

Bacon, L. W.

Review

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FALSE DEFINITIONS OF FAITH,  
AND THE  
TRUE DEFINITION,

By REV. LEONARD WOOLSEY BACON,

WILLIAMSBURG, N. Y.

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THE TRUE DEFINITION,

BY

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## False Definitions of Faith — the True Definition.

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THE primary lesson of practical religion, the essential condition of personal salvation, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is, at this day, after eighteen centuries of theologizing, a matter of such doubtful question that not only different schools of theology, but different theologians of the same school, are at variance upon it. On many subjects, after much division, there has come to be recognized a common view, generally accepted, from which sects or individuals vary. On this, the prime question of practical religion, there is no generally accepted view. So far are men from agreeing as to what is true on this point, that they are not even agreed as to what is orthodox.\* And one of the saddest things about the matter is, that there is no controversy about it. For there is one sadder thing than even the sharpest of controversies, and that is the indolent difference of Christian ministers on matters of fundamental importance, with no controversy.

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\* TILLOTSON, Sermon on Heb. xi. 1: "Most who write upon this subject have marvelously puzzled themselves with the various acceptations of this word, inso-much that some have undertaken to enumerate above twenty distinct significations. Hereby, instead of clearing the notion of faith, they have involved it, and made it more intricate, and have made men believe that it is a notion very remote from common understanding."

WOODS, Vol. III., p. 79: "Although the language of Scripture is very intelligible, there are few subjects on which more obscure and erroneous opinions have been entertained."

SIMEON, Sermon on Heb. xi. 1: "The nature of faith is little known."

WATSON, Inst. Part II., Ch. xxiii: "So many distinctions have been set up,—so many logical terms and definitions are found in the writings of systematic divines, and often, as Baxter has it, 'such quibbling and jingling of a mere sound of words,' that the simple Christian has often been grievously perplexed."

GODWIN, J. H., on Christian Faith. Congregational Lecture, London, 1862; p. 5: "The unsatisfactory character of some discussions respecting Faith has rendered many persons averse to all speculation on the subject. . . . Not a few have been painfully perplexed, through ignorance of what was enjoined, when they were directed to *believe in Christ*, and the injury occasioned by erroneous views of this subject has not been small."

Of the various definitions of faith that are current among Christian teachers, it is not possible that all should be true. But there is no need of uncertainty which of them is the true one. There are certain tests of the true definition of the word, which we propose to state distinctly, and then to bring up to them, one by one, the current false definitions, that the falsehood of them may be exposed; and afterwards the true definition, that its truth may be made manifest.

### I. *The Tests of a True Definition of Faith.*

1. The true definition of *faith* must express the natural meaning of the word under the limitation with which it is construed in the Scriptures, and no other.

To admit some special and unusual definition of the word *faith* into our theology, is to accuse the offer of the gospel of being a fraud upon common people. It is to represent it as an offer made upon a certain condition, which being fulfilled in its obvious meaning, the promise is to be repudiated.

What we want, therefore, is the definition, not of "justifying faith," nor of "saving faith," nor of "spiritual faith," nor of "evangelical faith," but simply of *faith*. To incur the conditions of salvation with such limitations as these, is to impute to God slackness concerning his promises. Our only right even to demand of one who has received the promise "whosoever believeth shall be saved," that his faith shall be a "*living* faith," is this that a dead faith is not faith, but only the appearance of it?

2. The true definition of faith, as it is used in the Scriptures, must express such an act as implies Obedience, Repentance, and Love to God, not in its more or less remote antecedents or consequences, but in itself. Salvation is promised in the Scriptures to faith always, and to faith exclusively. The offer of salvation on condition of faith, is made both positively and negatively. "He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned." In like manner salvation is promised to repentance and obedience and love—to each of them always, and to each of them exclusively. Obviously, then, we cannot read the New Testament intelligently and

consistently, with any definition of faith that does not make faith practically to involve the other conditions of salvation.

3. The true definition of faith must be such that we can see it to be illustrated in the examples of the saints both of the Old and of the New Testaments, who have obtained witness of their faith, God testifying that they believed; and also in the phenomena of the Christian life down to our day.

4. The true definition of faith must describe such a free, voluntary act, that all men may be exhorted to it, and that the failure to obey the exhortation may be imputed to every one who refuses to believe, as his own sin.

We are now ready to consider severally, under the application of these tests,

## II. *The current False Definitions of Faith.*

We enumerate several of the more important of them, beginning with the most formidable, the most plausible, the most widely prevalent, perhaps the most mischievous:

They are—

1. That Faith is the assent of the intellect to religious truth.
2. That Faith is a peculiar sort and degree of the assent of the intellect to religious truth.
3. That Faith is a firm conviction of one's personal salvation.
4. That Faith is equivalent to trust in God, together with all those subjective antecedents and concomitants of trust in God which are commonly included under the term "religious experience."

1. That *Faith is the assent of the intellect to religious truth* is the definition accepted, with some variations of statement, by all Roman Catholic theologians,\* and by a multitude, per-

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\* PERRONE, *Prælect. in Compend. Redactæ*, Louvain, 1846, I., 238: "Fides . . . . . est assensus liber quem præbet intellectus, divina gratia preventus et adjutus, ex imperio voluntatis a gratia pariter excitatæ, veritatibus divinitus revelatis, ob Dei ipsius revelantis auctoritatem."

Id. II., 198: "Fides quæ ad justificationem requiritur, non est fiducia in divinis promissionibus, sed firmus assensus ad ea omnia quæ Deus revelavit."

haps the majority, of Protestants.\* It seems, at first view, to be confirmed by the application of the first test, in that it does seem to express the natural meaning of the word Believe.

But the moment we come to the second test, it breaks down. The assent of the intellect to religious truth does not necessarily involve in itself Repentance, Holiness, Love to God.†

Holding this as the definition of Faith, good men are at their wits' end to vindicate the good faith of God's word, which promises in so many words that whosoever believeth shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life; and then, in the very face of this promise—this broad, unlimited promise, uttered only on the single condition of faith—declares that except we repent we shall all perish, and that without holiness

Id. II., 199: "Patrum unanimis consensus est, necessariam ad justificationem esse fidem dogmaticam seu historicam, ut eam vocant adversarii."

For the "consensus patrum" on this point, this standard Jesuit theologian refers to Bellarmine, *De Justific.* lib. 1, c. 9.

See also Roman Catholic theologians generally.

\* CHALMERS, Notes on HILL, 210, (Ed. N. Y.): "I am not fond of admitting in faith anything more than the intellectual act of believing, or of viewing it in any other light than as a simple credence of the truths of revelation, in as far as these truths are or may be known to us."

Id. 422: "This [saving] faith, in its proper elementary character, is belief and nothing else, and the exercise of faith is just a believing exercise. It is just a holding of the things said in the gospel to be true."

WILSON, JOHN M., in Edition of Ridgeley's Divinity, (Carters, N. Y.) p. 124: "Faith or belief, understand it as we may and apply it as we will, seems to be just assent to evidence,—counting true propositions or statements submitted to the judgment."

PEARSON on the Creed, London, 1835, p. 16: "The true nature of the faith of a Christian consists in this, that it is an assent unto truths credible upon the testimony of God delivered unto us in the writings of the apostles and prophets."

TILLOTSON, Sermon on Heb. xi. 6: "Faith is a persuasion of the mind concerning anything. . . . Its seat is the mind—the understanding."

CARSON on the Atonement, 142: "The faith of anything is neither more nor less than the belief of it; and the belief of anything is the conviction that the mind has of its truth, and implies no disposition about it, either good or bad."

† It is curious to see how the reasoning of some theologians on this point follows the line of beauty. True belief of the doctrines of the Gospel is surely followed by holiness; which is proved by the lives of believers. A sinful life proves one not to be sincere in holding the doctrines of the Gospel, because such belief is followed by holiness. See Carson on Atonement, 127–193, and Chalmers, Notes on Hill, 209–212, 422, 423. We do not count this patent fallacy among the means of avoiding the difficulty under consideration.

no man shall see the Lord. Men are driven to this dilemma :— either they must adhere to the doctrine of justification by faith only, repudiating the other demands of the Scriptures, and maintaining an antinomian orthodoxy ; or they must reject the doctrine of justification by faith only, and save the interests of holiness by sacrificing the credit of the divine promises. It is the latter course which has been adopted by the Roman Catholic Church, and by many Protestant theologians, including some of New England schools.\* And it becomes us, whenever we are tempted to denounce either of these for abandoning the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ*, to consider from how frightful an alternative they have reacted ; and seriously to question whether it is not better, with Rome and Romanizing “ New School ” men, to abandon the preaching of faith as the sole condition of salvation, rather than, with Scotchmen and Englishmen, to maintain it under such a definition as makes faith practically separable from repentance and holiness. If we accept the Romish definition of faith, we need to supplement it with the Romish doctrine of justification.

Try this same definition, now, by the fourth of the tests which we have named,—that the true definition of faith must describe a free, voluntary act, such as all men may be exhorted to,—such as a man must be to blame for not performing.

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\* See an admirably frank Article in the Congregational Review for May, 1868, from the pen of President Magoun of Iowa College. “ Either [unbelief or disbelief] may be the leading form [of selfishness]. They were such with the Jews. They are not with those brought up under Christian privileges ; nor is it true at all to say that unbelief is now the parent of all sin. . . . ‘ Only believe ’ is not safe advice to a sinner whose selfishness has not concentrated in rejection of Christ, as that of many Jews did.” 216. So in preaching the gospel to the heathen ; “ there may be found devout religious men among them. . . . In such exceptional cases, the missionary may preach to them ‘ Only believe. ’ Or they may be under conviction of sin, not having yet repented, and need first to be told how to repent. . . . The gospel . . . does not fall into the blunder and confusion of thought of telling men, however impenitent, to come to Jesus to be accepted and have faith.” 217, 218. “ The saving of the soul depends on two things, and one comes before, and the other after, as their several objects require ; repentance, antecedent ; . . . and faith consequent.” 212.

It is impossible to accept these statements, without feeling that our Lord and his apostles were addicted to a very reckless and “ blundering ” way of promising salvation on the sole condition of faith.



Can the definition of faith which declares it to be the assent of the understanding to religious truth, bear this test? Every one who is familiar with the conflict between Christianity and rationalism knows how perilously the good cause labors under stress of controversy at this point:—how such men as Henry Brougham \* declare it as a self-evident proposition that a man is no more responsible for his belief than he is for the color of his skin; and such Christian apologists as Richard Whately and Henry Rogers yield the point, and, in contradiction of all the implications of the gospel on this subject, declare it to be the keystone of ethical truth “that all we are really responsible for is honest investigation and conscientious pursuit of what we deem truth.” † Plainly, a mental act to which men cannot be urged and exhorted and commanded, and for the failure of which they cannot be condemned, is not what the Bible means by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. The palpable failure of this definition of faith to meet this scriptural test is not in the least relieved by the arbitrary distinction drawn by Roman Catholic and some other theologians, ‡ between faith as the assent of the understanding to truth, upon authority, and knowledge as assent to truth upon demonstration or evidence. Authoritative testimony is only one kind of evidence, and the action of the intellect in receiving truth upon this kind of evidence, is nowise different from its action in receiving truth upon any other kind of evidence.

We come back, now, with some suspicions in our mind, to reëxamine the plausible claim which this definition makes, to have passed the first named test, and to express the natural meaning of the word under the limitation with which it is construed in the Scriptures. The constant limitation with which the word Believe is qualified, either expressly or implicitly, in connection with the offer of salvation in the gospel, is this, “on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now we deny, as a simple matter of lexicography and the usage of speech, that the

\* Address at his inauguration as Provost of the University of Glasgow.

† “Reason and Faith.” From the *Edinburgh Review*, October, 1849. Republished by Crosby, Nichols, & Co. p. 359.

‡ *Perrone*, Praelect. Theol., I., 238, II., 198. Ed. Louvain, 1846. *Rogers's Reason and Faith*, 341, 342. *Ridgeley*, II., 107, note.

word Believe, in such a grammatical construction with the name of a person, signifies the assent of the intellect to truth,—except as this sense has been forced upon it in the course of centuries of theological sophistication; and claim, on the contrary, that the obvious and natural meaning of the phrase is something entirely different. But we do not undertake, at present, the details of a philological argument on this question.

The point on which we have just been insisting is shinningly illustrated when we come to apply the last test of a true definition of faith, to wit, that it must correspond with the acknowledged examples of faith in the Scriptures and in the experience of the Christian Church. What are these dogmas to which all those who are saved by faith have given intellectual assent, from the days of righteous Abel until now? They are “all things that God has revealed”—is the sweeping statement of Romish Theology, followed up by a catalogue of them in detail. But it evades the troublesome consequences of this statement by the contrivance of a *fides implicita*, which is no intellectual assent to truth at all, but only the state of mind in which one would believe if he had occasion. Our Protestant writers feel the difficulty as well, without so ready an escape.\* They go toiling through the Old Testament endeavoring to find in all the old heroes of faith the tenets of their own theology.† The clothing of our first parents in skins is made to prove their belief of the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice; and the scarlet thread from Rahab’s window is forced to testify to her theological soundness on the necessity of atone-

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\* Dr. Macknight would seem to know no other faith, as a Christian grace, than a *fides implicita*. “The faith,” says he, “by which men under the new covenant are justified, consists in a *sincere disposition* to believe what God hath made known.” Again, “faith does not consist in the belief of particular doctrines, but in such an earnest desire to know and to do the will of God, as leads them conscientiously to use such means as they have for gaining the knowledge of his will, and for doing it when found.” “Abraham’s faith consisted in an *habitual disposition to believe and obey God*.” Quoted in *Carson on Atonement*. 141.

† It is curious, by the way, and instructive, to observe how those theologians who are fiercest for extreme statements of the divine perfection of the Scriptures are, at the same time, most tenacious of interpretations like these, which imply that the Scriptures are defective in their statement of the very essential things in their histories, and require to be supplemented by an extensive system of guesswork under “the analogy of faith.”

ment. But not even with such exegesis as this, is it possible to ascribe to these ancient worthies, any more than to multitudes of modern saints, a reception of *all* true Christian doctrines; when, therefore, it becomes necessary to say *what* doctrine must be believed in order to salvation, then question arise. One says, with painful eagerness, "only the fundamental doctrines;" and if any person, interested in the stricter definition of the condition on which the issues of eternity hang, asks for specifications, every man is ready with his own favorite dogma to push it into the place of honor. One will say, the articles of the Nicene Creed;\* another, the Athanasian statement of the Trinity;† a third, who is styled by his admirers "the Jonathan Edwards of the nineteenth century,"‡ declares it to be the doctrine of limited atonement, declaring, in good round terms, that "the thing that a man believes for eternal life is that Christ died for the sins of all believers"—and for nobody else; while writers with whom we are more familiar, hold that the doctrine of general atonement—"the doctrine that Christ died for our sins,—is the precise object of saving faith."§ But after granting to all these the utmost license in selecting each his favorite dogma as the condition of salvation, we cannot probably find one of them who will confidently claim that it has been held by all who have been saved in the days of the Bible history and since.

2. The second false definition of faith is a modification of the first. It holds that faith is still the assent of the intellect to truth; but that the faith to which the promise of salvation is given is a peculiar sort of faith, a peculiar quality or intensity of intellectual assent, to be distinguished as "saving

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\* See, for example, the platform of the Christian Union Association, 1867.

† See the "damnatory clauses" of the Athanasian creed, "*Quicumque Vult*": "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith except one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. The catholic faith is this: &c., &c., &c. "This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved."

‡ Carson on the Atonement, 144.

§ Sacramental Sermons, by J. W. Alexander, p. 222. See also President Magoun, in *Congregational Review*, May, 1868

faith." Thus a very noted and excellent preacher,\* after stating the dogma which he declares to be "the object of saving faith," adds "the man who believes this *with a spiritual apprehension of what he believes* is a saved man." Such artificial limitations to the simple gospel condition of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, are naturally enough proposed by conscientious men who fear the antinomian consequences of promising salvation simply to all who believe—with intellectual assent. They are intended to guard the divine promises from being appropriated by evil and unworthy men to their own perdition, by inserting in the condition a saving clause. But they are set aside at once on applying to them the first test of a true definition of the faith of the gospel—that it must express the simple meaning of the words used, with no other limitation than that with which they are construed in the Scriptures. When God promises, "whosoever believeth shall be saved," no man may dare to say that this does not mean whosoever believeth, but "whosoever believeth with a saving faith," or "whosoever believeth with a spiritual apprehension of what he believes"—lest in so saying he charge the Faithful Promiser with a mental reservation and a fraud.

3. The third false definition of faith makes it equivalent to an undoubting confidence in one's personal salvation through

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\* Rev. J. W. Alexander, D. D., *Sacramental Sermons*, p. 222. This implication that there is something specially intense, or otherwise peculiar, in the convictions of truth which constitute faith, is found in many theologians, both Romish and Protestant, who do not include it in their definitions. The "*certitudo fidei*" is presented as something far more certain than other certainty. On this distinction turn some important questions of Tridentine theology.

A vast emphasis is commonly laid, even by writers who ought to know better, on the expression, "with *the heart* man believeth unto righteousness." So the Rev. Abel Stevens, LL. D., in *South Church Lectures*, N. Y., 1865, pp. 146, 147: "Evangelical or saving faith takes in intellectual faith, indeed, but transcends it by comprehending *also the heart*. . . . We all understand what is meant by the heart—it implies our affections as contrasted with our pure intellections." The exegete is misled by transferring to the writings of Luke the usage of the time of Fowler and Wells. There is no trace in the Scriptures of our popular distinction between *head* and *heart*. In the New Testament the heart means *the mind*, as distinguished from the body; and when the affections and emotions are to be specially indicated, it is done (according to the phrenology of those days) rather by the word *σπλάγχνα*, mistranslated *bowels*.

faith. Probably there are very few who would accept this definition at the present day. Conybeare, indeed, in his famous Article on Parties in the Church of England,\* imputes to the so-called Evangelicals of that body that they insist on the formula, "I believe that I am justified by faith," as expressing the condition of salvation. But Dr. Pusey, an equally competent witness, declares, in speaking of that same party, "I never met with any who held the Lutheran doctrine of justification, that 'justifying faith is that whereby a person believes himself to be justified.'"† But the admitted fact that for nearly a century, and that the most formative and critical century in the history of Protestant theology, this was the generally accepted statement of Protestant writers, both Lutheran and Calvinist,‡ makes it proper to speak briefly of it.

It fails on every test of a true definition.

(1.) It is in no sense the fair and natural meaning of the words Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but an arbitrary interpretation forced upon those words by a polemic exigency.§

(2.) It represents a so-called "faith," which in no wise involves repentance and holiness, but, on the contrary, is the favorite "faith" of the most impious and immoral fanatics.

(3.) It is widely at variance with the history and experience of God's church, which shows us the most divinely approved examples of faith, in believers who were sadly burdened with misgivings concerning their personal salvation.

(4.) But when we come to the final test, Is it a free act, to which any man may be exhorted, and for failing in which he may be condemned, the absurdity and folly of this definition become so apparent as to fill one with amazement that it

\* *Edinburgh Review*, Oct., 1853.

† *Eirenicon*, p. 15.

‡ No further citation is necessary in verification of this statement than a reference to the exhaustive essay of Principal Cunningham on "The Reformers and the Doctrine of Assurance," in the volume of his essays entitled "The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation," especially on p. 119.

§ For the history of this dogma, see the Article above cited from the work of Principal Cunningham.

could ever have obtained currency in the Christian Church. To exhort a man to this act of faith, is to exhort him to be convinced, not by evidence but by inducements of what is acknowledged to be a present falsehood, in order that, through his believing it, it may become a truth. To condemn a man for unbelief, under this definition, is to hold him guilty for not believing to be true what the very fact of his condemnation declares to have been false. This definition represents Christianity as a cruel Sphinx, setting insoluble riddles to all passers-by, and devouring them for not furnishing impossible answers.

4. The fourth false definition of faith describes it as not merely an act of trust, but as including those antecedent and concomitant states of the intellect and the emotions which are commonly summed up under the title "religious experience." This definition, set forth in the following terms by the American Tract Society, is declared by that representative body to be the accepted theology of the "Evangelical" Church :

"WHAT IS IT TO BELIEVE ON CHRIST? It is to feel your need of him; to believe that he is able and willing to save you, and to save you now; and to cast yourself unreservedly on his mercy, and trust in him alone for salvation." \*

If, now, we ask ourselves, under the first test of a true definition of faith, does this protracted three-fold process correspond with the natural, obvious meaning of the words "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," as they were uttered under the promise of salvation to Jews and heathen alike by the authority of the Holy Spirit, we are compelled to answer in the negative. It is one thing to say that the emotional experience and the intellectual conviction here described are implied as *antecedents* to the act of faith on Christ, but it is a different and a very unhappy thing to teach that they are a *part* of the act itself. No usage of the word, outside of theology, can be justly alleged in vindication of this definition.

In fact, when we come, next, to compare it with the examples of faith in the Bible, we find that when (as in the case of the Philippian jailer, Acts xvi., 31) the feeling of need and the necessary intellectual conviction are already present, the

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\* Tract number 857. "What Is It to Believe on Christ?"

demand of the gospel is not for a part of the act of faith, but for the whole of it.

And so when we ask, is the faith thus defined a voluntary act, to which all men may be exhorted under force of inducements of reward and penalty and with the alternative of personal guilt,—the answer again is no! You cannot procure a certain condition of the emotions by offering a reward for it. You cannot produce a conviction of the understanding by threats of damnation. Do not let us impute “to God’s wisdom unto salvation,” the clumsy expedients into which we fall ourselves. God’s way is to convince the intellect in the only way in which an intellect was ever yet convinced, by reason and evidence; to move the feelings, not by commanding one to agitate himself, but by those appliances which affect the heart; and to use the tremendous sanctions of the divine government to sway the free determination of the will.

But we know that the question will be put,—“since these conditions are the constant antecedents of faith, is there, after all, any practical harm in including them in the definition of it?”

We answer, first, that there is *no good* in it, of any kind, whether practical or theoretical. When you have gone through with your description of the necessary antecedents of faith, you come to an equivalent word—“trust”—to which all these things are just as necessarily antecedent as they are to faith: so that your definition has tangled up within itself an endless coil,—an infinite series—of antecedents, through which the inquirer for salvation would never make his way to the thing itself, to all eternity.

Secondly, the practical harm of the definition is this. It perplexes plain minds by a complex definition of a simple act. It encourages and justifies professed believers in computing the evidence of their faith by the intensity of their preliminary experience, rather than by their daily life of faith and acts of faith. It obscures, while professing to illuminate, the straight gate, for those who seek it. It takes away from the impenitent man the burden and guilt of willfully neglecting a simple duty,—to comfort him with the complacent feeling that he is

an unfortunate person, not altogether to blame for not having happened to be hit by a religious experience.

We have spent much time, now, in the consideration of some of the false definitions of faith. Happily, the true definition is so simple, so exactly and obviously correspondent with the conditions to which we are limited by the Scriptures, and so accordant with the consciousness of believers, that it requires little more than a just statement.

TO BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS TO TRUST ONESELF TO HIM.\* The very simplicity of the act makes it difficult to define it otherwise than thus by the use of a synonym. But whatever further illustration of the meaning of the word may be required, will come, in the process of testing this definition.

(1.) This is the natural and obvious meaning of the words as they would be understood by those to whom they were preached. Sometimes the word translated Believe stands in such construction that it cannot bear any other meaning: as when it is said (the reflexive pronoun being expressed, John ii. 24) that Jesus *did not intrust himself*—*οὐκ ἐπίστευεν ἑαυτὸν*—to the Jerusalem Jews. But in general we may say

\* One of the best and soundest statements of any of the systematizers on this subject, is to be found in the work of the Wesleyan, Watson. Naturally enough, preaching is in advance of theology in the return toward Scriptural truth; and many of the most useful preachers of the present day are explicit in the definition of faith in a contrary sense from the theologians of their own schools.

Spurgeon viii. 28: "Here lies the essence of saving faith, to rest yourself for eternal salvation upon the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ, to have done once for all with all reliance upon feelings and upon doings, and to trust in Jesus Christ and in what he did for your salvation."

N. L. Rice, D. D., in "South Church Lectures," N. Y., 1865, p. 178: "Faith is simply the act or exercise of a helpless being trusting in one who is able to help. For the purposes of justification it is the act of a guilty being, trusting in the righteousness of another."

Some of the most felicitous statements concerning the act and object of faith are found, as might be expected, in the writings of Dr. Bushnell. The growth of just views of the object of faith as a person, and not a proposition, stands, no doubt, in close connection with the prevailing direction of recent theology to the study of the life and person of Jesus Christ—the best "improvement in theology" since the Reformation.



that wherever the word Believe is in construction with the preposition *in* or *on*, either expressed or understood, it loses that meaning of "intellectual assent" which it bears when alone, and acquires the meaning of trust, or personal reliance, or self-committal. And for the justice of this statement (having no space here for an induction of particulars) we refer to the Greek Lexicon, to the Concordance of the Greek Testament, and to the usage of the English language as well as of the Greek.

This meaning is the only one in which the word can be construed with its object. "The Lord Jesus Christ" is not a doctrine concerning his own person; is not a theory of the atonement; is not a series of fundamentals in theology; is not a code of religious truth. And yet they who have misunderstood the words *believe on*, have been compelled to substitute one or another of these things as the object of Christian faith for the Lord Jesus Christ himself.\*

(2.) The act of Faith—of intrusting oneself for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ—includes, not as a remote consequence but in itself, Repentance, Obedience, Holiness, and whatever things beside are demanded in the Scriptures as conditions of salvation: and so the consistency and good faith of the word of God in promising salvation to "whosoever believeth," while yet demanding these other conditions, is maintained. The act of obedience to God, when expediency, or passion, or worldly fear are soliciting the soul to disobedience, is the act of faith; the life of holiness is the life of faith. So spake Peter (1 Peter iv. 19) to the martyr churches of Asia Minor,—“Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him *in well doing*, as unto a faithful

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\* The annotator of Ridgeley's *Body of Divinity*, in contradicting the text of his author, says, with 'marvelous unconsciousness how directly he is contradicting the language of the Scriptures: "As to faith being an 'act of trust or dependence on him who is its object,' Dr. Ridgeley uses language inconsistent with himself. *The object of faith is not a person, but a proposition or a statement.* . . . Trust, on the other hand, has reference entirely to a person. The difference between it and faith, in fact, is just that the one has a person and the other has a statement for its object. The two are quite distinct in their nature,—faith being an act of the understanding, and trust an act of the heart. Vol II., p. 125.

Creator" It is in the act of doing right that they do make choice of the safe keeping of God, rather than of the tender mercies of the wicked, and intrust their souls—their lives—to his charge. The words are almost a translation of those which David spoke to men in like trouble, in the thirty-seventh Psalm: "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers; . . . . *trust the Lord and do right,*" and you will be taken care of. There are not two conditions prescribed here, but one. It was *in doing the right* instead of the wrong, that one put himself, at once, in peril from evil-doers, and in charge with the Lord. So in the great classical instance of faith, which is the example, illustration, and specimen of faith to all generations—the case of Abraham—what was that faith which was counted to him for righteousness? It is written (Gen. xv. 6) "he believed in Jehovah"—literally, he *rested* upon him, or more exactly, perhaps, he *caused* something to rest upon him, or *built* upon him [Hiphil *בִּיהוָה בִּיָּאֲמִין*]. Not merely that he thought probable or certain that the promise would come true, but that he *ventured himself* upon God. So he committed himself to God when by faith he got himself out of his country, and from his kindred and from his father's house, and went out not knowing whither he went. So he ventured all upon God when that inexplicable summons came, obedience to which was the highest act of trust. He ventured upon God when, in the early dawn, he went forth to cleave the wood for the burnt offering; and all that weary three days' journey to Moriah, at every step he rested all his weight on God. So when he neared the journey's end, and climbed the mountain side with Isaac, bearing the fire and the knife, his faith was not the conviction of his mind what God would do; it was not the purpose of his mind what *he* would do; it was, moment by moment, what he *did*. Even then he might have faltered in his act, and having ventured thus far upon God, he might have failed to venture all, and his faith would then have been an imperfect, an unfinished faith,—a purpose to trust God wholly, but a purpose unfulfilled. But he did not falter. Having trusted in God, he trusted him to the end. He stretched forth his hand to slay his son. In that supreme act, he cast forth upon God's hands the treasure of his heart, the hope of his race, the token

and earnest of God's promise,—he flung himself, with his whole weight, on God's almightiness and faithfulness and love. In that act his faith became an actual thing,—it was “made perfect,—and the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, ‘he trusted in Jehovah, and it was counted to him for righteousness.’” You see, then, that it is by works—by the *act* of faith—that a man is justified, and not by a faith that does not act,—which is not faith, but only the dead corpse or effigy of faith.\*

(3.) This principle of a personal trust in God is the one common principle which we find through all the catalogue of true believers commenced in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and stretching from antediluvian Enoch and Abel down through ages of light or of barbarism to the latest of those who, in the kingdom of Christ, have obtained a good report through faith. It is the tie which binds into one the practical religion of the Old Testament and of

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\* For a full consideration, in this sense, of the faith of Abraham, see “Christian Faith, its Nature, Object, Causes, and Effects; by John H. Godwin.” London: 1862. pp. 29-37. This judicious treatise exhibits the necessary connection between Christian Faith, or Trust, and holiness of life, as follows:

“The term Trust expresses a more complex condition of mind [than belief]. It may, like belief, have respect to propositions, persons, and facts; but wherever there is an exercise of trust, there is not only some truth to be believed, there is also some good to be desired, and some course to be chosen. We may believe, when what we believe has no possible connection with our conduct. If there be sufficient evidence of truth and reality, there is all that is necessary for Belief. But we cannot *trust* a proposition, person, or fact, unless they are some way or other connected with our choice. There must be some ill to be removed or avoided, some good to be preserved or attained; and for these ends there must be something to be done or not done. There must be some occasion for the exercise of choice, or there can be no Trust. We *believe* that Xerxes invaded Greece, and that the orbits of the planets are elliptical; but we cannot *trust* to these propositions, because there is nothing to be desired or chosen in consequence of our belief of their truth. We may *believe* that a physician is able to remove sickness; but we cannot *trust* him, unless we, or some for whom we have to act, need to be restored to health. We may *believe* that a plank is strong enough to bear our weight, or a boat large enough to convey us safely across a stream; but we cannot *trust* to them unless we have occasion to use them; and *we trust to them by using them*. . . . There may be Belief, and no desire or choice; and if these exist, they are distinct from belief or consequent to it. But there cannot be Trust without choice, nor choice without some kind of desire; and *the choice is not distinct from the trust*” Pp. 9, 10.

the New. Only turn to the English concordance and you will be satisfied. The word *trust*, in the Old Testament, occurs two hundred and twenty-five times,—it is the synonym of piety, holiness, acceptableness with God.\* In the New Testament it almost disappears from use. In the Old Testament, the word Faith is found but *twice*, and *Believe*, perhaps, two score times. In the New Testament they are used nearly seven hundred times, and stand as the synonyms of all holiness. This is not because God has changed, or altered the conditions of his favor; but because we in our translations have changed from one word to another; and, unhappily, in changing the word have commonly let slip the meaning.

This one principle of common trust in a common Saviour is that which at this day, in every land, penetrating through the walls of sect and the divisions of opinion and the variations of religious experience, knits together all true believers into the unity of that one Holy Catholic Church, which is the communion of saints.

(4.) Finally, the condition of salvation, thus defined, is a voluntary act, and therefore a just condition, a practicable condition for every man, for every child. Demanding this, God is no longer presented to the world as one who would fain bribe or terrify the human intellect into a partial or biased decision of questions of evidence; nor as one who would extort the instantaneous exercise of emotions over which he has given no immediate control; but only as the stern enforcer, and the infinite rewarder of every man's simple duty towards a faithful Creator.

Have you never felt the point of that scoff against modern Christianity, that instead of teaching men that they must "be

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\* The Hebrew words which are usually employed to denote *faith, trust, confidence, reliance*, are from these four: 1. אָמֵן; 2. בָּטַח; 3. חָסָה; 4. שָׁעַן. Of these, the primary meanings, as stated by Gesenius, are—1. to support; 2. to lie down; 3. to flee; 4. to lean on. In the Septuagint, *πιστεύω* is commonly used for the first, and *πέποιθα* for the others. They do not appear to differ in their signification more than the four English words; agreeing in this, that all, in common usage, denote more than *belief*." See Godwin on Christian Faith, Appendix, p. 323.

converted and become as little children," it has taken to teaching little children that they must be converted and become like grown people? This scoff loses its point, when the faith which you preach is the child's own faith, the leaning of the weaker on the stronger, of the foolish on the All wise, of the sinful on the Infinitely Merciful, of the wavering on him that is Faithful and True:—the faith to which the wise and mighty find it hard to bow themselves, but which suffers little children to come unto the Lord, and in the mouths of babes and sucklings doth perfect his praise. Salvation by this faith is a salvation for every man. When the mind is weak and ill-instructed and cannot "understand all mysteries and all knowledge," it can yet trust, and so be saved. When evil habits have seized and bound one, and imperious passions do so dominate above the will as to leave no hope of successful struggle against them,—when life is shortening up moment by moment, and the issues of eternity are compressed within the compass of an hour,—when the sick and bewildered brain swims, and the intellect staggers in the vain effort to grasp new thoughts and arguments,—then this gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"—"Fear not; only believe"—comes to us, to every man, bringing great salvation. Having this promise, in the utmost conscious weakness, and ignorance, and sinfulness, one can rest confident in the arms of Him who is made to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification. Having this, the frightened soul that is shuddering on the giddy verge of eternity may compose itself to perfect peace, and, unperplexed with difficult and painful thoughts, may lean the aching head upon the bosom of the Lord,

"And breathe its life out sweetly there."

Thanks be to God for so great salvation, accessible to every creature! How shall we escape if we neglect it?

Only a few words remain to be said. Some are ready, perhaps, to complain of us for taking so much space in the needless demonstration of what no one doubts. But so long as the Scriptural definition of faith continues to be dropped out of the standard dictionaries of our language; so long as the

secular error on this point continues to be imbedded in the traditions and formularies of Christian churches, so long it cannot be needless to enforce the truth with line on line and precept upon precept.

For—ponder it well—if this doctrine of faith is right, the usage of Congregational churches concerning what they call “Confessions of Faith” is ALL WRONG. The very name of these documents is a misnomer. They are not “Confessions of Faith” but Articles of Doctrine. Sprung from that false theology which held faith and orthodoxy to be the same, they tend to perpetuate it; and to reduce the thoughtful men of our own day to the sad alternative which divided the theologians of Luther’s time—the choice between the peril of antinomianism, and the rejection of justification by faith. They warn away from the very threshold of our church-fellowship those thoughtful believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, whose very conscientiousness of opinion makes them hesitate at swearing in the words of human masters; while they offer no obstacle to the approach of those who hold an orthodoxy without faith; and of those unthinking novices, who solemnly and publicly, and calling God to witness, profess to believe the traditionary tenets of their sect, without knowing the arguments with which they are either gainsaid or defended.

The restoring of faith to its proper place in our conceptions, would, let us hope, do something to restore sound doctrine to its proper dignity. It is a lamentable, but a most natural reaction from that use of doctrine by which it has been set up as the test of church fellowship and the condition of salvation, to those silly sneers at sound and sober theology, which disfigure some of the most popular and eloquent Christian teaching of the day. For very conscience’ sake, because, forsooth, we must use our summaries of doctrine as a ritual for the induction of members into our churches, we have been compelled to cut them down to the most meagre and diplomatic statements, which any Christian might hold, and yet to confess, when we have done all, that there are some Christians that do not hold them. If we could but have *Confessions of Faith* that should read like those of ancient times, “*I believe on,*” instead of “*we*

*believe that ;*”\* then we might expect a freer use of popular *statements of doctrine* that should present the truth of Christ without trimming, and retrenchment, and diplomatic double meaning.

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\* The structure of “the Catholic creeds” is historically significant. In the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, there are only three Articles of *Faith*: “*I believe on the Father;*” “*I believe on the Son;*” “*I believe on the Holy Ghost.*” Then follow certain things which the Christian “believes,” “confesses,” and “expects.” From time to time, as the fashion of dealing with dissidents by anathema instead of argument grew in favor, item after item was inserted parenthetically under the second and third articles of faith, by which to entrap heretics in the act of confessing their faith. By and by, when the parentheses had outgrown the creed, the Athanasian method was adopted—“these dogmas are the Christian faith; hold them or be damned”—a method which is more or less illustrated in the Confessions of the Reformation and of modern Congregational and New School Presbyterian Churches, but which reaches its perfection in the doctrinal decrees of the Council of Trent.

This distinction in the language of the early creeds, in the use of *in be. fore Deum*, but not before *Ecclesiam*, is noted by Calvin (*Inst.* IV. i § 2). “*Ideo credere in Deum nos testamur, quod et in ipsum ut veracem animus noster se reclinat, et fiducia nostra in ipso acquiescit: quod in Ecclesiam non ita conveniret quemadmodum nec in remissionem peccatorum, aut carnis resurrectionem.*” He refers to Augustine and other early authors who give the same sense.

The same sense was insisted on in the early Waldensian catechism, long before the Reformation. “A dead faith is, to believe that there is a God, and to believe those things which relate to God, and not believe in him.”

“*Qu.* Dost thou believe in the Holy Catholic Church?”

*Ans.* No; for it is a creature; but I believe there is one.”

[Quoted in Milner’s Church History, Century XIII., Chap. iii.]