Confession* does not define saving faith as Sproul defines it. This Latin trichotomy is neither confessional nor Biblical. Echoing Scripture, the *Westminster Confession* calls faith “the act of believing.”

In his book *What Is Saving Faith?* Dr. Gordon Clark meticulously examined scores of verses in which the Holy Spirit uses the word *pistis* and its cognates. No other modern Reformed theologian seems to have done this, and many theologians and pastors continue to parrot what they have heard in seminary about faith, rather than studying the Bible. In his answer to the question, What Is Faith? Dr. Sproul fails to quote a single verse of Scripture, and when he refers to James, he completely misrepresents him. According to Scripture, faith and belief are the same (*pistis*), and saving faith is assent to the truth of the Gospel – nothing more and nothing less.

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Faith in Hebrews 11

W. Gary Crampton

Two Definitions of “Faith”

The word “faith” (*pistis*), as it is found in the New Testament, has both a subjective and an objective usage. The subjective usage is concerned with the act of believing, as found in passages such as *Romans* 1:16-17 and 10:17. There we have that which the Westminster Standards refer to as “saving faith.”¹ According to the *Shorter Catechism* (Q. 86), “[saving] faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the Gospel.”

The objective usage, on the other hand, has to do with that which is believed. In this latter sense, it is frequently referred to in the New Testament as *the faith*. According to Gordon Clark, in the objective sense, *the faith* “is the doctrinal content of Christianity.”² For example, in *Jude* 3 we read that we are “to contend earnestly for *the faith* which was once for all delivered to the saints.” In *1 Timothy* 6:12 Paul exhorts Timothy to “fight the good fight of *the faith*.” Earlier in the same epistle Paul had written that some have turned away “concerning *the faith* [and] suffered shipwreck” (1:19). This objective usage is brought home powerfully in *Galatians* 3:23 & 25, where Jesus himself, or his institution of the New Testament age, is called *the faith*. In each of these verses, the faith referred to is not the subjective act of believing the truth of God’s Word; it is the Word itself. Functioning as a metonymy, it is “the doctrinal content of Christianity,” or that which is to be believed. In the objective sense, the faith is the propositions revealed by God in Scripture.

Faith and Belief are the Same

In the New Testament, there is only one word for belief or faith, *pistis*, and its verb form is *pistein*, believe. There is

no separate word for faith, and those who wish to say that faith is something different from and superior to belief have no support from Scripture. Gordon Clark once remarked that the Bible’s English translators could have avoided a lot of confusion if they had not used the Latin-based word “faith” and had instead simply used “believe” and “belief” throughout the English Bible, as the writers of the New Testament use *pistis* and *pistein* throughout the Greek Bible.³

How Subjective and Objective Faith are Related

We must distinguish between the subjective faith of the believer (that is, his mental act of believing) and the objective truth of God’s Word (“the faith”). But we must never separate one’s subjective saving faith from “the (objective) faith” which is to be believed. The reason is that saving faith always believes “the doctrinal content of Christianity.” It is that doctrinal content, the objects believed, that makes saving faith saving. Or, in the words of *Hebrews* 4:2, it is essential that the truth of Christianity be “mixed with faith” in those who hear it in order for them to be saved. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (14:2) says it this way:

By this [saving] faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

1. See chapter 14 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, “Of Saving Faith.”

2. Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 190.

3. See Gordon Clark’s *What Is Saving Faith?* The Trinity Foundation, 2004.

Nowhere in Scripture is this taught more clearly than in *Hebrews* 11, a chapter on the Old Testament “heroes” of the faith. The opening words of the chapter confirm this: “Now faith is the substance [*hupostasis*] of things hoped for; the evidence [*elenchos*] of things not seen.” As John Owen averred, this statement cannot be made *merely* with regard to our subjective believing. That is, our subjective believing is not alone “the essence of things hoped for,” though saving faith is evidence of things not seen.⁴

The Word of God (see *Hebrews* 1:3) is the certain truth of the triune God (*John* 17:17; *Luke* 1:1-4; *Proverbs* 22:17-21); the Word is God the Son himself (*John* 1; *Psalms* 31:5; *John* 14:6; *1 John* 5:6). As the Presbyterian J. Oliver Buswell stated: “The system of truth to which we adhere, the truth which centers in our Lord Jesus Christ, is the substance and evidence for all the gracious promises of God in reference to unseen things to be realized eschatologically in the future life.”⁵ The Lutheran theologian R. C. H. Lenski wrote: “[Subjective] Faith is never its own basis.... faith rests on something outside of itself and not on itself.... Evidence, proof, etc., is the objective contents of the Word [of God], the ground, basis, productive power of faith.”⁶ *Habakkuk* 2:2-4 is a powerful example of this teaching, for there we read that the doctrine of “salvation by faith alone” (verse 4) is founded upon the certainty and truthfulness of the Word of God (verses 2-3).

Therefore, Owen concluded, the only way that *Hebrews* 11:1 can apply to the act of subjective faith is if that “faith mixes and incorporates itself with the Word of promise.”⁷ That is, to speak more clearly, only when faith believes the propositions of Scripture is it saving faith, “the essence of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.” Jonathan Edwards agreed. According to Edwards, the saints of *Hebrews* 11 placed their faith, that is, their “hope” (hope, like trust, is belief of a proposition or propositions in the future tense) in God’s promises in Christ: “Hope is our acquiescing and relying on God’s truth and sufficiency as to what concerns our own future happiness.”⁸ And again: “Seeking God in Scripture commonly implies trusting in God or the exercise of true faith.”⁹ In commenting on *Hebrews* 11:1-2, Matthew Henry wrote: Saving faith “is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ.... Faith is the firm assent of the soul to the divine revelation and every part of it, and sets to its seal that God is true. It is a full

approbation of all that God has revealed as holy, just, and good.”¹⁰

This is precisely what the author of *Hebrews* teaches in 11:13: It was “the promises” which they “embraced” (that is, believed) that rendered these Old Testament saints pleasing to God. And it is much in line with what the author said earlier in 10:23: “Let us hold fast the confession of the hope [God’s promised blessings in Christ] without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

Reading Hebrews with Understanding

This being the case, when we read *Hebrews* 11 we might insert the definition “his (or their) believing God’s Word” for the word “faith” in order to clarify things. Verse 2 reads: “For by it [their believing God’s Word] the elders obtained a good testimony.” It was their subjective faith in the truth of “the faith,” that gave the Old Testament saints a “good testimony” before God. That is, it was “the simple elementary truths of the Gospel,” as taught in the Scriptures, “which constituted the ground of [their] future hope.”¹¹ These saints “embraced the promises.”

Verse 3 reads: “By faith [our believing God’s Word] we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.” It is the Scripture itself, that is, “the doctrinal content of Christianity,” which tells us, as the *Shorter Catechism* (Q. 9) says, that “the work of creation is God’s making all things of nothing, by the Word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.” And by faith, the saints acquiesce to God’s Word on the subject; they believe these things to be so, simply because God said it in his Word.

In verse 4 it is “by faith [his believing God’s Word] [that] Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous.” Abel’s more excellent sacrifice was based on what he believed about God and sacrifices, as taught by God. Hence, he offered a bloody sacrifice, anticipating the cross work of Christ, as opposed to the unbloody offering of Cain (*Genesis* 4:3-5). As stated by Matthew Henry: “Abel brought a sacrifice of atonement, the blood whereof was shed in order to remission, thereby owning himself a sinner, placating God’s wrath, and imploring his favor in a Mediator.”¹² Again, Abel believed in the God who accepts such sacrifices. But he could know about this God and his good pleasure in accepting such sacrifices only from *the faith*, that is, the Word of God. In this way Abel embraced the promises. Notice, again, that “embracing” means nothing different from or more than believing. It is a figure of speech, the literal meaning of which is “to believe.”

Verse 5 says that it was by his belief in the promises of God that Enoch “was translated so that he did not see

4. John Owen, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, VII:11.

5. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2:185.

6. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, 375-376.

7. Owen, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, VII:9.

8. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II:809-810; see also John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, I:330-331, 378ff.

9. Cited in Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, I:387.

10. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, VI:938.

11. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology*, 2:185.

12. Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, I:37-38.

death." He had placed his faith in the Gospel truth and so lived by it that "he pleased God" (see *Amos* 3:3: "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"). Verse 6 teaches us that "without faith [believing, putting our trust, in God's Word] it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that he is [God], and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." How is a sinner able to know in order to believe (for one cannot believe what one does not know) "that he is [God], and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him?" One can know only by the teachings of Scripture, "the doctrinal content of Christianity," "the faith."

In verses 7 through 11 we learn that Noah's faith was based on the "divine warning" of God's Word (verse 7); Abraham's faith was founded on God's "call" for him "to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance" (verse 8), and the promise God had made regarding "the land of promise" (verse 9); and Sarah's faith focused on the promise God had made to her regarding the child which would be born to her (verse 11). All of these responses of faith are responses to God's Word. They are all consent to, agreement with, assent to, the propositions that God had revealed to these saints. They were not feelings, trances, intuitions, or anything other than assent to propositions revealed by God.

The final two verses of *Hebrews* 11 elaborate the opening words of the chapter: "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith [through believing the Word of God], did not receive the promise [the things hoped for and not yet seen], God having provided something better for us [all of the elect], that they should not be made perfect apart from us." That is to say, even though the Old Testament saints looked forward to their eschatological hope, they did not witness the coming of Christ and their everlasting inheritance. Yet by what they believed, they embraced the promises. We too, living in the New Testament era, and looking back on the finished work of Christ, still await the second coming and our everlasting inheritance. And it is by believing the teaching of God's Word that we are assured that it will occur.

It is the Word of God alone, "the faith," which gives substance to the subjective faith of the elect sinner. Subjective faith, without being "mixed" with the objective "doctrinal content of Christianity" (*Hebrews* 4:2), is not saving faith. It is faith, that is believing, but it is not saving faith, for it is not a believing of the Word of God. Saving faith is that which embraces the promises of God. It is that faith which was exercised by all the Old Testament saints, who, like their New Testament counterparts, were "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (*Hebrews* 12:2). And in him alone all of God's elect are "made perfect."

Open Letter to Joe Morecraft

Pastor Joseph Morecraft

Executive Editor

The Counsel of Chalcedon

Dear Pastor Morecraft,

In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes of his amazement that this fledgling church would so quickly desert "him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ." Paul pronounces the most severe judgment on those distorting the Gospel by damning them, and he chastises the Galatians for being "men pleasers" instead of Christ pleasers. Paul even gets personal and excoriates Barnabas for joining Peter in his "hypocrisy" and rebukes Peter publicly and to his face "because he stood condemned." Paul calls the Galatians "foolish" and asks who had "bewitched" them into doubting the Gospel of justification by faith alone and embracing a clever substitute. Peter's hypocrisy, which contributed to leading men astray, Barnabas in particular, stemmed from his fear of men, who, we are told, were of "high reputation." While Paul would not "yield subjection" to these men "for even an hour," Peter expressed his submission to these "false brothers" by separating himself physically from Gentile believers, thereby sanctioning the false doctrines of the Judaizers without ever having to say a word. Peter's actions were enough to illustrate his shameful accommodation of those who "had sneaked in... in order to bring us into bondage." But I am sure you know all these things.

Paul's letter to the Galatians provides the single best parallel in all of Scripture to the current defection from the Biblical doctrine of justification by belief alone.

Paul's letter to the Galatians provides the single best parallel in all of Scripture to the current defection from the Biblical doctrine of justification by belief alone that is corrupting Reformed churches. The error Paul was fighting was the subtle yet deadly idea that belief of the Gospel alone is not the sole instrument of justification. The teaching of the Judaizers was that justification results from a combination of belief plus our faithful obedience to the demands of the covenant – in the Galatians' case, circumcision. Paul damns this Jewish notion that mere belief of the Gospel alone – the Biblical idea that Douglas

Wilson derides as “raw faith” – is not sufficient to render a sinner righteous before God, along with those who teach it.

So, I ask you, what excuse could the Elders of the Galatian Church have offered if, following Paul’s letter, they had continued to open their homes and pulpits to the Judaizers? What excuse could Peter and Barnabas have offered if they had continued to eat with the Judaizers? What excuse could the Session of the Galatian Church have given for holding a Pastors Conference on the role of our covenant obedience in obtaining salvation? Would Paul have overlooked an article or two in *The Counsel of Galatia* magazine defending the efficacy and importance of circumcision for all believers, or even something as seemingly innocuous as an essay on the importance of Sabbath-keeping by devotees of “Second Temple Judaism” who also acknowledged Christ as Lord?

What excuse could the Elders of the Galatian Church have offered if, following Paul’s letter, they had continued to open their homes and pulpits to the Judaizers?

If the Galatian Session could have offered no good excuse, what should we make of the recent issue of *The Counsel of Chalcedon* featuring the work of one of Neolegalism’s most prominent and recognized defenders, Dr. Richard Gaffin, Jr., of Westminster Seminary? Your magazine even gave his essay the recognition and prominence of a cover story! Is it possible that you have forgotten Gaffin’s decades-long defense of the false gospel of Norman Shepherd, documented in Palmer Robertson’s book *The Current Justification Controversy* and elsewhere? Have you forgotten Gaffin’s glowing endorsement of Shepherd’s counterfeit gospel on the cover of Shepherd’s book, *The Call of Grace*: “This lucid and highly readable study provides valuable instruction on what it means to live in covenant with God. God’s covenant is the only way of life that fully honors both the absolute, all-embracing sovereignty of his saving grace and the full, uninhibited activity of his people. *The Call of Grace* should benefit anyone concerned about biblical growth in Christian life and witness.”

Have you forgotten Gaffin’s official, public defense of one of Shepherd’s defenders and friends, OPC Ruling Elder John Kinnaird, who was tried for and convicted of heresy in the OPC, only to have his conviction overturned by the OPC General Assembly, thanks to Gaffin’s influence, prestige, and help? You might recall that Kinnaird is the man who taught, among other errors, that “It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous at the day of Judgment.” Yet, Gaffin argued at his trial that Kinnaird’s conflation of faith and works in justification is “well within the system of doctrine taught in Scripture.”

Has Gaffin publicly recanted his errors? Has he repented of his own “new perspective” on Paul and the false gospel

of salvation by Existential Union with Christ – not belief of the Gospel – that he has taught for four decades in his book *Resurrection and Redemption*? For Gaffin, water baptism, not belief alone, brings sinners into union with Christ.

When I spoke to Wayne Rogers, Editor of *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, about this matter, he explained that, in his view, Gaffin “has stated a very helpful and important perspective on keeping the Sabbath which...is desperately needed today among Christians who are by and large Sabbath breakers.” Is keeping the Sabbath so important that you must commend an author to your readers who perverts the Gospel? No doubt the Judaizers believed in God and Christ as Messiah, and they may have even had some interesting things to say about other doctrines. But does Paul for one moment consider such possibilities? Or does he immediately damn these men who believed in God and the Sabbath for teaching a false gospel? What “helpful and important perspective” can Gaffin offer to your readers, since any assertion he might make about the Sabbath must be governed by his rejection of the Biblical and Reformed order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) in favor of his doctrine of Existential Union with Christ? Even more incredible was Editor Rogers’ claim that *The Counsel of Chalcedon* “broke the story” on the current justification controversy, and yet Mr. Rogers was unfamiliar with Gaffin’s central role in that controversy. How can that be? Can anyone imagine the editor of *The Washington Post*, which broke the Watergate story, being unfamiliar with G. Gordon Liddy, Chuck Colson, or Richard Nixon?

I hope and pray that you will inform your readers of Dr. Gaffin’s and Westminster Seminary’s central role in defending and furthering the false gospel that is now sweeping through Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

Whatever we conclude about Mr. Rogers’ performance as Editor of *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, you, Pastor Morecraft, must have known that Dr. Gaffin is and has been on the wrong side of the debate over justification for more than thirty years. Is it possible that you are so impressed by Dr. Gaffin’s “high reputation” that you have joined his band of admirers who look for any excuse to downplay and ignore his responsibility for teaching and defending a counterfeit gospel for almost all his adult life?

I hope and pray that you will inform your readers of Dr. Gaffin’s and Westminster Seminary’s central role in defending and furthering the false gospel that is now sweeping through Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

Sean Gerety
Virginia Beach, Virginia

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

Gordon H. Clark

Editor's Note:

The rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in so-called Reformed churches takes many forms.

Some deny that Christ earned anything for his people, because, they say, contradicting Scripture, God never deals with his creatures in terms of merit or justice, but only in terms of grace, which is unearned.

Some deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, declaring imputation to be a legal fiction. One renowned New Perspective author, N. T. Wright, Bishop of Durham in the Anglican Church, is so opposed to the idea of imputed righteousness that he compares the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to passing gas.

Some say faith alone is not enough; that one must also work (obey, remain faithful) in order to be justified, or to stay justified. These claim James as their authority, twisting his words to contradict Paul and to fit their works-religion.

Some say faith is enough, but the only faith that justifies is an obedient faith, a faith-with-works, for faith-apart-from-works cannot justify, they say, contradicting Scripture.

Some deny that Christian faith is knowledge, asserting that it is a personal encounter, or a personal relationship, or membership in a covenant community. They say that those who think we are saved by knowledge, such as the Apostle Peter, are Gnostics.

*One of these miscreants has published a book in which he maintains that "Christianity is Gnostic." To quote from an advertisement for (and endorsement of) his book in Douglas Wilson's magazine *Credenda/Agenda*, "The Bible never mentions Christianity. It does not preach Christianity, nor does it encourage us to preach Christianity. Paul did not preach Christianity, nor did any of the other apostles.... The Bible speaks of Christians and of the Church, but*

Christianity is Gnostic.... we must stand against Christianity." The author of this book, Peter Leithart, is "Senior Fellow of Theology and Literature" at New Saint Andrews College in Moscow, Idaho. His boss is Douglas Wilson, author of many cunningly devised fables. Leithart is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church of America.

*Those attacking Christianity and the Gospel of Jesus Christ fail to consult Scripture to see what faith is and does. But one theologian has: Gordon H. Clark. More than 30 years ago Clark examined hundreds of passages of Scripture about faith and published his findings in two seminal books, *Faith and Saving Faith* and *The Johannine Logos*. More than three decades later the pseudo-scholars and theologians who now pass as Christian thinkers remain ignorant of Clark's work. Clark's exegesis exposes the theology they have fabricated in their books and schools as Romantic fables.*

*In this and the next issue of *The Trinity Review* we are publishing excerpts from our new edition of *The Johannine Logos* titled *What Is Saving Faith?* The new edition combines the complete texts of two of Dr. Clark's seminal works, *Faith and Saving Faith* and *The Johannine Logos*, in one volume. Please read these excerpts (and the whole book) carefully, for no other commentator has bothered either to examine or to exegete what Scripture says about the nature and object of faith.*

Persons and Propositions

The obvious importance of the word *logos* in chapter 1 demands an examination of its other instances in the

remainder of the *Gospel*.¹ At the same time there is another term to be compared with it. *Rheema* (singular, though it does not occur in the singular in *John*) and *rheemata* (plural) mean *word* and *words*, ordinarily spoken words. One therefore asks, Are these two terms, *logos* and *rheema*, identical in meaning, contrasted in meaning, or in any way related?

To begin with the etymology previously mentioned, *rheema* has the same root as the Latin *verbum* and the English *word*; *eiroo*, to say, speak, or tell. It occurs sixty times in the New Testament. *Logos* has the root *legoo*: to say, speak, or tell. It occurs over twelve hundred times. Though the two roots are almost identical in meaning, some modern theologians wish to contrast *rheemata* and *logos*. Investigation of this matter best begins with a list of the instances of each word in *John*. The *logos* list comes first.²

One category of the instances of the term *logos* in *John*, a noticeable proportion of the total, defines it by giving examples. These make it indubitable that *logos* means a sentence, a proposition, a doctrine, an object of intellectual apprehension. They make it indubitable by quoting the proposition to which they refer. The first such instance is *John* 2:22. After cleansing the temple at the beginning of his ministry, and being confronted by the Jewish authorities, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I shall raise it up." Naturally the Jews were nonplussed. But "when he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered it, that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word [*logos*] that Jesus had said." The word (*logos*) was, of course, the sentence, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I shall raise it up." This sentence is the "it" that the disciples remembered; it is the "this" that Jesus had said. Accordingly the *logos* is this sentence.

The next such case is *John* 4:37: "For in this the saying [*logos*] is true, the one sows and another reaps." The adage or saying is the *logos*. It is stated to be true; and the only thing that can be true is a proposition or declarative sentence. Two verses below, there is the next *logos*: "Many of the Samaritans from that city believed on him through the word of the woman who said that he told me everything I have ever done." The *logos* is precisely the sentence, "He told me everything I have ever done." Another two verses down,

¹ Unfortunately, no commentator on *John's Gospel* before Clark seems to have bothered to conduct this examination. They treat the concept of *logos* in chapter 1 as though it were unrelated to the rest of *John's Gospel*, rather than recognizing it as the best introduction to the *Gospel*, in the judgment of both the Apostle John and the Holy Spirit. – Editor.

² Please see the book for the *rheemata* list. – Editor.

"Many more believed because of his preaching." Here in *John* 4:41 *preaching* or *argu-ment* is a good translation for *logos*. The actual words are not quoted, but the verse refers to two days of discussion and preaching that Jesus engaged in with the Samaritans. Still in the same chapter, but no longer concerning the Samaritans, *John* 4:50 tells us that the nobleman, who came to Jesus and requested him to heal his son, "believed the word Jesus said to him." The *logos* was, "Your son lives."

Logos means a sentence, a proposition, a doctrine, an object of intellectual apprehension.

In the sixth chapter Jesus preaches about the bread from Heaven. He also refers to eating his flesh. Then in verse 60, "Many of his disciples, when they had heard, said, This doctrine [*logos*] is difficult; who can accept it?" *Lo-gos*, here, although in the singular, must not be translated by "a word." Nor even by "a sentence." The reference is to the whole sermon. And if anyone dislikes the translation, "This doctrine is difficult," he may translate it, "This sermon is difficult." But the meaning is the same, for it was the intellectual content that caused the displeasure of the audience.³

John 7:36, 40 are similar. In the first of these the *logos* is the assertion, "You will search for me, but you shall not find me." In the second, the plural occurs: "Some of the crowd, when they had heard these words, said, 'This man is indeed the prophet.'"

Restricting this section to instances where a definite sentence or sentences define the *logos*, we come next to *John* 10:19. Here Jesus had just said that he lays down his life voluntarily; no one can take it from him. "Then the Jews, because of these words [*logoi*], were again divided." The words referred to are roughly all of the first eighteen verses.

In several cases the *logos* is a verse in the Old Testament. *John* 12:38 quotes *Isaiah* 53:1. *John* 15:25 quotes a part of *Psalms* 35:19 and *Psalms* 69:4. *John* 18:9 refers to *John* 6:39 and 17:12. In this case the prophecy fulfilled was one that Jesus himself had made. The same essentially is true of *John* 18:32, where the words referred to are in *John* 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32-34. They are not actually quoted, but the *logos* is these assertions. The word is singular, and hence can be translated *thought*, *idea*, *doctrine*, or best, *the words*

³ And it is the intellectual content of the *Gospel* that causes so much displeasure among churchmen today.

– Editor.

in the plural.

Finally, there is a prophecy, a misunderstood prophecy, that spread among the disciples. Jesus had said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" This was the *logos*, the *rumor*, the *idea*, the *thought*. A further instance where *logos* refers to a definite sentence is *John* 15:20, "Remember the proverb [*logos*] I told you: The servant is not greater than his lord."

Two other instances where the *logos* is identified by an explicitly quoted sentence, though in these cases it is Pilate and the Pharisees who are involved, rather than Jesus, are *John* 19:6 and 13. In the first of these verses the *logos* that frightened Pilate was "He made himself the son of God." The second of these verses refers to several sentences. The *King James Version* is incorrect in using the singular. *Logos* here occurs in the plural: "When Pilate heard these words..." The words were the declaration by Jesus and the shoutings of the Jews.

Here then is a long list of cases where the meaning of the term *logos* is determined by quoting it. It is always an intelligible proposition. At this point, and before continuing with the list of instances of *logos*, the reader might want to know what the connection is between the sentences or propositions just given and the *Logos* of verse 1 who created the universe and enlightens every man who comes into the world. How did the argument get from Christ to sentences? The connection is this: The *Logos* of verse 1 is the Wisdom of God. To him his worshipers erected the architectural triumph Hagia Sophia, the church in Constantinople dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God. To purloin Heraclitus' phrase, this is the Wisdom that steers the universe. But this steering, the plan on which the universe is constructed, the providential governing of all creatures and all their actions, is based on wise counsel. God does not work haphazardly. He acts rationally. Some of this wisdom is expressed in the propositions of the previous list. They are the mind of Christ: They are the very mind of Christ. In them we grasp the holy Wisdom of God. Accordingly, there is no great gap between the propositions alluded to and Christ himself. The Platonic Ideas, as interpreted by Philo, and by him called *Logos*, are the mind of God. Some of these Ideas are given to us in the words of *John*, or in the words of Christ recorded by John. This is how Christ communicates himself to us. Is it completely ridiculous to suggest that this is why John uses the term *logos* for these two superficially different purposes? But now to continue the list of instances.

The meaning of the term *logos* is determined by quoting it. It is

always an intelligible proposition.

Another category can be constructed of those instances where no definite sentence is quoted, but where the reference is clearly to previously spoken sentences. *John* 5:24 reports that Jesus said, "He who hears my word [*logos*] and believes him who sent me has eternal life." The phrase "He who hears my word," can equally well be translated, "He who hears my doctrine"; and it can be interpreted as, "He who accepts my doctrine or theology." Verse 38 of the same chapter says, "You do not have his word [*logos*] remaining in you because you do not believe the one he sent." This verse also refers generally to the doctrine or theology that Jesus had been preaching. *John* 8:31 and 37 are entirely similar. So is *John* 8:43, with the additional parallel between *logos* and *lalia*. This latter word means speech or talk. The translation can be, "Why do you not understand my talk? Because you cannot hear [accept or understand] my word." Verses 51 and 52 also use *logos* to refer generally to Jesus' preaching: "If anyone keeps my doctrine, he shall not see death ever." Three verses below Jesus contrasts himself with the Pharisees on the ground that he, Jesus, keeps God's *logos*.

Besides these verses in which the term *logos* refers generally to the preaching of Jesus, *John* 10:35 uses *logos* to designate the prophecies of the Old Testament. The prophets were men to whom the *Logos* of God came, and this *logos* as written in the Scripture cannot be broken. This is the first verse so far quoted that definitely links the *logos* to the *written* words of the Old Testament. The idea that the *logos* is something that can be written down on papyrus, parchment, or vellum is important, even if only because it is so distasteful to the dialectical theologians.

The paragraph before this last one compared *logos* with words, not as written, nor with words merely as such, but with spoken words. *John* 12:48 identifies the *logos* with *rheemata* or words as such. The passage reads, "He who ignores me [or, sets me aside] and does not accept my words [*rheemata*], has a judge: The *logos* that I have spoken, that *logos* will judge him in the last day." Note that the *logos* is something spoken and naturally therefore consists of words.

If the listing of these verses seems tedious, it is at least overwhelming and leaves no defense for those who deprecate words and doctrine. *John* 14:23-24 say, "If anyone love me, he will keep my *logos*.... He who does not love me, does not keep my *logous* [plural]; and the *logos* which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me." The combination of singular and plural, of hearing and therefore of saying, enforces the point of the argument.

If the listing of these verses seems tedious, it is at least overwhelming and leaves no defense for those who deprecate words and doctrine.

Since some fundamentalists also have accepted the anti-intellectualism of the liberals, we must patiently plod through the list. *John* 15:3 is, “You are already clean because of the theology I have spoken to you.” *John* 17:6 and 14 hardly need to be quoted. Verse 17 says that God’s word is truth. And in verse 20 of the same chapter the *logos* referred to is the future preaching of the disciples.

To make this a complete list of all the occurrences of the term *logos* in the *Gospel of John*, we have only to add *John* 1:1 and 14. In the beginning was the *Logos*, the logic, the doctrine, the mind, the wisdom of God. The wisdom of God is God. This *Logos* became flesh and we saw the glory of his grace and truth.

Contemporary theology frequently distinguishes between the *Logos* and the *rheemata*: the Word and the words. The Word is in some sense divine. If it is contained in or somehow mediated by the Bible, the Bible is “authoritative,” though not infallible. Just how false statements can be “authoritative” the liberals do not explain. Reception of the Word for them is a sort of mystic experience without intellectual content. The words, on the other hand, are human, fallible, and mythological. The supernatural truth of God is so different from human truth that they do not coincide at a single point and not even omnipotence has the power to express it in human language; therefore the words, the concepts, are mere pointers to an unknowable object.

Faith Is Belief of Propositions

In view of the clear and repeated assertions of the *Gospel* it is strange that anyone who considers himself conservative or even orthodox should minimize faith or belief and try to substitute for it some emotional or mystic experience. Two possible explanations may be suggested. The first is that these people are so impressed by the spectacular conversion of the Apostle Paul that they think all conversions should conform to this type. Such a view cannot be rationally justified. In the first place the persecutor on his way to Damascus was not merely converted: Christ appeared unto him (making him a witness of the Resurrection) “to appoint you a minister and a witness both of the things wherein you have seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send you, to open their eyes...” (*Acts* 26:15-18). Such an appointment to apostleship should not be made

the required type for every conversion. Indeed, it is not the type even for every apostle. There were eleven others. Who appeals to their conversion experiences? Their conversion experiences are not recorded; and the various other conversions that are recorded differ from Paul’s and from each other. It is therefore wrong to elevate anyone’s experience to the level of a norm for everyone.

They conclude from the meagerness of their thinking that thinking and believing are inadequate.

The second possible explanation of the strange disparagement of faith or belief is the Romantic notion that sensory titillation is “experience.” Hence people who do not suffer ecstasies of joy or depths of despair are said to be devoid of Christian experience. But such a view has more in common with the pagan Goethe than with the Apostle John. It is likely that Romanticism thrives on inborn tendencies plus an inability to think clearly, especially to think clearly about one’s own (I shall not say experience) mental life. These people do indeed have beliefs. Many of them believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that Christ’s death was a substitutionary sacrifice. But because they have studied so little, because their theology is limited to a few fundamentals, and because they assume the detailed and onerous duties of pastors and evangelists where their limited theology is inadequate, they conclude from the meagerness of their thinking that thinking and believing are inadequate. Combined with this is their failure to notice the effect of their few beliefs on their own conduct.

As a man thinks, so is he. Out of the heart – and as we shall see some pages farther on, *heart* means mind or intellect – are the issues of life. If a man says he has faith, but does not have works, we tend to conclude that he has no faith. Conduct, particularly habitual conduct, is the best criterion fallible men have for judging hypocrisy. What a man believes, really believes, even if he says the contrary, will show in his living. Therefore, these popular evangelists show by their conduct that they believe in some things. Their intellectual capital controls their actions so far as their capital reaches. But because they are undercapitalized, and because they have too little intellectual endowment to recognize how intellectual beliefs control them, they minimize theology and take refuge in Romanticism.

In these introductory remarks in this chapter the meaning of the Scriptural term *heart* has been anticipated. Faith and belief have been emphasized. Even apart from these introductory inducements the nature of saving faith is an

important division of theology. Therefore one should pay strict attention to what John's *Gospel* says on the subject.

Although John never uses the noun *faith* (*pistis*) in his *Gospel*, and only once in his epistles, he scatters its verb (*pisteuoo*) about in abundance – just about one hundred times. The main uses can be divided into two categories, depending on its object. The first object is a noun or pronoun governed by the preposition *in* (*eis* with the accusative or *en* with the dative). The second object is a clause. Sometimes also a noun occurs without a preposition, and there are instances when the object is unexpressed.

The usage with the noun-object seems to lend support to the liberal contention that Christians must believe in a person, not a doctrine. God, they say, never reveals any thing, information, or doctrine: He reveals himself. Of course, modern theologians care little for the words of Scripture, and why they should accept the use of *pisteuoo* with a noun while rejecting many other things in Scripture is what they cannot explain. Nevertheless, a conservative, an evangelical, one whose principle is *sola Scriptura*, must examine these words and this usage regardless of liberal oscillations.

From among the many instances of the noun-object the following are typical. *John* 1:12, 2:23, and 3:18 have the phrases “believed in his name” (*eis to onoma*). Comments on the usage will be postponed until the list is ended; but one may note how Hebraic and non-Hellenistic the reference to the name is. The phrase, “believed in him” is found in *John* 2:11; 3:15 (*en autooi*); 3:18, 4:39, 6:29 (*eis on*); 6:35 (*eis eme*); 6:40 on to 16:9 (*eis eme*). To “believe on the Son” occurs in *John* 3:36, 9:35, and 12:11 (on Jesus). There are also instances where the noun or pronoun is a simple dative without a preposition. The pronoun is *me* in *John* 4:21, 5:46, 8:45-46, and 10:37. The pronoun *him* is in *John* 5:38 and 8:31. These listings are not complete or exhaustive, but they are typical and will serve the present purpose.

The present purpose is to show that these noun or pronoun objects are linguistic forms that simplify the text by implying without expressing the propositions to be believed. One of the clearest is *John* 4:21: “Woman, believe me.” In this case the proposition to be believed follows explicitly: “Woman, believe me, that a time is coming when....” There is no antithesis between believing Jesus as a person and believing what he says. Similarly *John* 5:46 compares “believing Moses” (dative without a preposition) and “believing me.” In both cases the object of belief is not a person without words, but definitely the words of the person. The *me* of *John* 8:45-46 again refers to the truth I am saying. The “Do not believe me” of *John* 10:37 means, “Do not believe what I say.” The same explanation holds for 5:38 and 8:31. In both cases the reference is to an explicit *logos*.

There is no antithesis between believing Jesus as a person and believing what he says.

The instances with the preposition *eis* are not always so obvious; but obviously they do not contradict what has just been said. For example, “to those who believe on his name”(1:12); “many believed on his name” (2:23); and “he has not believed on the name of the only Son of God” (3:18); all these with their Old Testament background imply that what is believed or not believed is the claim Jesus makes. If 2:23 can be closely connected with 2:22 (it is clearly the same place, the temple; and the time cannot be much later), the background is *Psalms* 69:9 and the words of Jesus himself. His act of cleansing the temple caused many to believe these propositions.

The second category of the uses of the verb *believe* has the propositional object explicit in the text. Without counting the cases where the object is clearly a proposition, although not explicitly given, a full 25 percent of the instances of *believe* have the proposition written out in full.

The first verse, already cited (2:22), does not itself contain the propositions believed: They are in the preceding context. The disciples believed *Psalms* 69:9 and the words Jesus had addressed to the Jews.

The second verse (3:12) also finds the explicit proposition in the context. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “If I have spoken to you on earthly matters [such as the new birth and the Spirit’s effect on men] and you do not believe, how will you believe [my propositions] if I speak of heavenly matters [such as the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son and the intertrinitarian relationships]?” The second set of propositions is of course not given; the first set constitutes the previous conversation explicitly reported.

The third verse (4:21), also previously cited, itself contains the proposition. *John* 4:41, 50 both have the noun-object *words* or *word*; but the propositions are explicit in the context. Similar are the two instances in 5:47, *viz.*, Moses’ writings, not quoted, and Jesus’ words contained in the preceding verses.

John 6:69 says, “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” *John* 8:24 says, “You do not believe that I am [Jehovah, or, the one I claim to be].” *John* 9:18, “the Jews did not believe that he had been blind.” *John* 10:25-26, “I told you [that I am the Christ] and you do not believe [that proposition]; the works I do...testify of me [that I am the Messiah], but you do not believe [the propositions they assert].” *John* 11:26-27, “Everyone who is alive and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this [proposition]? Yes, Lord, she said, I have believed that you

are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.” In *John* 11:42 Jesus spoke out loud “so that the crowd would believe that you did send me.” But why tediously quote in addition 12:38, 47; 13:19; 14:10-11, 29; 16:27, 30; 17:8, 21; 19:35; and 20:31?

The conclusion is, not only that the verb *believe* (*pisteu-oo*) may have a clause or proposition for an object, but that this is the fundamental meaning of the verb *believe*. In literary usage one may say that one believes a person, but this means that one believes what the person says. The immediate and proper object of belief or faith is a truth (or falsehood), a meaning, the intellectual content of some words; and this intellectual content is in logic called a proposition.

It may possibly be the case that the *King James Version* has been a small factor contributing to anti-intellectualism. In German the Greek verb *pisteuoo* is translated *glauben*, and the noun is *der Glaube*, belief. Therefore, *Matthew* 9:22 in German is, “*Tochter, dein Glaube hat dir geholfen.*” And *Matthew* 6:30 is, “*O ihr Kleingläubigen.*” But in English the connection between the Greek verb *believe* and its Latin noun is obscured by translating the noun as *faith* instead of *belief*.

The Latin language has not been an unexceptionable advantage to theology. *Dikaioo* was translated *justus-facere*; and thus the New Testament word for *acquit* or *pronounce righteous* was taken to mean *make righteous*. The result was a theory of infused grace that obscured the method of salvation until the time of Luther and the Reformation. So too it would have been better if the *King James Version* had omitted the word *faith* and emphasized the root meaning of *belief*.

This Latin anti-intellectualism, permitted by the noun *fides*, undermines all good news and makes Gospel information useless.

Because *fides* or faith permits, though it does not necessitate, a non-intellectual interpretation, the liberals today want us to have “faith” in a god who is unknowable and silent because he is impotent to give us any information to believe. This Latin anti-intellectualism, permitted by the noun *fides*, undermines all good news and makes Gospel information useless. Although the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have repudiated twentieth-century anti-intellectualism, their Latin heritage adversely affected some of their views. Before this earlier material is discussed, however, we must turn once again to the text in order to see precisely what is the effect of believing certain propositions.

This part of the study pays no attention to the grammatical object of the verb. Reliance is now placed on the conclusion already drawn that noun and pronoun objects are linguistic simplifications of the intended propositional object. To believe a person means precisely to believe what he says.

The first case, *John* 1:12, asserts that those who believe in his name have the right, graciously given by God, to be the children of God. The phrase “in his name,” I take it, means his character as Messiah and Lord. Those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament have the authority to be God’s children.

The same idea occurs in *John* 3:15, 36. Everyone who believes in Jesus, believes that he is the Messiah, has eternal life. The converse is stated in verse 18. That the noun-object, or phrase *in his name*, bears this meaning is a little clearer in 5:24, where the person who hears Jesus’ discourse (*logos*) and believes the Father who sent him with the message, has eternal life and has (already) crossed over from death to life.

To be sure, a random intellectual belief of an unregenerate man will not save him. The difficulty lies, not in belief as such, but in the fact that an unregenerate man is incapable of believing the necessary propositions. As *John* 12:30-40 say, “They could not believe because...he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.” If God had opened their eyes and had exchanged their heart of stone for a heart of flesh, they would have believed the Gospel message and so would already have passed from death to life. It is regeneration to eternal life that causes the intellectual belief. Thus acceptance of the propositions is a mark of having been regenerated and of having eternal life.

Again, *John* 6:40,47, “Everyone who contemplates the Son and believes on him has life eternal... Most assuredly I tell you, the man who believes has eternal life.” Similar phrases are found in 7:38, 8:31, and 11:25.

The Apostle John never mentions a mystic experience. He repeatedly says, if you believe, you are saved. Belief is the whole thing.

More explicit verses are the following. *John* 8:24 puts the matter negatively: “if you do not believe that I am [Jehovah, or, the Messiah] you will die in your sins.” The force of this negative is important. The proposition “All believers have eternal life” does not imply that all non-believers lack eternal life. Such an implication would be invalid, as may be seen in an example from daily affairs: The proposition “All voters are residents” does not imply “all non-voters are non-residents.” Therefore, the simple statement “All

believers are saved” allows the possibility that some unbelievers are saved as well. Belief may well guarantee eternal life; but without further information to the contrary, something else may also guarantee eternal life. This elementary lesson in logic points up the importance of the explicit negative statement: If you do not believe, you will die in your sins. All believers are saved, and all the saved are believers.

John 10:25-28 say, “You do not believe because you do not belong to my flock. My sheep listen to my voice.... I give them eternal life.” This states what is essentially both the negative and the positive proposition; and the negative is clearly implied in 16:9: “He will convict the world of sin...because they do not believe on me.” Then if one supposes that God granted the petitions of the high-priestly prayer, the positive statement is implied in 17:8-10, 16-17, 20-22, and 26.

Be sure to note that the Apostle John never mentions a mystic experience. He never says that one must get behind the text to something other than the words or doctrine. He repeatedly says, if you believe, you are saved. Belief is the whole thing. Indeed *John* 20:31 asserts this very thing in stating the purpose for writing the *Gospel*: that you may believe the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah and that believing this proposition (and not in some other way) you may have life by his name.

The next question is, what does it mean to believe? This question is usually asked in Latin rather than in Greek, and so phrased the question becomes, What is faith? Various theologians have offered psychological analyses of faith. The most common Protestant analysis is that *fides* is a combination of *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. If these last three Latin words can be explained, then one may compare *fides* and *pistis* or *pisteuoo* to see if they are synonymous. If these Latin terms cannot be clearly defined, then they do not constitute an analysis of faith....

What better conclusion can there be other than the express statements of the Bible? Permit just one outside of *John*. *Romans* 10:9-10 say, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your mind that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.” There is no mystical getting behind, under, or above the text; the only consent there is, is belief in the propositions. Believe these, with understanding, and you shall be saved. Anyone who says otherwise contradicts the repeated *rheemata* of Scripture.

Editor’s Note:

Many professed conservatives hold views similar to those described in the preceding paragraph. They say that man, because he is finite and sinful, cannot know divine truth, but at best only an analogy of it.

But Christ contradicts them. In John 17 he says, “I have

manifested your name to the men whom you have given me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me; and they have kept your word. Now they have known that all things which you have given me are from you, for I have given to them the words which you have given me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from you, and they have believed that you have sent me.... I have given them your word.... Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.”

Jesus Christ, the divine-human mediator between God and men, has given to us the exact words that he received from the Father. Christ communicated the divine words to men perfectly. Not one word has been lost in the translation from God to man.

Those who say that men can know only an analogy of divine truth and not divine truth itself reject the words of Christ and the Scriptures. Their views are fundamentally Antichristian. They have been influenced by men such as Herman Dooyeweerd, Herman Bavinck, and Cornelius Van Til. That branch of Reformed theology, which is already apostate in other nations, is now apostatizing in the U.S.

New Book Available

What Is Saving Faith? the new combined edition of *Faith and Saving Faith* and *The Johannine Logos*, is available from The Foundation for \$12.95. Here are the contents of the book:

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- 3. Generic and Secular Faith: H. H. Price
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- 5. The Biblical Data
- 6. John Calvin
- 7. Thomas Manton
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- 14. The Necessity of Faith
- 15. The Language
- 16. Person or Propositions?
- 17. The Object
- 18. A Conclusion

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- 1. Introduction
- 2. The Prologue
- 3. Logos and Rheemata
- 4. Truth
- 5. Saving Faith
- Index
- Scripture Index

New Book Available

The third edition of our collection of essays and lectures by John Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, is now available.

Machen, the great defender of Christianity against unbelieving churchmen in the early twentieth century, understood the anti-intellectual character of modernism, and opposed it with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. The institutions he founded, Westminster Seminary (1929) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1936), are now plagued by (and are plaguing others with) the unbelief and anti-intellectualism Machen opposed.

The price of *Education, Christianity, and the State* is \$10.95. Please add \$6 shipping for the first book and 50 cents for each additional book sent to the same address.

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

May 1995

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Through Faith Alone

A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).

"By faith alone" was the motto of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. It was radical then. It is just as radical now. It does not mean quietism, that is, "Let Christ live the victorious life in you." Nor does it mean the slothful indolence of spiritual do-nothingism. The Reformation was revolutionary. "Faith alone" was not the slogan of a delicate, cloistered piety. It was the battle-cry of a movement that turned the world upside down.

What does "faith alone" mean? "Faith alone" is the confession that all which is necessary for our acceptance with God has been done by God himself in Jesus Christ. It is an acknowledgment that Christ himself, in our name and our behalf, met all our obligations before the bar of eternal justice. This redemptive act was so complete and perfect that we cannot and need not add anything to it. "Faith alone" means that we cannot in the least contribute to our salvation, but that we must submit to what God has already done – fully and completely.

"Faith alone" does not mean that faith in itself will make us pleasing and acceptable to God. Only one is righteous. Only one is pleasing. "Faith alone" is a confession that God's saving work has been done completely outside of our own experience. There are some who will admit that God alone saves, but they imagine that this saving work is done inside of them. But faith is always directed to the outside-of-

me action of God in Jesus Christ. As John Bunyan wrote, "It is the righteousness which resides with a person in Heaven which justifies me, a sinner, on Earth." The book of *Revelation* shows that the ongoing cause of Christ depends on the action of Christ in the control room of the universe. He alone can move history on toward its great consummation. He alone must come to bring salvation to those who eagerly wait for him (*Hebrews 9:28*). "Faith alone" is therefore a confession that salvation has been won by mighty, conquering acts in which we had no share.

"Faith alone" is a confession that our righteousness is not in us, but in Jesus Christ at God's right hand. It means that we continually confess that we are sinners and have no righteousness to justify us save that which is outside of us in the person of our mediator. It means that life is not fulfilled here and now in this historical process. We know that all that we do is unworthy. Our best deeds, when tried before the undimmed splendor of God's law, are no better than filthy rags. Notice that Isaiah says that all our "*righteousnesses*" – not our "*unrighteousnesses*" – are filthy rags.

We are never righteous before God by virtue of being born again, or by being filled with the Spirit, or by lives of new obedience, or by acts of "surrender" or "trust." The truth of "faith alone" is a great No! against the aspirations of humanism, Romanism, Pentecostalism, neo-evangelicalism, Arminianism, Wesleyanism, and all other -isms

which promise fulfillment through internal and earthly experience. "Faith alone" says, "Our completeness is realized only in him" (*Colossians* 2:10). "Faith alone" means that we admit our destitution. We confess before justice that we have nothing to pay.

"Faith alone" means that we come to God relying on his love and mercy and forgiveness. "Faith alone" is a humbling of man in the dust, a dependence upon God to do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. Nothing empties a man like "faith alone." That is the reason why we are filled with the Spirit by faith (*Galatians* 3:14). Let us never speak of faith plus self-crucifixion, but of faith as self-crucifixion. "Faith alone" is the fountainhead of all true obedience. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me." In his *Catechism*, Martin Luther says:

A God is that to which we look for all good and where we resort for help in every time of need; to have a God is simply to trust and believe in one with our whole heart.... If your faith and confidence are right, then likewise your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your confidence is false, if it is wrong, then you have not the true God.... I say, whatever your heart... confides in, that is really your God.... If the heart is rightly disposed toward God and this commandment is kept, obedience to the remainder will follow of itself.

"Faith alone" frees a man for a life of good works. On the other hand, when a man fails to understand the Gospel and the law, he labors in vain and spends his strength for nothing. His effort is directed to do what God alone can do. Deep down, every soul is conscious of the need to be right with God. But justification is a great work that only God can do. When a man blindly spends his strength and effort to do God's work, he cannot be about his own work. When he works his fingers to the bone trying to save himself, he cannot love his neighbor, for he has no time for him. "The soul released from anxiety about itself is free to exercise concern about others. The heart is at leisure from itself to set

forward the salvation of those around" (W. H. Griffith-Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles* [London: Church Book Room Press, 1956], 194). This is a far cry from that false religion which removes all urgency for ethical action. "Faith alone" puts a man to work for God as nothing else can. It is not an opiate to put a Christian to sleep, but a stimulant to stir him to action. "Faith alone" is mighty. What makes it mighty is its mighty object. Like John the Baptist, it points away from itself to the Lamb of God, who alone takes away the sin of the world.

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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What Is Faith?

John W. Robbins

Long before neo-orthodox theologians thought of saying that faith is an encounter with a divine person rather than assent to a proposition, preachers who ought to have known better taught that faith is trust in a person, not belief in a creed. This writer, when a teenager, was told that some people would miss Heaven by twelve inches—the distance between the head and the heart—because they believed the Gospel with their heads but not with their hearts. Today it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is to find a minister—a conservative minister—who does not believe and teach that one must have a "personal relationship" with Christ in order to be saved. But what that "personal relationship" consists of is either not made explicit or, when made explicit, contradicts what the Bible teaches about saving faith. The result is that non-Christians are either needlessly confused or deliberately misled. Perhaps the world is not responding to our message because we have garbled the message. Neither we, nor they, know exactly what to do to have eternal life.

Statements such as these about the head and the heart and trusting a person, not believing a creed, are not only false, they have created the conditions for the emergence of all sorts of religious subjectivism, from modernism to the charismatic movement and beyond. No one will miss Heaven by twelve inches, for there is no distance between the head and the heart: "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." The head/heart contrast is a figment of

modern secular psychology, not a doctrine of divine revelation. St. Sigmund, not St. John, controls the pulpit in all too many churches.

Further, "trust in a person" is a meaningless phrase unless it means assenting to certain propositions about a person, propositions such as "I believe in God the Father Almighty...and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into Heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead." Trust in Christ, unless it means belief of these propositions, is totally without value. "Christ" *means* these propositions—and a lot more, to be sure, but at least these. No one who trusts in the Christs of Barth, Brunner, Renan, or Tillich will be saved.

As for having a "personal relationship" with Christ, if the phrase means something more than assenting to true propositions about Jesus, what is that something more? Feeling warm inside? Coffee has the same effect. Surely "personal relationship" does not mean what we mean when we say that we know someone personally: Perhaps we have shaken his hand, visited his home or he ours, or eaten with him. John had a "personal relationship" with Christ in that sense, as did all the disciples, including Judas Iscariot. But millions of Christians have not, and Jesus called them blessed: They have not seen

and yet have believed. The difference between Judas Iscariot and the other disciples is not that they had a "personal relationship" with Jesus and he did not, but that they believed—that is, assented to certain propositions about Jesus—while Judas did not believe those propositions. Belief of the truth, nothing more and nothing less, is what separates the saved from the damned. Those who maintain that there is something more than belief are, quite literally, beyond belief.

In the pages that follow [in *Faith and Saving Faith*], Dr. Clark defends the view that faith is assent to a proposition, and that saving faith is assent to propositions found in the Bible. Saving faith is neither an indescribable encounter with a divine person, nor heart knowledge as opposed to head knowledge. According to the author of *Hebrews*, those who come to God must believe at least two propositions: that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Mindless encounters and meaningless relationships are not saving faith. Truth is propositional, and one is saved and sanctified only through believing true statements. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

The anti-intellectual cast of virtually all modern thought, from the university chair to the barroom stool, controls the pulpits as well. It is this pious anti-intellectualism that emphasizes encounter rather than information, emotion instead of understanding, "personal relationship" rather than knowledge. But Christians, Paul wrote, have the mind of Christ. Our relationship to him is intellectual. And since Christ *is* his mind and we are ours, no relationship could be more intimate than that. That is precisely why the Scriptures use the analogy of marriage to illustrate the intellectual relationship between Christians and Christ.

This recognition of the primacy of the intellect, the primacy of truth, is totally missing from contemporary theology. Fifty years ago, one of this century's greatest theologians and writers, J. Gresham Machen, wrote a book entitled *What Is Faith?* His words are as appropriate today as they were then:

This anti-intellectual tendency in the modern world is no trifling thing; it has its roots deep in the entire philosophical development of modern times. Modern philosophy... has had as its dominant note, certainly as its present day result, a depreciation of the reason and a skeptical answer to Pilate's question, "What is truth?" This attack upon the intellect has been conducted by men of marked intellectual power; but an attack it has been all the same. And at last theological results of it, even in the sphere of practice, are beginning to appear. A marked characteristic of the present day is a lamentable intellectual decline, which has appeared in all fields of human endeavor except those that deal with purely material things. The intellect has been browbeaten so long in theory that one cannot be surprised if it is now ceasing to function in practice

As over against this anti-intellectual tendency in the modern world, it will be one chief purpose of the present little book to defend the primacy of the intellect, and in particular to try to break down the false and disastrous opposition which has been set up between knowledge and faith.

That, too, is a chief purpose of this little book [*Faith and Saving Faith*]. The following pages argue that it is rational to believe what God says; it is irrational to disbelieve God. No argument is more urgently needed than that.

Book Review

A Short History of the Early Church

A retired missionary of the Christian Reformed Church's Nigerian work, Dr. Harry R. Boer, has gathered together some of the more important strains of ancient ecclesiastical history into a brief and rather readable book. Much of the material was apparently used in instructing African theological

students originally, but as it stands the book is obviously designed to reach as wide a circle of relatively untaught people as possible. As one who has taught church history to an American adult Sunday school class and a Chinese undergraduate class, I read the book with great interest, especially since I am engaged in editing the initial Chinese translation.

Boer's language is crisp, clear, and concise, and his style possesses none of the dry pedanticism that all too often mars much historical writing of *any* kind. In these respects, the English original is really a rather attractive book. In chronology and recitation of the major controversies of the first six Christian centuries, there are no major flaws, and the reader with little background will be able to piece together the flow of events with little difficulty. Yet there are quite a few points which forbid an enthusiastic endorsement of the work, especially as an aid to the informal discussion group or textbook for a non-seminary class.

First of all, in view of the increasing Jewish-Christian dialogue (theological and evangelistic), Boer's section on the Jewish background of Christianity is quite inadequate, and contents itself with a number of clichés which may have made sense in Harnack's time but which really fail to come to grips with how Judaism actually developed, Judaism's influence on Christianity, and the real conflict between Church and Synagogue. For instance, Boer states (6) that the Pharisees "disappeared from the scene with the destruction of the Jewish state." In fact, the Pharisees were the foundation of the Rabbinic Judaism that nurtured Jewish existence throughout the centuries of Diaspora. The Pharisees disappeared only in the sense that there was no longer any Sadducean rival left for them to contrast themselves with after the destruction of the Second Temple. They lived on, however, wherever the tradition crystallized in the Talmud lived. This is important, for many well-intentioned Christian witnesses to the Jewish people cause great offense when they say something like, "Jesus was against the Pharisees, not necessarily all Jewish people," for to most modern Jews, the Pharisees were their remote spiritual and physical ancestors. This is not to minimize the very real

errors of Pharisaism's autosoterism, but rather to express a wish that Dr. Boer could have given us a little more practical help in understanding and witnessing to our Jewish neighbors.

Similarly, to characterize Christianity's conflict with Pharisaism as "spiritual attitudes" versus adherence to "outward observance of the law" really misses the point, even though this feeling has a long and too-well respected history in Christendom. A perusal of *Pirquei Avoth*, to cite one example of the voluminous Rabbinic literature available to us, will reveal that the fathers of Rabbinic Judaism stressed such "inward" virtues as humility, charity, and laboring without thought to rewards as surely as the New Testament. What, then, is the real controversy between Rabbinic Judaism and Christian Faith?

Apart from covering the Messiahship of Jesus, a good place to start would be Christ's accusation that the Scribes and Pharisees made the law of none effect through the multiplication of man-made traditions. In the light of Paul's teaching in *Colossians* 2:16, much could be said about the well intentioned but thoroughly misguided attempt not only of ancient Jews but modern Christians as well to transcend God's standard of holiness. How often do modern Christians think of a "holy person" as one who neither smokes nor drinks, attends no films, and attends meetings thrice weekly, who nonetheless is lacking in justice, mercy, and kindness! Perhaps by analyzing the motives of both Pharisaism and certain kinds of "evangelical traditionalism" we might find a common tendency to autosoterism in both, and an unwillingness to seek justification of the sinner in Christ alone.

Again, Boer sees Diaspora Judaism as "more liberal" than Palestinian, and hence more receptive to the Gospel and better suited to serve as its forerunner. While there is no doubt that the Diaspora was a providential preparation for the spread of Christianity, is it correct to see it as "more liberal?" It would probably be better to say that any "diaspora" is better suited to dealing with outsiders than "the folks back home," rather than characterize it as "more liberal." This is true of Chinese and other dispersed people. By its very nature, a diaspora community must adapt to "them" or die.

Yet what the clichés of Liberal Diaspora/Conservative Palestine fails to take into account is the fact that much of the Pharisaic tradition grew up in Babylon rather than in Palestine, and that Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, was no less rigid for his having hailed from the Diaspora. Moreover, the *am-ha'aretz*, the People of the Land, who figure in Rabbinic literature as frequently lax in their observance of the Torah were a Palestinian phenomenon.

In dealing with Judaism, Boer's work is admittedly intended to be brief, but his acceptance of such outworn clichés as those enumerated above can only encourage Christian complacency and self-righteousness in facing the Jewish people and certain tendencies perennially apparent in Christendom itself. There is indeed a chasm that has existed and grown since late Roman times between the church and Jewry, yet failure to at least build an adequate telescope to look across it has been bad for the church; and Boer does not add anything that will remedy the situation.

More serious, though, is his willingness to state that the various ancient heresies "died" somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean world sometime in the ancient past. But as anyone who has sought to instruct people in the doctrine of the Trinity can testify, Modalism, Arianism, Adoptionism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism are all alive and well and living in Evangelicaldom—even though they may lack an organized expression. In all fairness to Dr. Boer, he does make concise and accurate statements as to why the orthodox Church opposed these ancient heresies, and what some of the issues at stake were. Yet it would have been a valuable service if Arianism's similarities to modern Watchtowerism and Modalism's similarity to the common "simple person's" reinterpretation of the Trinity were exposed rather than suggesting that these heresies died out between the pincers of Byzantine political persecution and Islamic conquest.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not an easy concept to grasp, and even leaving out all the sophomoric atheists who see it as a vestige of Hellenistic polytheism, it is very widely misunderstood.

Moreover, it is a live theological question everywhere the Gospel has gone, even when some church pretends to be "non-theological." For exposing people to what the Trinity really is there are few opportunities as golden as a church history class. By focusing on the errors of the Arians, semi-Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, and Monothelites—and what was truly at stake in their omissions—people will be challenged to reassess their own view of God, and the true relationship of the three persons will stand out more clearly. Today, the proliferation of such sects as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and "Jesus Only" Pentecostals—as well as the prevailing theological illiteracy of "orthodox" congregations make it certain that the average person whom the pastor or adult teacher deals with will not have an adequate understanding of Trinitarianism. The proliferation of pop quasi-history which purports to give "the real facts" about the origins of Christianity also demands that responsible students of church history be ready to give both adequate and accurate descriptions of what the orthodox faith truly is and is not.

Finally, Boer's book is flawed by his dependence on Harnack in interpreting the New Testament as ecclesiastical history. He is too much of an evangelical to fall for the crude "Jerusalem/Petrine Christianity thesis, Pauline/Gentile Christianity antithesis, Second-century Lukan synthesis reconstruction, but he does accept the liberal chestnut that the relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem/Jewish Church was fundamentally mistrustful, if not hostile. As an ostensibly Reformed scholar, Boer would have served his constituency better had he relied more on J. Gresham Machen's *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, where the fundamental agreement of the Jerusalem apostles with Paul is stressed in Paul's struggle with the Judaizers. This fits the evidence of *Acts* 15 and *Galatians* much more closely.

One is tempted to speculate that this recasting of a liberal theory for the consumption of a conservative readership is probably related more to Boer's dissatisfaction with the current state of the Reformed churches than it is to an honest reliance on one of a very few resources available to a

missionary in the field. In his *Short History*, the Jerusalem Church tends to come off as hidebound, ethnocentric, unable to develop an adequate missionary thrust, and unsympathetic to new theological currents where the Spirit is really at work. It is possible that in this case, Boer is not talking about Hebrew ecclesiastics in first-century Palestine but Dutch-American ecclesiastics in twentieth-century Michigan and Iowa, or at least his conception of them.

Of course, a hallowed theological tradition can never be made so hallowed that it is above criticism. If the Reformed community is made to reflect on its shortcomings through a reading of Boer's book, it will have performed a valuable service. But, getting back to ancient history, is Boer warranted in saying that the hidebound Hebrews of the Jerusalem Church failed? We can answer affirmatively only if we accept the older liberal hypothesis that Palestinian Christianity was somehow a rival that "lost out" to Pauline Christianity. But does the New Testament demand that we see Paul and Peter as rivals? The consensus of conservative opinion is a resounding negative. Perhaps we might say that it is more accurate to describe Jerusalem as viewing Paul more as a co-worker abroad than as a rival. If this is so, then the ancient church of Jerusalem succeeded admirably in bringing the nations to the light of the Holy One of Israel.

Occasionally, bits of questionable theology occur as well. Rather than stating that the Bible is unashamed of God's being the Creator of the visible universe (and everything else as well), Boer states that against the Greek philosophers, the Bible teaches that God created the world out of matter (12). Perhaps this is a slip of the pen. Perhaps it is a sop to the modern cult of science that deifies matter by ascribing eternity to it. He also states that John taught the possibility of a sinless life (39), yet recognizes as well that *I John* 1:8 would seem to contradict this. Perhaps this is due to writing in a hurry, perhaps it is due to a desire to demonstrate that nobody can appeal to a consistent Bible. Either way, it introduces a note of confusion into the book.

Perhaps, in light of Dr. Boer's association with *Reformed Journal*, which represents the more

liberal wing of the Christian Reformed Church, part of Boer's reason for writing may have been to enter a plea for the rebels. He does seem to sympathize with Paul against Jerusalem, and to delight in pointing out that time elapsed between Pentecost and the ordaining of ecclesiastical officers (what a painful kick to the Presbyterian posterior). This tends to give parts of the book a lively, polemical cast. But at the same time, one is tempted to ask if the *early* institution of offices might not suggest that Christian fellowship was never intended to be completely free, unstructured, and open.

A well educated (theologically, that is) instructor might be able to find the book serviceable as an aid to a study group or adult class by offering appropriate criticisms in the right places. Certainly Boer's desire to make Church history intelligible to modern believers is a commendable one, and we should recognize his as an attempt to bridge the gap between the earliest Christians and the modern evangelical congregation. Yet the publication of a work that will truly fill this glaring gap in Christian education still seems to await another day. —Peter Herz

Religion in the News

STOCKTON, Calif.—A minister shot and critically wounded a deacon who disliked his sermon, police said yesterday. Oscar McAlister, 54, interrupted Sunday morning's sermon to tell the Rev. Murphy Lee Paskell he was "getting out of hand," said Police Sgt. James Singer. After the service, Paskell, the pastor of New Testament Baptist Church here, pulled a .25-caliber revolver and shot McAlister four times, Singer said.

McAlister was reported in critical condition at St. Joseph's Hospital yesterday. Paskell was booked into San Joaquin County Jail for investigation of attempted murder. Police did not say why McAlister objected to the sermon.

Police added that someone threw a bottle of flammable liquid on the minister's house Sunday evening, causing \$600 damage. —*The Washington Times*

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Saving Faith

Gordon H. Clark

Though the *Larger Catechism* does not address itself directly to the psychological analysis of faith or belief, this problem is one that has merited the attention, not only of Christian theologians, but also of secular philosophers. These secularists, even when they are not so successful as the theologians, have one advantage; to wit, their task is simpler because they do not consider religious complications. Many theological discussions fall into confusion because elements necessary to saving faith are assigned to any belief whatever. Here one must first try to analyze belief as such, and then characterize those beliefs, or that belief, which justifies.

The usual evangelical analysis of belief separates it into three parts: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*—or understanding, assent, and trust. Perhaps even theologians who use this analysis might omit *fiducia* if they confined themselves to belief as such; for in a colloquial manner a person who believes that Columbus discovered America in 1492, or in 1374, is not taken as an example of *trust*. Yet is he not actually an example of *confidence*?

Thomas Manton in his *Commentary on James* expresses the usual evangelical view quite well; and he distinguished, well or poorly, between saving faith and other faiths. The passage is too long to quote, so a condensation—sometimes verbatim—sometimes not, must suffice.

Quoting *James* 2:19 about the devils, Manton remarks that the faith here is a "bare speculation" and cannot possibly save anyone. That this faith cannot save is very true. It is no more than a belief in monotheism. This the Moslems possess. But, however it may be with Moslems, it seems incorrect to call the faith of devils a bare "speculation." This word often is used to refer to some proposition that is so unverifiable as to be more likely false than true. Granted, Manton also calls it a *knowledge*; and this is better, because on this point, if on nothing else, the devils believe the truth.

He continues: "Thou believest; that is, assentest to this truth." Belief therefore is an act of assent to the truth. Yet Manton adds, believing is the "lowest act of faith." In view of all the Scriptural commands to believe, this sounds very strange. Is there then a higher act of faith? And if so, is it higher because it has a more detailed object—*i.e.* a greater number of propositions—or because the elements of the act of believing are different?

Manton continues with the object of this belief: "There is one God. He instanceth in this proposition, though he doth limit the matter only to this." This is a now rare usage of the verb, not noun, to *instance*. It means, to give an instance; the proposition, "there is one God," is therefore an instance or specification of what the man believes. Manton suggests that the man believes or assents to "other articles of religion." This is doubtless true,

for nearly everyone who believes in any sort of God believes something else about him beyond bare existence. That the man has an extensive Jewish or Christian theology, however, is not clear because the devils are soon said to believe the same propositions.

"Thou doest well," quotes Manton, "it is an approbation of such assent so far as it is good and not rested in." Again Manton has described the act as voluntary assent. Naturally, all assent must be voluntary. But what also needs to be noted here are the words "rested in." When we say we resting—or should not rest in—this or that, do we mean that in addition to *notitia* and *assensus* there is some other psychological element in saving faith called "resting"? Or does it mean that saving faith, rather than being psychologically different, must be an assent to other propositions in addition to monotheism? The latter seems to be the case, whether or not Manton meant it so. We should not "rest in," i.e. be satisfied with, the single proposition, "There is but one God." This proposition even the devils accept. But for salvation men must not only accept the monotheistic proposition, but also other propositions relating to the Atonement.

On the next page Manton notes that the devils assent to this one truth and to other truths revealed in the word, even to "many truths in the Scriptures" (on the following page). But how much of the Bible the devils believe, justification by faith perhaps, is a question that we in our ignorance of satanic psychology cannot answer. Manton apparently wants to maximize the devils' orthodoxy.

"Bare assent," says Manton, "to the articles of religion doth not infer true faith. True faith uniteth to Christ, it is conversant about his person." Two factors seem to be confused in Manton's mind: the psychology and the propositions. Does this quotation mean that saving faith, in addition to belief in monotheism, must also include the Chalcedonian Christology? Certainly an assent to Chalcedon, however "bare," is "conversant about his person." Or does Manton's statement mean that the devils themselves subscribe to Chalcedon, and that "conversant" is a psychological element in

addition to assent? It would seem so because otherwise no contrast could be made between "assent to the articles of religion" and "conversant about his person."

Faith "is not only *assensus axiomati*, an assent to a Gospel maxim or proposition; you are not justified by that, but by being one with Christ. It was the mistake of the former age to make the promise, rather than the person of Christ, to be the formal object of faith." The mention of the person of Christ is pious language. Similar expressions are common today. One slogan is, "No creed but Christ." Another expression, with variations from person to person, is, "Faith is not belief in a proposition, but trust in a person."

Though this may sound very pious, it is nonetheless destructive of Christianity. Back in the twenties, before the Methodist Church became totally apostate, a liberal in their General Conference opposed theological precision by some phrase centering on Christ, such as, Christ is all we need. A certain pastor, a remnant of the evangelical wing of the church, had the courage to take the floor and ask the pointed question, "which Christ?"

The name Jesus Christ, at least since 1835 in Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, has been applied to several alleged persons. Strauss initiated the "Life of Jesus Movement." It ran through Ernest Renan to Albert Schweitzer. But the persons described are nothing like the person described in the Creed of Chalcedon, nor, for that matter, are they alike amongst themselves. It is necessary therefore to ask, which Christ, or, whose Christ? The Christian or Biblical answer is the Creed of Chalcedon. *A person can be identified only by a set of propositions.*

This is what Manton refers to as "the mistake of the former age." Thomas Manton was a Puritan of the seventeenth century, and when he speaks of "the former age," he is not referring to apostate Romanism, but to the Reformers themselves. Hence he is a witness that they defined faith as an assent to the promise of the Gospel. By the same token, he wishes to introduce some other element into faith in addition to this act of will. What is it? He answers, "There is not only *assent* in faith, but *consent*; not

only an assent to the truth of the word, but a consent to take Christ... True believing is not an act of the understanding only, but a work of all the heart."

A careful study of these words and of the complete context in Manton, plus a comparison with the Scripture, should conclude that Manton is confused. The first point is that the word *consent* receives no explanation. It makes a pleasant alliteration with *assent*, but literary style is no substitute for analysis. Is "consent" an act of will? Ordinary language would make it seem so; but if so, how is it different from assent? If "consent" is not voluntary, and if it cannot be an act of the understanding either, what sort of mental state is it? Then too, when he says that "true believing is not an act of the understanding only, but a work of all the heart," he is not accurately confronting "the former age." The former age never said that true believing, or false believing either, is an act of the understanding only. The former age, and much of the later ages too, specify as sent in addition to understanding. They make this specification with the deliberate aim of not restricting belief to understanding alone. One can understand and lecture on the philosophy of Spinoza, but this does not mean that the lecturer assents to it. Belief is the act of assenting to something understood. But understanding alone is not belief in what is understood.

Manton himself acknowledges, "I confess some expressions of Scripture seem to lay much upon assent as *1 John* 4:2 and 5:1; *1 Corinthians* 12:3; *Matthew* 16:17; but these places [Manton strangely says] do either show that assents, where they are serious and upon full conviction, come from some special revelation; or else, if they propound them as evidence of grace, we must distinguish times."

Now, *Matthew* 16:17 is not clearly a special revelation. It can well be, and more probably is, an illumination such as God gives to every believer. Nor is *1 Corinthians* 12:3 a special revelation: It refers to all men—it is a completely general statement—and cannot apply only to the recipients of special revelation. Unless, therefore, one wishes to be very dogmatic about Peter in *Matthew*, all of these verses—in Manton's opinion—are to be set aside, are to be explained away by "distinguishing

the times." True enough, God administered the covenant in the Old Testament in a manner different from his administration of the New. Then too, but the differences are much less important, the apostolic age and the following two centuries faced difficulties that do not so directly trouble us now. But such historical differences are entirely irrelevant to the present discussion. Whether the propositions and promises of the Old Testament were more vague and less specific than those in the New, and whether the truths of the Gospel seemed more "contrary to the ordinary and received principles of reason" there than now (which is much to be doubted), all this is irrelevant because the mental act of believing is the same in every age and every place. Manton's account of faith is therefore confused, and it has led him to set aside some instructive New Testament material.

The crux of the difficulty with the popular analysis of faith into *notitia* (understanding), *assensus* (assent), and *fiducia* (trust), is that *fiducia* comes from the same root as *fides* (faith). Hence this popular analysis reduces to the obviously absurd definition that faith consists of understanding, assent, and faith. Something better than this tautology must be found.