

What is a Believer?

Martin Zender Answers Jim Coram

Before I begin this report, you should know that Jim Coram and I are good friends. I have entertained him twice at my home. Jim has enjoyed my *Idle Babblers Illustrated* over the years, as I have benefited from his scholarly articles in *Unsearchable Riches* magazine. Jim's articles are sometimes difficult to read, but as my friend Matt says, "It is so comforting to know that the truth holds up to Jim's kind of scrutiny." I could not agree more.

The hardest part about writing this report is that I am convinced that, in his article titled, "Believing and Understanding" in the November, 2000, edition of *Unsearchable Riches* magazine, Jim Coram makes two key mistakes. These mistakes cause him to miss the mark on this important subject: What is a Believer? Jim would be the first one to admit, "it is possible." Of course, it is also possible that I could be mistaken. That is why I submit this critique of Jim's article to you, the body of Christ, that you may read for yourself and draw your own conclusions.

What does Jim believe on this subject, and how does it differ from what I believe? Jim holds that one may vitally and heartily embrace the doctrines of Free Will, Eternal Torment and the Trinity, and still be a believer, as Paul defines a believer (in 1 Cor. 15:3-4). I contend that the aforementioned doctrines are in direct opposition to foundational truths of the evangel, and that the vigorous holding of these doctrines keep people from apprehending *and* believing Paul's evangel, unto eonian life.

As many of you already know, I can be a bulldog when it comes to Scripture. I consider this a strength, not a weakness. Whenever I criticize someone's doctrinal stance, it is purely on a doctrinal level, and not a personal one. I try to write directly and simply, and some may mistake this for brusqueness. But it is not brusqueness. It is writing directly and simply.

The best way to handle this is for me to take Jim's article point for point and put in my bits. I

think this is a simple subject, really. It comes down to either/or, as in either you believe Jesus is your Savior, or you believe you save yourself. Either you believe Jesus died, or you believe His body died and *He* kept living. I think Jim makes this much more complicated than it has to be.

Here is the question someone asked in *Unsearchable Riches Magazine*, Volume 91. (The November, 2000, issue). I don't know who submitted it. Some people thought I did, since I was the one just teaching on this subject. But I didn't. It doesn't matter, really. This is a universally good question.

This question and Jim's writing (including his footnotes) will be in dark print. My comments (and my footnotes) will be in light print, as you see here.

BELIEVING AND UNDERSTANDING

Question:

We have been blessed by receiving *Unsearchable Riches* for many years, and always enjoy the thoughts of each one who writes articles in it.

I have noticed, however, that many times, you speak of the so-called "Christian churches" as "our brethren in Christ," stating that they are included among the called and chosen ones who will be vivified in the presence of Christ.

Paul taught you must believe that Jesus died, and was dead and then resurrected after three days. Most all, however, teach that Jesus never really died (nor that anyone else ever really died, for that matter), but that He went on living while His body remained in the tomb, preaching to spirits in prison during that time. This is contrary to what the Bible plainly teaches concerning the state of the dead.

Most churches more or less teach the gospel of the Circumcision, claiming that one must be baptized, pay tithes, do good works, and so forth, in order to be saved. Also, they teach that if you don't believe like they do, then you will be put in hellfire and tormented forever and ever. Isn't this a different evangel than what Paul taught, and subject to his "anathema"?

Do you believe that those who "believe in Jesus" (including the majority of Americans who make this very claim) are really members of the ecclesia of God? While I believe that all mankind will eventually be saved, I don't believe that those who believe and teach a different evangel than that of the apostle Paul are members of the body of Christ nor that any such opposers will be granted eonian life in Christ's presence.

If you believe I am wrong here, please show me, because I want to know and am willing to learn.

Answer:

We appreciate your kind words concerning our ministry. The affirmation which you make here is concerned with the question of what it means to be a believer. This is a perennial question which we receive. Sometimes, as in your case, it arises independently, as a result of one's own studies. More often, as has been the case a number of times over the years and happens to be so at present as well, various ones of our friends become exercised concerning this question, as the result of some mutual friend's having adopted such a position, contrary to our own teaching on this subject.

Such a course should never be presumed to be wrong nor viewed as necessarily a bad thing, even if, due to the human weakness of all concerned, regrettable incidents will sometimes occur as

a result of the public consideration of such “new teaching.”

If our findings should be mistaken, and one truly has eyes to see that this is so, then they should be rejected. This is the case just as surely as it is also true that if our teachings should be correct, and one truly has eyes to see that that is so, they should be accepted.

For that matter, even if our position itself should be correct, it may be that hitherto we have failed to adequately explain it, at least with respect to certain questions, ones that even a thoughtful and conscientious reader might still have, having reviewed our existing literature.

That which the Scriptures actually *reveal*, directing our hearts into a true understanding of their declarations, alone is the arbiter of truth. Every one of us is quite up to the task of being mistaken; neither is it any great achievement simply to *happen* to be correct. What we are *not* able for, of ourselves, however, is the achievement of that most formidable task, not simply of being correct, but of being correct according to the ascertainment of the conclusive evidence which actually proves the veracity of our position.

In replying to the various issues which arise in respect to your inquiry, perhaps it would be best for me to begin simply by clarifying a few incidental points which you introduce, related to our consideration of the principal issue which we wish to evaluate. That issue is whether it is so that one who misunderstands something, therefore necessarily disbelieves it as well.

This is the heart of the thing: misunderstanding versus disbelief.

You are surely correct in suggesting that the traditional teachings of Christendom are, and that to a great degree, a “different evangel” than that brought by Paul, and that those heralding such an evangel must therefore be subject to the apostle’s “anathema” upon all who follow such a course.

But the question remains, Of what does Paul’s anathema consist? We can only know the answer to this question if we first of all know the nature and particulars of Paul’s evangel, which entails a knowledge as well of the delimiting factors determinative of the boundaries of that company to whom it applies.

The nature and particulars of Paul’s evangel entail it being so that this evangel is for all who are called and chosen of God, according to that evangel, irrespective of their faithfulness, whether of deed or doctrine. Such ones, even if unworthy of service, have nevertheless been granted a measure of faith (*cp* Rom. 12:3). They are at least believing that Jesus died and rose (*cp* 1 Thess. 4:14), and give evidence of their calling in their testimony of heart, “Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24).

Jim says that the chosen of God are “at least believing that Jesus died and rose.” With this, Jim is agreeing with what I have been saying, that there is an “at least” involved in Paul’s evangel. There is a minimum of something that those who are chosen of God will be believing. And it does have to do with the death of Christ. It does have to do with acknowledging the power and wisdom of God.

Here’s my question: how can it be that people who assert that they are saved by their own free will are at the same time giving the “testimony of heart” that *God’s* power saved them? The word of the cross is stupidity to those who are perishing. “The word of the cross” is the message of the sufficiency of the cross. Those who believe in free will certainly do not see that the cross is sufficient. If they really believed in the power of God, they would not feel the desperate need to work up their own power in order to be saved, or to defend the teaching that insists one must do so.

All who believe that Jesus died and rose are believers; and, all such ones are included in the “ecclesia of God.”

Should any be disbelieving, God will be remaining faithful to His blessed promises concerning them (*cf* 2 Tim. 2:13).

Jim, I believe, is jumping from apple orchards to orange groves here without notifying us of the change in fruit. This first statement has to do with people *coming into* the body of Christ, and the “at least” beliefs they will have. The second statement has to do with those who are already *in* the body of Christ (who have already come to believe certain “at least” things), but who backslide into disbelief. It is true that members of the body (who are “at least believing that Jesus died and rose”) cannot be un-membered. But Jim’s use of “should any be disbelieving” so near to “all who believe that Jesus died,” suggests to the unwary reader that people who are disbelieving that Jesus died (that is, who never *have* believed that Jesus died) are still, somehow, members of the body of Christ. Jim squeezes these “believers” and “disbelievers” too close together, as if the “any” who should be “disbelieving” *can* be those who never have believed in the death of Christ and the power of God.

But, again, these are two different groups of people in two completely different circumstances, and they shouldn’t be linked like this, as if they’re the same. 1 Corinthians 15: 1-3 should not be linked with 2 Timothy 2:13. The one group is coming *into* the body, the other group is already in the body and is backsliding.

These include, even today, membership in the ecclesia, and for the future, eonian life and glory, even if, due to their own lack of faithfulness, they should forfeit an allotment of eonian reigning in that day. Therefore, it must be that the nature of the anathema which will befall any among them who may bring a “different evangel,” is confined to the loss of the present knowledge and appreciation of much important truth. Indeed, in this practical sense of present-day “destruction,” that of forfeiting a life lived according to truth together with the enjoyment of a concomitant spiritual walk, any course which precludes such blessed privilege is certainly a most destructive course. It is a pathway which evinces a corresponding utter failure to get hold of eonian life, and to do so “really” (*cp* John 17:3, 1 Tim. 6:12, 6:19).

My friend and fellow member of the body of Christ Ted McDivitt and I met one night last October at the Bob Evans restaurant in Medina, Ohio, for the purpose of discussing this important topic, “What is a believer?” Before Jim wrote his article, Ted was the only person who brought Scripture to the table on the heels of my tape series, *What is a Believer?*

Ted and I arrived with books and *UR* articles, and of course our Bibles. Ted brought out verses like 2 Timothy 2:13 and others (verses from Galatians, and from 1 Corinthians, chapter 3), showing members of the body of Christ suffering some sort of loss resulting from their backslidings, loss such as not ruling for the eons. Ted’s passages had to do with people like the Galatians, who had *begun* well (that is, people who were already believers), but then had “fallen out of grace,” or gone off on a doctrinal tangent.

I, on the other hand, brought up passages such as Philippians 1:27-30 and 3:18-19 and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, verses that had to do with those who never had accepted the basic testimony of the death of Christ and the power of God for salvation, whose “eonian destruction”

would result, not only in a loss of appreciation of the truth in *this* life, but in eonian death in the future.

After dinner, I pulled out some of the structures I had found in these passages (à la Bullinger), that proved that enemies of the cross and opposers of truth suffer, not just loss in this life, but eonian extermination. (I am including these structures at the end of this report.)

Ted was impressed with the structures. He ended up studying them in detail later and could find no fault with them. From this meeting, Ted and I concluded that there are *two* sets of verses in Scripture, one set detailing eonian loss for those pseudo-believers who never have believed, the other set detailing eonian loss for those who have believed (such as the Galatians) and have fallen away. The one “eonian loss” is eonian death, the other “eonian loss” is, as Jim says, “forfeiting a life lived accord to truth,” loss of “present knowledge and appreciation” and forfeiting “an allotment of reigning.”

I can truly say of Ted and myself that each of us would surrender any belief he had if the other could show him where he was mistaken. That’s how much respect Ted and I have for one another’s scholarship and opinion. There was such a lack of ego at this meeting, so much listening and considering of the other’s viewpoint, that I feel compelled to report it.

I bring up this meeting because the points discussed deal directly with Jim’s tendency (his tendency as I perceive it) to mix these two groups of people: **1)** feigned believers (whom I would call unbelievers) and **2)** believers who backslide.¹

At this point in Jim’s article, before he gets to the next section titled, “Believing in Jesus,” he inserts a footnote. The footnote says: **For a more detailed consideration of the question of the necessary scope and sense of the apostle Paul’s declaration in which he avers, “Let him be anathema!” see *Unsearchable Riches*, “Let Him Be Anathema!” vol. 87, pp. 9-22)**

This was one of the *UR* articles Ted and I had brought to Bob Evans. We both tremendously respect Jim Coram’s scholarship (and we are both friends of Jim Coram) and so this article was, to us, the one to read on the subject of Paul’s anathema. I had re-read the article before meeting Ted, and had written in a notebook several places where I thought Jim was missing the big point. Ted understood where I was having problems, and he agreed with me that it would be good to write Jim about it. So I went home and wrote him. I did this over five months ago now, and I have not yet received a response from Jim. I know Jim is very busy, and so I did not expect an immediate response.

But here is the letter. I share this with you because it has to do with this subject of *What is a*

¹A significant discovery that came from the Bob Evans meeting was noticing how Paul uses the word “lamenting” in Philippians 3:18 concerning those who were walking among the believers but who were yet “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose consummation is destruction,” but how he only used the word “marveling” with the Galatians, who had begun well in the spirit, but now were getting off track. “Lamenting” is a very strong word in the Greek, often associated with death, whereas “marveling” is not nearly as strong. Both Ted and I believe there is a reason why Paul used these particular words for these particular people in their own particular circumstances. It comes back to differing degrees of “eonian destruction.” This makes a lot of sense to us, and Ted and I are both beginning to “correctly cut” the word of truth to an even greater degree.

Believer? After this letter, I will return to the current article.

Dear Jim,

Greetings from Greenwich, Ohio.

I submit this letter and tape series (*What is a Believer?*) to you in the expectation that your skills of logic outweigh mine, and that you will correct me where I have swerved from the truth. This is not to say I have not tried to be logical. In fact, I have tried hard. I am not justified by this, however, especially having just laid my logic skills at your feet.

I also submit this letter and tape series in the hopes of overcoming the bad press that has plagued my recent teachings. I have endured public relational nightmares at the hands of the self-sent, who have misrepresented my vital points. I have no ill will toward these individuals except where their zeal has surpassed their knowledge. This is why I am distributing my tapes.

In your article titled “*LET HIM BE ANATHEMA!*”² you rightly state what characterizes people as either unbelievers or believers:

It is not a matter, however, of a failure to believe other important teachings, but of a failure to believe the central message of “Christ crucified,” His death and resurrection, that shows that one is lost. Conversely, where these same glorious essentials *are* believed, we have the evidence that one is saved. All who see in Christ, God’s own wisdom and power, who believe as well that Jesus died and rose, are included among God’s people (*cf* 1 Cor. 1:21-25; 1 Thess. 4:14). This is so, even if they should be utensils of dishonor as to their service, having been given over to foolish myths (pgs. 18-19).

I am happy that you would use the word “evidence.” I like this word, and you are bold to use it. You have stood on the word of God and are brave enough to draw black and white conclusions from it.

And yet I see a glaring conclusion in your article, standing in a spotlight of evidence, that you do not recognize.

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While declaring here that a failure to believe the central message of Christ crucified, “shows that one is lost,” I am wondering why, for the rest of your article, you ignore violent and glaring evidence “that shows that one is lost,” in favor of assuming that the people who display such violent and glaring evidence are nonetheless saved.

²Unsearchable Riches, January 1996, pgs. 9-22

To first adequately describe the nature of the false evangel submitted to the Galatians by those disturbing them, I quote from Vladimir Gelesnoff's *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*. On page 30, Mr. Gelesnoff writes:

In every particular the circumcisionist gospel was diametrically opposed to Paul's. It was a garbled, mutilated, emasculated gospel; a travesty and a caricature of the gospel of grace—in a word, a *bastard* gospel in the fullest sense of the word.

I trust that you agree with Mr. Gelesnoff's appraisal, for you have written in the article under examination concerning *any* who would bring such a false gospel (underlines mine):

Apart from repentance, such will spend their careers in essential and vital opposition to the grace of God. It means that their ministries cannot but become a substantial disservice to others, through which many are injured and deceived. Worst of all, Paul's anathema entails God's displeasure with the ministry of all such ones, at least with respect to the essential character and content of their teaching. It means a life lived under the power of strong delusion; a strong delusion of a most insidious nature (pg. 21).

And again on page 21:

If one finally owes their enjoyment of divine blessing to themselves, it is impossible for them to thank God for it. Such cannot glorify God as God, and must to a considerable extent involve themselves in the veneration of the creature rather than the Creator. They cannot thank God alone even for their virtues, much less for their failures, which will yet bring glory to Him, for they imagine that they themselves are ultimately responsible for their deeds.

What more evidence could we wish to see of a failure to believe the central message of Christ crucified? Such individuals, **1)** essentially and vitally oppose the grace of God, **2)** are mistaken in the essential character and content of their teaching, **3)** owe their salvation to themselves, **4)** worship the creature rather than the Creator, and **5)** hold themselves ultimately responsible for their deeds.

In light of this, you will understand my surprise at your statement on page 19:

There is no indication that those who were disturbing the Galatians denied [the] most basic elements of faith.

No indication? We have people here who are essentially and vitally opposing the grace of God, who are mistaken in the essential character and content of their teaching, who owe their salvation to themselves, who worship the creature rather than the Creator, who hold themselves ultimately responsible for their deeds, and yet there is “no indication” that such people deny the most basic elements of faith, one of which is a recognition of God's power in the cross of Christ?

If there were some better indication, I would not know what it would be.

It is even more surprising that you would play the belief of “glorious *essentials*” for salvation (pg. 19) against “*essential* opposition” (pg. 21) and the “*essential* character” (pg. 21) of false teachings, and make these homogeneous by insisting that those who oppose the essentials are yet members

of the body of Christ.³ That one must believe *essentials* to be saved is understandable. But that one may also vigorously deny the same essentials and *also* be saved, shakes our confidence in your understanding of the word “essential.”

As illogical as this may be (and as far as it may be from what you *meant* to say), one may easily draw the following conclusion from what you *wrote*:

1) There are certain essentials that belong to the evangel. Believing these essentials shows one to be saved. Not believing them shows one to be lost.

2) Nevertheless, both those who show themselves to be believing these essentials *as well as those who show themselves to not be believing them*, are saved.

As readers, then, our question to you would be: *what happened to the recognition of evidence? If there is to be no recognition of evidence, that is, if evidence is not to be a factor in determining who are believers and who are not, why did you broach the subject of evidence in the first place, as if it meant something?*

But if you do mean to say that evidence means something, why don't you trust your own evidence concerning those who are plainly portrayed by you in this article (in accord with your own standards of evidence) to be unbelievers?

I venture it is because you have a bias toward unbelievers bordering on denial. I venture it is because you are generous to a fault in dispensing the benefit of the doubt to apparent unbelievers, to the extreme that you would artificially contrive doubt where, to an unbiased person, no doubt exists.

Case in point #1:

You argue on page 19:

All who see in Christ, God's own wisdom and power, who believe as well that Jesus died and rose, are included among God's people. This is so, even if they should be utensils of dishonor as to their service, having been given over to foolish myths.

You are assuming that these who hold foolish myths have necessarily been “given over” to them, as if they once held pure truth, but now have fallen into falsehood. But where is the evidence that any such ones did any such thing? We have no such evidence. But you, yourself, have offered evidence as to what characterizes an unbeliever (the holding of foolish myths such as owing one's salvation to oneself, which is evidence that one *does not see* in Christ God's power), such evidence as applies to the “utensils of dishonor” you here describe.

Thus, you have denied your evidence to support your supposition.

Case in point #2:

On page 21, you write:

Paul's anathema upon those who proclaim a different evangel, entails their loss of wages

³That is, they appear “at the dais of Christ”—page 21, paragraph 2.

at the dais of Christ.

Again you assume that such ones who proclaim the different evangel of Galatians 1:6 are members of the body of Christ (for only members of the body of Christ appear at the dais of Christ). This, even though they “spend their careers in essential and vital opposition to the grace of God.” Again, you have denied evidence to support a supposition.

In light of what Vladimir Gelesnoff said concerning this “different evangel,” and what you say concerning those proclaiming it, are you willing to admit that one who holds to a gospel that is the exact opposite of everything Paul taught concerning vital and essential truth (“In every particular the circumcisionist gospel—that is, the pseudo-gospel brought *by* the circumcisionists—was diametrically opposed to Paul’s”—*Gelesnoff*) has eonian life right along with one who holds to Paul’s gospel as proclaimed from the mouth of God?⁴

I believe you hold this bias toward unbelievers because you, as well as many in Concordant circles, have mistaken an era of grace for an era of nice. Because we are living in an administration of the grace of God, perhaps you believe that God now uses grace to eradicate lines of distinction between belief and unbelief. Perhaps, to you, grace means manufacturing sympathetic doubt for rank unbelievers who, though they speak outwardly of “the salvation of Christ,” inwardly revel in salvation by self and vehemently oppose every truth shown them.

As for me, I believe grace to be the nature of God’s new message; it does not guarantee that many will embrace that message. In fact, the cross is called a snare and a stumbling block. Look around you and see how many it has snared. See how many stumble at it by denying its sufficiency. Does it seem to you that the millions stumbling and snared by the cross would also be grasping vital and essential truths concerning it? Your article seems to allow for that, as it suggests that the common delusions of Christianity—delusions such as Free Will that result *from* the snare of the cross—still somehow let in enough light to keep one free of the snare of the cross and able to grasp vital and essential truth concerning it. This puts us into an odd situation. For, if we can use the adjective “snared” to describe those who *are* grasping the vital and essential truths of the cross, what adjective do we use to describe those who are *not* grasping them? “Snared?” But we just used that adjective to describe those who *are* grasping them.

Some believe that the many pseudo-believers surrounding us who deny every essential of Paul’s gospel, who are said in the Scriptures to be “perishing,” and “whose consummation is destruction,” are perishing and being destroyed in their appreciation of Christ in this life only, and are still believers. If this is true, then what word do we use to describe those who *believe* the essentials of Paul’s gospel? “Believers?” But we just used that word to describe those who *deny*

⁴Perhaps you want to say that the disturbers merely *brought* this pseudo-gospel and did not embrace it themselves. But I don’t get this from you, especially in paragraph 2 of page 21, where you write, “Paul’s anathema upon those who *proclaim* a different evangel (emphasis mine), entails their loss of wages at the dais of Christ,” then say of the same people in the same paragraph, “It means *a life lived under the power of strong delusion*; a strong delusion of a most insidious nature.” Since one who brings this pseudo gospel is the same who lives under it (according to this paragraph), then the objection remains: how is it that those who deny the essentials of Paul’s gospel have eonian life right along with those who embrace the essentials? If you would say, “because of grace,” I would rejoin: “Then why does Saddam Hussein not have eonian life? He, too, denies the essentials of Paul’s gospel.”

the essentials of Paul's gospel. I have thought that, in order to see this view, one would need to squint and look sideways at the contexts. I have since found evidence in the structure of these passages that the "perishing" and "destruction" of these contexts do refer to eonian life, or the lack thereof.

This seems natural. To me, it follows that one who is "being saved" in this life continues "being saved" unto eonian life, and that one who is "perishing" in this life—so long as one continues on in such a course—perishes unto eonian extermination. This is reasonable, natural, logical. I do not have to squint or look sideways to see it. What I do have to squint and look sideways to see is how these two phrases: "whose consummation is destruction" and "who is being saved," both describe people who are entering into eonian life.

I believe that the structures support my view, and I am including them in this package.

I do not want to believe that Satan has tricked you, along with the rest, into believing that the zealous holding of his premier doctrines (Free Will, the Trinity and Eternal Torment) is irrelevant to eonian life. I pray that you, too, have not forgotten the deadly subtlety of Satan's teachings. And yet, based on the following statement, I have to wonder. Page 19:

There is no indication that those who were disturbing the Galatians denied these most basic elements of faith. Indeed, it is not credible to suppose that they did do so. The Galatians would hardly welcome the teaching of any who actually made any such extreme, foundational denials.

Are you forgetting how subtle is the doctrine of human free will? Free Will denies the "most basic element of faith," the truth that Jesus Christ died for our sins, that we are saved through Him and not through ourselves. And yet the doctrine of Free Will itself passes for truth. It surprises me you would think that an extreme departure from truth would necessarily be easily detected. We see today how many millions of Christians welcome the teaching of Free Will, even though it *is* an extreme denial of the sufficiency of Christ's work. And yet Satan has robed Free Will in such innocuous garb that no one notices its deadline.⁵

(Jim, it was from you I learned that those who embrace Free Will are humanists in disguise. You said this in your Free Will series. It stunned me when I heard it, and I've never forgotten it. I mention you and this statement of yours on Tape #3 of my current series; I state that you were the one responsible for me embarking upon this teaching. And indeed, you are. My teachings on *What is a Believer?* are a direct result of taking your statement concerning humanists to its logical conclusion.)

I also wonder when I read on the bottom of page 18:

It is not a matter, however, of a failure to believe other important teachings, but of a failure to believe the central message of "Christ crucified," His death and resurrection, that shows that one is lost.

⁵I am not saying here that Free Will was the poison sneaked into the Galatian ecclesia. I am only relaying my surprise at your apparent denial that any false teaching of Satan's, even that teaching which would deny a foundation of faith, would be anything but subtle, sweet and easily-welcomed.

What are these “other important teachings” you speak of? I pray that they are not the sovereignty of God, the death of Christ and the salvation of all. Because the failure to believe any of these teachings keeps one *from* believing the central message of “Christ crucified,” His death and resurrection. I hope you will not say with the rest: “As long as you believe Jesus died for your sins, you can believe in Free Will.” Or, “As long as you believe that Jesus died and rose, you can believe in the Trinity.” Free Will *denies* the death of Christ for our sins, and the Trinity *denies* the death and resurrection of Christ. The death of Christ for sins, and the doctrine of Free Will, are mutually exclusive doctrines. They are as mutually exclusive as the death and resurrection of Christ and the Trinity.

There is more I could say, but I will stop here. I trust you will not despise my youth. If I have overstepped my bounds by addressing you improperly as my elder in the Lord, I trust you will deal graciously with me.

If I have completely missed your point somewhere along the way (it is quite possible), please tell me how and I will apologize. I know you will see through my brashness to my yearning for truth.

Please listen to all four tapes before writing back (there are many more important considerations there)—if you desire to write back.

I am sending this letter, these tapes and the structures to Dean Hough and Ted McDivitt, both of whom are aware of and interested in this discussion.

My family sends their warmest greetings. I remain yours in Christ Jesus,

Martin

That was the letter I wrote back in November. And now, back to the article from volume 91 of *Unsearchable Riches Magazine*.

“BELIEVING IN JESUS”

Of course we would not speak of those groups or congregations themselves, as such (i.e., as collective entities), commonly termed “Christian churches,” as being “our brethren in Christ.” We would, however (based on such passages as Ephesians 4:11-14), suppose that there are individual persons within at least some such groups who are in Christ. Insofar as religious affiliation is concerned, God’s chosen ones may well be members of various diverse communions, or of no formal community at all.

Granted.

Where you ask whether we believe that those who “believe in Jesus” (I take it that you mean, as their Saviour) are really members of the ecclesia of God, you first of all point out the fact that there are many millions of persons, both past and present (including, according to polls, vast numbers of Americans), who profess such very faith. Hence you wish to know if it is our opinion that, factually, all such persons are also members of the ecclesia of God, called and chosen of Him.

Our answer to this question is, No. Surely not all who claim to “believe in Jesus” are truly in Christ. Many who *profess* faith, may nevertheless not *possess* faith. Whether due to some type of peer pressure (in the interests of, for example, civil, political, or social advantage), or merely concern for one’s own personal safety (for example, out of fear that the teaching of the eternal torment of unbelievers might somehow be true), many may profess to believe—and even seek to believe—who nonetheless do not, in fact, believe.

This has been my very teaching, that many who profess to believe do not believe. Those who are chosen beforehand for membership into Christ’s body may live three-quarters of their lives totally ignorant of God. But once they are actually *called* (into the body of Christ, not into merely an *interest* in Christ), they will be found to be believing certain essentials of the evangel. That is, they *will* demonstrate doctrinal faithfulness. It will be evidence that they have been designated (chosen) beforehand.

But as to any question of what even the approximate percentage of those who are naming the name of the Lord may be who are also truly in Christ, we simply do not have an opinion. Perhaps it is a fairly high percentage, perhaps it is quite a low percentage; we do not know. But since we do not wish to be disposed above what is written, and, hence, do not wish to place confidence in human speculations, we prefer simply to avoid all speculation concerning that particular question.

Yes, but I *do* have an opinion, and my opinion is based on Scriptural evidence, not speculation. Here is where Jim and others have chosen to quit the trail, and where I have picked up the scent and gone on.

There is a day in the future of which Jesus prophesied, saying, “**Many** will be declaring to Me in that day, ‘Lord! Lord! Was it not in Your name that we prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many powerful deeds?’ And then shall I be avowing to them that ‘I never knew you! Depart from Me, workers of lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:22-23.)

The word I want to emphasize, obviously, is “many.” The day is coming when *many* will be doing things in the name of Christ, but who will in fact be workers of lawlessness. This strongly suggests that those who profess faith today but who do not actually possess it are of a “high percentage” compared with those who profess it and actually have it. Besides, anyone with even a half dose of spiritual sense can see that the Christian religion and its members are in full-fledged apostasy, their hearing being tickled, heaping up teachers in accord with their own desires, and having a form of devoutness yet denying the power.

Jim wants to “avoid all speculation” concerning this particular question of who is a believer and who is not. (This, in spite of his statement in the January, 1996 edition of *UR*, that there are certain beliefs that “**show** that one is lost,” and certain beliefs that give “**evidence** that one is saved.” But then, as already shown, Jim unaccountably shies away later in the article from drawing conclusions based on his own standard of evidence.)⁶ Paul is not so reticent. In Philippians 1:28, he encourages the church, saying, “...not being startled by those who are

⁶ Perhaps those who know Jim *can* account for this shyness; Jim is a nice person. By nature, he would hesitate to apply his conclusions to actual *people*. Jim does not want to hurt anyone’s feelings. Indeed, we should live at peace with all mankind as much as we are able. But when an individual actively perverts the straight ways of God, to the point of keeping others *from* God, we must be bold in our exposure and rebuke. For just such an example of purposeful and constructive boldness, see the apostle Paul’s handling of Elymas in Acts 13:6-12.

opposing in anything, which is to them a proof of destruction, yet of your salvation...”

I milked details from this passage in my tape series *What is a Believer?* Paul considers opposition to his message *a proof* that the opposers are being destroyed. The question then becomes, *are these people destroyed merely in their current appreciation of the truth, or are they destroyed unto eonian death?* The answer to that question is found in the structure of this passage. According to the structure, those who are opposing are also UNBELIEVERS. (See structure included at the back of this report.) Thus, the destruction of the context is that which belongs to unbelievers, not backslidden believers. Thus, the destruction of the context is eonian death.

CAREFULNESS IN EXPRESSION

You made mention of the apostle Paul, stating that he taught that we “must believe...” I would only suggest here (and I trust you will agree with me), that, apart from the question of, specifically, that which is to be believed, it was not Paul’s custom, as such, to speak baldly in such terms. Instead, it is so, simply corollarily to what Paul *did* declare that we, indeed, “must believe.”

I mention this only because most, when hearing that which is true in itself here, namely, that we must do something in order to be saved, will mistakenly conclude that our doing thereof is not under God’s ultimate control but our own. Most will further suppose if there is something that we *must* do in order to be saved, that it follows from this that whatever we *must* do, God therefore *requires* us to do. Any such notion, however, is simply a presumption; it is not necessarily a fact. And, it is a presumption which cannot be a fact, since it is contrary to the truth that our salvation and eonian life is a gracious gift apart from works. This includes all human efforts to believe, as well as all of man’s supposed own endeavors of non-resistance in response to the operations of the spirit.

It is not that we are *required* to believe, but that we are *graciously granted* to be believing (Phil. 1:29). Indispensable antecedent obedience need not be that of the meeting of a requirement; it may instead be (as is the case in the evangel of our salvation) simply the fulfilling of an essentiality.⁷

This is a vital distinction to a correct understanding of the nature of the evangel. Therefore, it is important for us to be circumspect and careful not to leave the wrong impression in any instance in which we may speak of it being so that, in some respect, we “must believe.”

I have strained to make myself clear on this point as well, that faith is ultimately of God, and that those designated beforehand for membership into Christ’s body *will* be believing certain vital aspects of Paul’s evangel, only because God will cause them to believe. And they will be believing truths, not lies. Thus, we are not saved for the eons by believing correct doctrine. Rather, believing correct doctrine is evidence that we are saved for the eons.

Because I said that one had to unhand the doctrine of Free Will in order to be saved, it was suggested to me at a conference that I was just as bad as those who said a person “must make a decision for Christ” in order to be saved. But the person who said this wrongfully put me into the same camp as those who, as Jim Coram says, “mistakenly conclude that our doing thereof is not under God’s ultimate control.” Those who say we “must make a decision for Christ,” assume that the human is the deciding, the absolute, factor in salvation. However, when *I* say,

⁷For definition of terms, as well as a consideration of the tremendous difference between a “requirement” and an “essentiality,” see *Unsearchable Riches*, vol. 91, p. 173.

“you must unhand Free Will,” I speak in the relative sense, in the same sense that Jim Coram says, “in some respect, we ‘must believe.’” And so, “in some respect” (the relative respect) people “must unhand Free Will” if they are to be saved.

INCONSISTENT ARGUMENTS

You further spoke of Paul as teaching that “Jesus died, and was dead and then resurrected after three days.” I am sure you will be glad for me to quote exactly the passage to which you refer: “Now I am making known to you, brethren, the evangel which I bring to you, which also you accepted, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you are retaining what I said in bringing the evangel to you, outside and except you believe feignedly. For I give over to you among the first what also I accepted, that *Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was entombed, and that He has been roused the third day according to the scriptures...*” (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

There are many things to consider here, and judge correctly, if we would possess a full and accurate understanding of these words comprising the evangel. This is true of certain related points as well, such as the matter of the present aspect of salvation (*cf* “through which...[we] are being saved”), that is, as Paul indicates, except in the case of one who is believing “feignedly” (i.e., not genuinely).

One issue here, it is true, is that of attaining to a full and correct understanding of what is meant by the words, “Christ *died...*” even as by the declarations which affirm that, “*He* was entombed...” and “*He* has been roused....”

There is, however, an additional important issue to take notice of here as well, in this summary declaration of the evangel, one which, even as the question of death, is also capable of being either correctly or incorrectly understood. That issue is this: In what sense is it so that Christ’s death, entombment, and resurrection occurred “according to the Scriptures”?

I think Jim goes off on a tangent here. Here is where, in my opinion, he makes this subject much more complicated than it is. I’ll show you why I think that in a little bit. But for now, here is what Jim has to say:

Is it that one need only truly believe that this was so according to whatever the Old Testament may have to say concerning the coming Anointed One, or is it instead that one must first possess a full, accurate knowledge of the grand and complex theme of Hebrew Christology, both typically and prophetically, in all its ins and outs, within the compass of the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures?

If our argument is that one must understand the subject of death correctly, else one cannot “really believe” that Christ died, our argument must likewise be that one must also understand the subject of Hebrew Christology correctly, else one cannot “really believe” that Christ’s death was according to the Scriptures. It would be inconsistent and absurd to insist that one’s incorrect knowledge of the former theme (including one’s holding of incompatible doctrines, contrary to the truth thereof), precludes one’s membership in Christ’s body, while denying that one’s incorrect knowledge of this latter theme does not preclude one’s membership in Christ’s body.

I have considered the difficult subject of Hebrew Christology in some detail for over thirty years, having read learned books on the subject, besides doing my own further, incidental research, together with informal reflection and meditation from day to day. Though it may be so that I know somewhat more about this subject than many others, it is undoubtedly so that I know much less about it than those scholars who have made this theme their specialty.

In any case, it is beyond question that I do not understand the subject of Christology “correctly.” This is because, first of all, I am not even fully cognizant of it, which makes it

impossible for me to understand it correctly.⁸

It is a practical certainty as well that I am at least somewhat mistaken in my consideration of this subject, whether these errors should be sins of commission or omission. Therefore, I do not fully grasp all that is an object of faith relative to this subject. For that matter, we may be likewise certain that the same is true not only of myself but even of the most learned specialists in this field as well. Yet if it is so that one must correctly understand the entirety of that which comprises the evangel in order to partake of future eonian life, then not only are those who believe in immortal souls precluded from this blessing but those as well who fail to understand the doctrines of Christology.

Mercy. From straining over these paragraphs, I *think* Jim is saying that: if somebody insists that people have to have a full and accurate understand of the subject of death, they must also insist that people have to have a full and accurate understanding of Hebrew Christology, because “understanding Hebrew Christology” is apparently Jim’s interpretation of “according to the Scriptures.” It is not mine. Mine is much simpler.

But first of all, let’s analyze the first paragraph of Jim’s lengthy statement. This is his “either/or” proposition. To Jim, there are two ways one may arrive at believing in the death, entombment and resurrection of Christ. Either a person “need only truly believe that this was so according to whatever the Old Testament may have to say concerning the coming Anointed One,” or “one must first possess a full, accurate knowledge of the grand and complex theme of Hebrew Christology...” Jim assumes my position to be the latter, which it is certainly not. *His* position is the former. It is in the first category that Jim would place the millions of nominal Christians. But do the nominal Christians belong here? Let us see.

The Old Testament has much to say concerning death, that it is the absence of life. I cannot cite all the passages here, but one could start with Ecclesiastes 9, verses 5 and 10, then proceed to Job 3:11-19, then to Isaiah 38:18, then to Psalm 146:4, then to Daniel 12:1-2. Christians have much Scripture that accurately describes what death is. God is very clear about it, and writes repeatedly concerning it. Obviously, He wants people to know what death is, for we can see how important the subject becomes later on, when the death of Christ becomes the founding stone of the evangel.

And yet, in spite of all this Scriptural evidence, nominal Christians clings tenaciously to what death is *not*; they believe the *opposite* of the Scriptural truth concerning it. What excuse do they have, relatively speaking, except that they value tradition over truth, and heed the teaching of Satan (“You shall not surely die”) over the teachings of God? This is no mere misunderstanding, it is rank unbelief. And so, as much as Jim strains to get them into the circle of faith, this vast group of people cannot even meet his “only” requirement.

Next, I have never insisted that one “must understand the subject of death correctly.” No. Rather, I have said that one must understand death, *period*. One does not have to know everything there is to know about death in order to understand the evangel. But one does have to at least know that dead people are not alive. If a person thinks death is life, that person is not merely “understanding the subject of death incorrectly” (that’s giving him too much credit), but

⁸It is impossible for one to understand *correctly* any discrete topic or subtopic of which he is simply ignorant, concerning which he therefore possesses no understanding at all.

is misunderstanding death itself, and that entirely.

Someone who thinks that there are fourteen people on a football team is “not understanding the subject of football correctly.” Someone who thinks “football” is a disease people get from wearing wool socks, is far beyond “not understanding the subject of football correctly,” *because they are not even on the subject of football.*

Let’s plug 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 into a common, non-scriptural context. Doing this will help us understand the sense of “according to the scriptures,” and will make Jim’s lengthy argument unnecessary.

“For I give over to you among the first what I also accepted, that Bill went to Chicago according to his wife Alma, that he stayed in Chicago, and that he left Chicago after three days according to his wife Alma.”

In light of *this* simple statement (Paul’s statement is just as simple, though we somehow make it complicated and heavy when it becomes Scriptural), Jim’s concerns are absurd. Let me plug his words into this parallel, non-scriptural example and show you what I mean. I know this is laborious reading, but it is necessary to help you understand my point:

There are many things to consider here, and judge correctly, if we would possess a full and accurate understanding of these words comprising Bill’s trip to Chicago.

One issue here, it is true, is that of attaining to a full and correct understanding of what is meant by the words, “Bill went to *Chicago*..” even as by the declarations which affirm that, “*he* stayed in Chicago...” and “*he* left Chicago...”

There is, however, an additional important issue to take notice of here as well, in this summary declaration of Bill’s trip, one which, even as the question of Chicago, is also capable of being either correctly or incorrectly understood. That issue is this: In what sense is it so that Bill’s trip occurred “according to his wife Alma?”

Is it that one need only truly believe that this was so according to whatever Alma may have to say concerning Bill’s trip, or is it instead that one must first possess a full, accurate knowledge of the grand and complex theme of all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill, both typically and prophetically, in all its ins and outs, within the compass of the entirety of Alma’s life?

If our argument is that one must understand the subject of Chicago correctly, else one cannot “really believe” that Bill went to Chicago, our argument must likewise be that one must also understand all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill correctly, else one cannot “really believe” that Bill’s trip to Chicago was according to Alma. It would be inconsistent and absurd to insist that one’s incorrect knowledge of the former theme (including one’s holding of incompatible doctrines, contrary to the truth thereof), precludes one’s membership into the club of those who understand Bill’s trip to Chicago, while denying that one’s incorrect knowledge of this latter theme does not preclude one’s membership into the club of those who understand Bill’s trip to Chicago.

I have considered the difficult subject of all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill in some detail for over thirty years, having read learned books on the subject, besides doing my own further, incidental research, together with informal reflection and meditation from day to day. Though it may be so that I know somewhat more about this subject than many others, it is undoubtedly so that I know much less about it than those scholars who have made this theme their specialty.

In any case, it is beyond question that I do not understand the subject of all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill “correctly.” This is because, first of all, I am not even fully cognizant of it, which

makes it impossible for me to understand it correctly.⁹

It is a practical certainty as well that I am at least somewhat mistaken in my consideration of this subject, whether these errors should be sins of commission or omission. Therefore, I do not fully grasp all that is an object of faith relative to this subject. For that matter, we may be likewise certain that the same is true not only of myself but even of the most learned specialists in this field as well. Yet if it is so that one must correctly understand the entirety of that which comprises Bill's trip to Chicago in order to, say, partake of future eonian life, then not only are those who believe that Bill went to Singapore precluded from this blessing but those as well who fail to understand all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill.

See what I mean?

Now, a little bit at a time:

There are many things to consider here, and judge correctly, if we would possess a full and accurate understanding of these words comprising Bill's trip to Chicago.

One issue here, it is true, is that of attaining to a full and correct understanding of what is meant by the words, "Bill went to *Chicago*.." even as by the declarations which affirm that, "*he* stayed in Chicago..." and "*he* left Chicago...."

What else could be meant by "Bill went to Chicago" other than "Bill went to Chicago?" Can anything be simpler? Bill did not go to Singapore. He did not go to Vancouver. He did not go to Brisbane. He went to Chicago. And then, wonder of wonders, *he* stayed in Chicago, and *he* left Chicago. Not just his luggage, not just his watch, not just his fingers or toes, but *him*.

Plug this back into 1 Corinthians 15, and it's very simple. What else could be meant by "Jesus died" other than, "Jesus died?" He did not continue to live, He did not ascend to heaven, He did not preach to spirits in the underworld.¹⁰ He *died*. Then, *He* was entombed, and *He* was roused. Not just His skin, not just His sandals, not just His arms and legs, but *Him*.

There is, however, an additional important issue to take notice of here as well, in this summary declaration of Bill's trip, one which, even as the question of Chicago, is also capable of being either correctly or incorrectly understood. That issue is this: In what sense is it so that Bill's trip occurred "according to his wife Alma"?

Let's try the obvious sense. The obvious sense is that Alma told us about Bill's trip. Six words: Alma...told...us...about...Bill's...trip. That's it. It's not very hard to understand. Transfer this simplicity to 1 Corinthians 15, and we have, "The Scriptures tell us about Christ's death." This is as simple as it gets.¹¹

If our argument is that one must understand the subject of Chicago correctly, else one cannot "really believe" that Bill went to Chicago, our argument must likewise be that one must also understand all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill correctly, else one cannot "really believe" that Bill's trip to Chicago was according to Alma.

⁹It is impossible for one to understand *correctly* any discrete topic or subtopic of which he is simply ignorant, concerning which he therefore possesses no understanding at all.

¹⁰ He preached to the spirits after He was vivified. See 1 Peter 3:18-20.

¹¹ Paul was comforting the Corinthians here by letting them know that these grand events (namely, the death, entombment and rousing of Jesus Christ) were predicted by and accomplished in accord with God's holy Record.

This boldly illustrates Jim's misunderstanding of my teaching (or anyone's teaching similar to mine), and the subject of *What is a Believer?* in general. One certainly does not need to "understand the subject of Chicago correctly" to "really believe" that Bill went to Chicago. Who would ever insist that one needed to know the current mayor of Chicago, or the date of Chicago's founding, or the number of streets in Chicago, or how many square miles Chicago occupies, in order to "really believe" that Bill went to Chicago? *But one does need to believe that Bill went to Chicago and not to Singapore, in order to "really believe" that Bill went to Chicago!*

Jim is assuming that my teaching (or, should I say, anyone's teaching on this subject) is that "one must understand the subject of death correctly." *To my knowledge, I have never said that.* What I have said is that one must understand *death*, and the fact that *Jesus died and did not continue to live*.

The death and resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the evangel.

One does not need to know how death came into existence, or how many different ways people can die, or how, precisely, the spirit is separated from the body, or how the lack of blood removes consciousness from a human being. *But one certainly needs to know that dead people cease to live.*

Thus, since we (hopefully) understand that Chicago is Chicago and that one *does not* have to know everything about Chicago to believe Bill went there, neither do we need to know everything that Bill's wife Alma has ever said about him. Likewise, since we (hopefully) understand that death is death, and that one does not have to know everything about death to believe that Jesus died, neither do we need to know everything about Hebrew Christology.

Yet if it is so that one must correctly understand the entirety of that which comprises Bill's trip to Chicago in order to, say, partake of future eonian life, then not only are those who believe that Bill went to Singapore precluded from this blessing but those as well who fail to understand all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill.

Let's say it *is* so that one must correctly understand the entirety of that which comprises Bill's trip to Chicago in order to partake of future eonian life. In this case, it would be obvious that those who believe that Bill went to Singapore would be precluded from this blessing, let alone those who fail to understand all that Alma has ever said concerning Bill. But now let's say that this *isn't* so. Instead, let's say that one *only* needs to believe that Bill went to Chicago—period. This is the minimum, the bare minimum. Right? Understanding that Bill went to Chicago is elementary. It's not even *near* understanding "the entirety of that which comprises Bill's trip to Chicago." Forget Alma entirely. Even so, even with this bare minimum requirement, *it would still preclude from eonian life those who believe Bill went to Singapore.*

Now let's plug this understanding into Jim Coram's original statement and see what we learn about 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and *What is a Believer*.

Yet if it is so that one must correctly understand the entirety of that which comprises the evangel in order to partake of future eonian life, then not only are those who believe in immortal souls precluded from this blessing but those as well who fail to understand the doctrines of Christology.

Let's say it *is* so that one must correctly understand the entirety of that which comprises the evangel in order to partake of future eonian life. In this case, it would be *obvious* that those who believe that death is life would be precluded from this blessing, let alone those who fail to understand all the doctrines of Hebrew Christology. But now let's say that this *isn't* so. Instead, let's say that one *only* needs to believe that the dead are not alive—period. This is the minimum, the bare minimum. Right? Understanding that the dead are not alive is elementary. It's not even *near* understanding “the entirety of that which comprises the evangel.” Forget Hebrew Christology. Even so, even with this bare minimum requirement, *it would still preclude from eonian life those who believe that the dead are alive.*

DELUSIONS OF EQUIVOCATION

More fundamentally, however, we need to see that the claim is simply wrongheaded which effectually asserts that failing to understand a subject correctly is tantamount to a failure to believe it. “Understand” signifies “make out the *meaning*” (see Keyword Concordance, p.314); “believe” means “*be convinced by* testimony (concerning matters outside the sphere of observation)” (see Keyword Concordance, p.28: *cp* Hebrews 11:1: “faith is [1] an *assumption*...[and, 2] a *conviction*...”).

Understanding (i.e., discernment of true meaning), is the result of correct interpretation, that is, of correct judgment of *the sense* in which what is said was intended to be understood. Belief, however, consists merely in the acceptance of testimony and the conviction that it is true.

The three words I want to highlight for you here are the words “correctly” (as in, “the claim is simply wrongheaded which effectually asserts that failing to understand a subject *correctly* is tantamount to a failure to believe it”), the word “true,” (as in “understanding [i.e., discernment of *true* meaning), is the result of correct interpretation...”), and the word “it” (as in “Belief, however, consists merely in the acceptance of testimony and the conviction that *it* is true.”). I highlight these words because they show that even Jim is modifying (by adding to) the basic thing of understanding.

To make this clearer, let's once again plug “Bill” and “Chicago” into Jim's argument. The bold italics are mine.

More fundamentally, however, we need to see that the claim is simply wrongheaded which effectually asserts that failing to understand Chicago ***correctly*** is tantamount to a failure to believe that Chicago exists. “Understand” signifies “make out the *meaning*” (see Keyword Concordance, p.314); “believe” means “*be convinced by* testimony (concerning matters outside the sphere of observation)” (see Keyword Concordance, p.28: *cp* Hebrews 11:1: “faith is [1] an *assumption*...[and, 2] a *conviction*...”).

Understanding (i.e., discernment of ***true*** meaning), is the result of correct interpretation, that is, of correct judgment of *the sense* in which what is said was intended to be understood. Belief, however, consists merely in the acceptance of testimony and the conviction that ***it*** is true.

Again, I have never said that one needs to understand death *correctly* in order to believe that Jesus Christ died; one only needs to understand death—*period*. That Jim adds the word “correctly” to the word “understand,” shows that he is acknowledging the necessity of some basic, primitive understanding (knowing what a thing *is*) to accompany belief (such understanding as would be able to answer the question, “believe in *what?*”)

Next, why does Jim add the word “true” before the word “meaning?” Same reason. He knows

that meaning is essential as a starting point. The word “meaning” (as in “discernment of *meaning*”) can stand alone. And yet Jim doesn’t let it do that. That Jim tacks on the word “true” to it suggests a *perfection* of meaning, a thing that no one I know of has insisted upon as a requirement for salvation.

Finally, in his last sentence, Jim admits that belief *does* consist (even in the “merest” sense) of the acceptance of testimony and the conviction that *it* is true. That’s a big “it” there. Because with it, Jim is admitting that one at least has to believe that some “it” is true, though one may not **fully** understand what “it” is. The “it” of the context is “Jesus died.” *And yet Christians do not accept the testimony of Scripture concerning death. And so they do not believe that “it” is true.*

One may very well genuinely believe that which he does not truly understand.

Again, Jim uses the qualifier “truly,” as in “*truly* understand.” He *has* to use these qualifiers, else he will wind up having to agree that a person can understand Jesus Christ to be Don Rickles and still be saved (that is, as long as the person *calls* Don Rickles “Jesus Christ”). There must be, to Jim’s mind, at least some *basic* understanding involved with “who is Christ?” and “what is death?” or he wouldn’t continually add these qualifiers. But by adding these qualifiers, Jim is aligning with my position. I also believe that a person can genuinely believe that which he does not *truly* understand (“truly” in the sense of a perfection of understanding).

But the person has to understand *it*.

For instance, a person has to believe that Jesus Christ was the One sent by God via Mary, condemned by Pilate and killed by the Jews around the year 30 A.D., in order to be saved. Right? If the person believes that Jesus Christ is Don Rickles, the comedian, does this count as believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Is the person still saved by believing that Jesus Christ is Don Rickles? No? Not even if the person *calls* Don Rickles “Jesus Christ?”

Of course not.

But by Jim’s standards, believing that death is life qualifies one as believing that death is death. As long as a person says, “I believe Christ died,” that person, according to Jim, can believe that Jesus Christ did *not* die. By the same standards, we could say that one who believes that Don Rickles is Jesus Christ, is saved right along with someone who believes that Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ, as long as they use the name “Jesus Christ” when they think of Don Rickles. But we agree that this is ridiculous. One must at least know what the “it” (or the “Who”) is, in which (or in Whom) one is to have faith.

One cannot believe that death is life (though that person *calls* the life “death”) and still believe that death is death, any more than one can believe that Don Rickles is Jesus Christ (though that person *calls* him “Jesus Christ”) and still believe that Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ.

What I want you to see is that those who believe that death is life are not only not “truly” understanding death, they are not understanding it at all. They’re not even in the ballpark of death. They think that death is life. But death is the *opposite* of life.

It is only because we ourselves often speak imprecisely¹² that we are confused concerning this theme, saying that a man does not *believe* a statement to be so, when our actual thought, *fairly and accurately stated*, is that he does not *understand* the statement according to truth, according to the sense in which it is truly intended.

Suppose I think that “Chicago” is the name of Bill’s sister, who lives next door to Bill in his Miami, Florida, neighborhood. When I say, “I believe Bill went to Chicago,” I am thinking in my mind that Bill went next door to see his sister. Now, according to what Jim Coram has just suggested, “not understanding” a statement “according to truth” does not preclude one from *believing* a statement to be so. And so, transferring now to the Chicago example, Jim Coram would say that I can legitimately be ranked among those who believe Bill went to Chicago, Illinois, even though, in my mind, I *really* think and *truly* believe he went next door to his sister’s house.

In addition, it is also wrong to claim that someone “does not really believe” a certain scriptural testimony (e.g., the testimony that Christ died for our sins), in any case in which the person, in fact, not only is honestly convinced that the proffered testimony is true, but in which he simply holds, *in part*, to a wrong opinion concerning it.

Here, Jim brings in another qualifier: “in part.” As long as Jim uses these qualifiers before words like “believe” and “understand,” I can agree with him. Certainly, “in part” knowledge does not keep one from believing Paul’s evangel, else we’re all doomed. But every time Jim fails to use a qualifier—suggesting that a person doesn’t have to understand anything *at all*, or believe anything *in particular*—I disagree with him.

A person can believe that Jesus died, while still holding incorrect ideas *about* death. (That is, the person can be wrong *in part*.) And yet the person *cannot* believe that Jesus died, while failing to understand what death *is*, that is, that it is the absence of life. In the case of me believing that Bill went to his sister’s house, I am not merely wrong “in part” concerning Chicago, I am wrong completely, in that I think “Chicago” is the name of Bill’s sister. It is not that I do not *fully*

¹²The error of argumentation termed the Fallacy of Equivocation is at the root of the mistaken position which equates misunderstanding with unbelief. It is committed in relation to the problem we are considering when in one instance we say a man “does not believe,” when our thought is that he [*a*¹] “is not convinced by the testimony of,” and yet in another instance say that he “does not believe,” when our thought is that he [*a*²] “does not make out the meaning of.” That is, this fallacy is committed when [*a*²] is the situation which obtains, and yet, by force of the same language, we argue *as if* (for our argument to have any possible merit) [*a*¹] were the situation which obtains—even though it does not obtain, nor is it even our thought that it does obtain. This insidious error is the cause of many a false conclusion even as of the unwitting propagation of many a myth. Hence, wherever it exists, we should do our utmost to discern its presence and to reject all arguments based upon its employment.

My comments on this footnote: While I agree that the Fallacy of Equivocation principle exists, I don’t think it applies to misunderstanding and unbelief, as Jim presents it here. That’s because a person has to at least have a basic understanding of a *thing* before he can be convinced by the testimony of the *thing*. We at least have to understand that Chicago is Chicago before we can believe the testimony that Bill went to Chicago. Thus, understanding and believing *do* go hand in hand. The mistake Jim makes in his attempt to make belief and understanding unequivocal is that he has forgotten to modify the word “meaning,” as he did earlier. If he had made [*a*²], “does not make out the *true* meaning,” then I would agree with him that “convinced by the testimony of” and “making out the *true* meaning” are unequivocal factors in “does not believe.” But the qualifier is not here.

understand Chicago, but that I do not understand it at all.

Let us be fair. Traditionalists freely believe the account that on the cross, Jesus suffered and died. It is simply incorrect for anyone to deny the fact that this is their faith. It is only that traditionalists differ with non-traditionalists as to *the sense* in which He died. The traditionalist affirms that Jesus died corporeally, with reference to the demise of His body. The non-traditionalist affirms that Jesus died entirely, with reference to the demise of the entirety of His being.

It is not that one party believes that Christ died and the other does not, but that there is a difference of opinion between the two parties as to the correct sense in which it is so that Christ died.

This might be a good time to compare the basic difference between, as Jim calls it, the traditionalist and non-traditionalist view of the death of Christ. In a nutshell, the traditionalist insists it was only Christ's *body* that died ("the traditionalist affirms that Jesus died corporeally, with reference to the demise of His body"), while the non-traditionalist insists (with the Scripture), that *He* died. Note that, while the traditionalist affirms that the *body* of Jesus died, he never does affirm that *He* died. And neither can he, for he does not believe it.

The reason that Jim uses the odd word "corporeally" is that he is trying to excuse the unbelief of traditionalists. For whatever motives, Jim is straining to include them with those who believe in the death of Christ. Toward this end, Jim very much wants to begin his sentence, "The traditionalist affirms that Jesus died..." But since the traditionalist *doesn't* believe that Jesus died, Jim must add the qualifying word, "corporeally." Then, in case the reader doesn't know what "corporeally" means, he adds, "with reference to the demise of His body."

Look closer at this sentence and notice how badly it's sweating. If we remove the word "corporeally" and delete the comma, Jim's sentence becomes more apparently contradictory, and his strain to make believers out of unbelievers more obvious. Notice: "The traditionalist affirms that Jesus died with reference to the demise of His body." "Demise" is just another word for "death." So now we have: "The traditionalist affirms that Jesus died with reference to the death of His body."

Let's go back to Bill now and say that, due to a very cold winter, Bill had to have his fingers amputated. Plugging Jim's statement into this analogy, we can fashion *this* statement: "The traditionalist affirms that Bill went to Chicago with reference to his *fingers* going to Chicago." Are we all agreed that, in this example, the traditionalists are wrong to the point of stupidity? Will we give them credit for believing that Bill went to Chicago, when only his fingers went there? No. Then why do we give these same people credit for believing that Jesus died when, actually, they believe that it was only his shell (that is, His body) that did so?

A snake in Miami sheds its skin. We leave the skin in Miami and send the snake to New York. Will anyone insist that the snake is still in Miami? It would be stupid to do so, for one would then have to insist that there are now two snakes, one in Miami and one in New York. Obviously, the snake is in New York; only its shed skin is in Miami.

Traditionalists believe that Jesus merely shed His skin, leaving *it* behind in the tomb; *He* went to heaven. And yet, to make it *seem* as if they agree with the basics of Paul's gospel, they will *say*: "Jesus died." But saying this in light of their true belief is as stupid as saying that the snake of

my example became two snakes. Traditionalists are not *that* stupid. They do not believe there were two Jesus Christs, One Who went to heaven, and One Who stayed on the slab three days. We know they believe that Jesus Christ went to heaven. And so when they say, “Jesus Christ died,” we can be sure they do not really believe it; it is an utterance of expediency. We at least give them credit for not believing there were two Jesus Christs. Don’t we? For we must say either that the traditionalists are *totally* stupid, or that they are unbelievers in the guise of believers, borrowing the phrase of believers as an expediency.

I say, they are unbelievers in the guise of believers, borrowing the phrase of believers as an expediency.

The fact of the matter is that the traditionalist does *not* believe that Jesus Christ died. And yet the death of Christ (not the mere laying down of His body), is the testimony of 1 Corinthians 15:3, and the foundation of our evangel. For the death of Christ is where the faith of Christ shines through.

Some may have thought my earlier example of believing that “Chicago” was the name of Bill’s sister is ridiculous. But is it any more ridiculous than believing that death is life? Is it any more *inaccurate* than believing that death is life? And yet, earlier, Jim insisted that believing that death is life is merely a “difference of opinion” concerning death, and does not touch the basic element of the subject. Yet it not only touches the basic element, *it denies the truth entirely*.

And so, let me plug into Jim’s previous paragraph the practical example of me thinking that “Chicago” is the name of Bill’s sister. You will surely see, from *this* example, how ridiculous it is to insist that my belief qualifies me as believing that Bill went to Chicago, Illinois, which in this case is the truth. I trust you will then carry this sense of “that’s ridiculous” over to the subject of death, and see how ridiculous it is to assert that those who believe that death is life qualifies them as believing that death is the absence of life.

Let us be fair. Martin Zender freely believes the account that Bill went to Chicago. It is simply incorrect for anyone to deny the fact that this is his faith. It is only that Martin differs with us as to *the sense* in which Bill went to Chicago. Martin affirms that Chicago is the name of Bill’s sister. We, however, know that Chicago refers to the city in Illinois, where Bill actually went.

It is not that one party believes that Bill went to Chicago, and the other does not, but that there is a difference of opinion between the two parties as to the correct sense in which Bill went to Chicago.

I’ll say!

Or, what if I believe that Bill went to Chicago with reference to his fingers? Then we have this:

Let us be fair. Martin Zender freely believes the account that Bill went to Chicago. It is simply incorrect for anyone to deny the fact that this is his faith. It is only that Martin differs with us as to *the sense* in which Bill went to Chicago. Martin affirms that Bill’s *fingers* went to Chicago. We, however, know that Bill himself went there.

It is not that one party believes that Bill went to Chicago, and the other does not, but that there is a difference of opinion between the two parties as to the correct sense in which Bill went to Chicago.

And so I disagree with Jim. Contrary to his assertion, it certainly *is* true that one party believes Bill went to Chicago, and the other does not, just as it certainly is true that non-traditionalists believe Jesus died, and traditionalists believe He went on living in a different form, at a different place.

In arriving at any opinion at all concerning a certain declaration of faith, whether or not one should do so consciously and formally, in any case, one must necessarily engage in interpretation concerning it. Opinion—any opinion at all—is impossible apart from interpretation, whether witting or unwitting. And, correct interpretation is no less interpretation than incorrect interpretation. Hence it is naïve besides mistaken for any one of us to take the position in respect to himself in contradistinction to his fellows with whom he differs that, “I simply believe the Scriptures as they stand, unlike *you* who merely ‘interpret’ them. I furthermore say this even though I must admit that you, just as surely and in as conservative a way as myself, honestly accept the same writings as I do as constitutive of the very word of God.”

What is the function of this paragraph? That because we say with the traditionalist that the Bible is “the Word of God,” we’re all one big happy family, united in the faith? Are we to make no distinctions between right and wrong, simply on the grounds that we are all interpreting and we all believe the Bible to be “the Word of God?” Some interpret “God is the Savior of all mankind” to mean “He will damn most of them.” Some interpret “in grace, through faith are you saved, and this is not out of you,” to mean that “we have to exercise our free will in order to be saved.” Some interpret “Christ died” to mean that “Christ went on living.” Are we to ignore these diametrically-opposed differences and gather mindlessly beneath some tissue-paper banner that reads: WE ALL INTERPRET, AND WE ALL BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS “THE WORD OF GOD,” SO COME JOIN OUR HAPPY FAMILY?

What an appalling notion! Paul will certainly have none of it, as he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:14-16, “Do not become diversely yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? Or what communion has light with darkness? Now what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what part a believer with an unbeliever? Now what concurrence has a temple of God with idols?”

It is most remarkable that many have adopted such a perspective toward those with whom they differ doctrinally, some even going so far as to imagine that those who are their theological opponents as to various important issues, are therefore not even in Christ.

How is it “most remarkable” that righteousness should have no partnership with lawlessness? How is it “going so far” to say that light has no communion with darkness? Is it remarkable that Christ should have no agreement with Belial? Perhaps Jim Coram now ranks the doctrine of Eternal Torment as “light,” and merely “another way” to believe in Christ, the Savior. Jim is attempting to forge some ungodly partnership between self-salvation (Free Will) and the cross. He is trying to fashion some monstrous and unnatural communion between Christ and Belial. What else can he be doing when he gathers the doctrines of Christ and the doctrines of Belial together beneath the same banner and exhorts us to, “Come together, one and all! It is *only* a difference of *doctrine*!”

And how is it going “so far” to imagine that someone who, in practice, worships the creature

above the Creator, and makes Belial stronger than Christ, is “therefore not even in Christ?” Indeed, it is most remarkable, and the height of “incredibly far,” to imagine that they are!

MISCONCEPTIONS OF FAITH

The spurious argument that if one does not believe that Jesus died entirely, he does not believe that Jesus died, and so is unsaved, is based on the false assumption that in order to believe any certain statement, it is necessary to possess a true knowledge of its particulars. This simply is not true.

One may believe a declaration, itself, while *also* believing mistakenly concerning certain of its particulars. Perhaps this fact can be helpfully explained by way of the following examples:

Jim is back to using a qualifying phrase in front of “believing something.” This time, the phrase is, “certain of its particulars.” Again I repeat, it is one thing not to believe “certain particulars” about death, quite another to believe that death is the continuation of life in another form.¹³

Jim says it is “a spurious argument” (that is, it is an illegitimate argument) “that if one does not believe that Jesus died entirely, he does not believe that Jesus died, and so is unsaved.” Let’s plug this into our helpful parallel example about Bill going to Chicago and see how spurious it is.

In a nutshell, the traditionalists insist it was only Bill’s amputated fingers that went to Chicago (they don’t believe *Bill* went to Chicago), while the non-traditionalists insist (in agreement with Bill’s wife Alma) that *He* went to Chicago. See how the following statement ranks, itself, as a spurious argument:

The spurious argument that if one does not believe that Bill accompanied his amputated fingers to Chicago, he does not believe that Bill went to Chicago, is based on the false assumption that in order to believe any certain statement, it is necessary to possess a true knowledge of its particulars. This simply is not true.

One may believe a declaration, itself (“Bill went to Chicago”), while *also* believing mistakenly concerning certain of its particulars, namely, that Bill’s amputated fingers alone went to Chicago. Perhaps this fact can be helpfully explained by way of the following examples:

Jim’s examples are perfect examples in themselves of Jim’s ongoing assumption that one who does not understand certain particulars about a thing, necessarily believes the thing itself, as long as the thing is *claimed* to be believed.

There are many statements concerning technical computer topics, ones which I have accepted and believe to be true. I *do* believe these things are true, and I accept them accordingly.

Even so, for years I continued to misunderstand certain aspects of some of them, long after I first believed them to be so. And indeed, in the case of certain other such technical facts, I am aware that even today, after many years engagement in complex computer activities daily, I still do not properly understand them. Indeed, I no doubt continue to hold certain misconceptions

¹³ If we were looking for “certain particulars,” Christians believe plenty of them concerning death. But they’re all the wrong particulars. My question is: if the Christians can believe all the *wrong* particulars about death, why can’t they believe the right ones? It would seem easier to believe the right ones, as the right ones are in Scripture while the wrong ones are not. But it is easier yet to cherish the lies of Satan above the Word of God; which saying most flatters the flesh: “To die you shall be dying,” or “You shall not surely die”?

concerning various computer-related subjects, ones which I nevertheless *believe* to be true.

Now my son Marc, who is trained in computer science, would never say that I do not *believe* this or that technical proposition to be true, things which he has taught me concerning or otherwise represented to me as true. Instead, he would simply say what is so: that I still *misunderstand* various things concerning some of these subjects.

First of all, notice in this example the presence of the qualifiers. Jim says that, concerning technical computer topics, he continues to misunderstand “certain aspects” of some of *them*, and “certain other such technical facts” concerning *them*, and continues to hold “certain misconceptions” concerning various *computer-related* topics, and still misunderstands “various things” concerning some of *these* topics.

The one constant among all these “various” and “certain other” misunderstandings and misconceptions is that Jim is working with *computer-related* topics. He never denies that constant fact. That is, *he never thinks that computer-related topics are banana-related topics!*

I am not trying to be facetious or in any way funny. A computer is as different from a banana as life is from death. In this example, Jim already *assumes* a starting point of understanding, namely, that it is computer-related topics in view here, and no other topics. He understands the *basic* thing (never mind the “certain other” things associated with the basic thing), namely, that he is working with computers and not bananas.

Jim exercises similar powers of assumption upon the traditionalists. He *assumes* they understand what death is, when actually they do not. He strains to allow them this starting point on the track, even though they have yet to emerge from the locker room. The traditionalists do not know that death is the absence of life, let alone that *Christ* died, along with His body. These traditionalists *say* that people die, but what they mean is that they “pass on” to another form of life. They *say* that Jesus died, but what they mean is that His body became inert while He, Himself, continued to live. These traditionalists do not deserve the benefit of the doubt Jim struggles to give them. If any of my readers doubt what traditionalists *really* believe, they can simply present to the traditionalists the case of the death of Jesus Christ and, by necessity, the falseness of the Trinity—and see what happens.

“For many are insubordinate, vain praters and imposters, especially those of the Circumcision, who must be gagged, who are subverting whole households, teaching what they must not, on behalf of sordid gain. One of them, their own prophet, said, ‘Cretans are ever liars, evil wild beasts, idle bellies.’ This testimony is true. For which cause be exposing them severely, that they may be sound in the faith, not heeding Jewish myths and precepts of men who are *turning from the truth*. All, indeed, is clean to the clean, yet to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is clean, but their mind as well as conscience is defiled. *They are avowing an acquaintance with God, yet by their acts are denying it*, being abominable and stubborn, and disqualified for every good act.”

—the apostle Paul, Titus 1:10-16

In this context, the acts of those who are avowing an acquaintance with God and yet denying it, are the acts relating to turning from the truth. The point of this verse is that, while many *claim* to be acquainted with God, their act of turning from the truth, when presented with the truth,

prove that they love the precepts of men more than the precepts of God.¹⁴

We must come to the point in our service for Christ when we are able to see through those who are merely avowing an acquaintance of God (nearly all of Christianity), but who turn from the truth when it is presented to them (nearly all of Christianity). Rather than excusing these who deny the very essentials of faith, or straining with our misguided assumptions to gild their unbelief, we ought to be gagging them. For they are subverting whole households, teaching what they must not, on behalf of sordid gain.

Another example of honest belief in the presence of much ignorance is that of the belief which I once held, as a small child with limited spelling skills, concerning pasteurization. I knew that cows lived in pastures, and had been taught that it was good to drink pasteurized milk. So I supposed that pasteurization was somehow concerned with cows that lived in the field as opposed to in a barn.

It is true that I then held a mistaken belief about pasteurization; and, it is true as well that even today I only know a little about that process. In fact, it may also be true that even today I still hold to some mistaken opinion or another concerning pasteurization. Nonetheless, from early childhood, *I have believed* that Borden Company milk is pasteurized.

Indeed, as I have already indicated, when I first believed this declaration, I did not even know what pasteurization *is*, much less did I hold to a fully correct definition thereof. This, however, did not change the fact that I believed what I was told. This is because I simply trusted the Borden Company to be telling me the truth in stating right on their carton that their milk was subjected to a certain process, thus named. My belief in their statement was dependent upon my trust in them; it was not dependent upon any knowledge of my own of the process claimed to have been performed. I did not possess either knowledge or understanding of pasteurization; nevertheless, I possessed *faith* that a process, termed pasteurization—whatever it may consist of—claimed to have been performed.

Jim Coram claims that, as a child, “I did not even know what pasteurization *is*.” But he *did* know. He knew it was a process performed on milk. Witness: “It is true that I then held a mistaken belief about pasteurization; and, it is true as well that even today I only know a little about *that process*.” Also: “I simply trusted the Borden Company to be telling me the truth in stating right on their carton that their milk was subjected to a certain *process*, thus named.” Also: “I did not possess either knowledge or understanding of pasteurization; nevertheless, I possessed *faith* that a process, termed pasteurization—whatever it may consist of—claimed to have been performed.” (And so what Jim meant to say, and what he should have said, was, “I did not even know what pasteurization entails.”)

¹⁴ Interesting that Jim uses the term “traditionalists” to describe those who, besides the Trinity, believe everything else that opposes truth. Didn’t Jesus speak frankly and unmistakably concerning those who loved tradition more than truth? Quoting Isaiah’s prophecy, He says in Mark 7:7, “Yet in vain are they revering Me, teaching for teachings the directions of men.” Then applying this prophecy to the Pharisees in His midst, Jesus says, “For, leaving the precept of God, you are holding the tradition of men...Ideally are you repudiating the precept of God, that you should be keeping your tradition.” Jesus acknowledged that those who keep traditions rather than the precepts of God are, in fact, repudiating the precept of God and, worse, revering Him in vain. And so how is it that one who is revering God “in vain” is, at the same time, a part of that chosen company found to be *believing* God’s testimony? And yet Jim Coram would welcome all such traditionalists into the circle of faith, in spite of Paul’s warning not to be diversely yoked with unbelievers. Yes, unbelievers. For “traditionalist” is merely a euphemism for such.

In this example, as in the previous, we have the assumption of a basic understanding, namely, that pasteurization is a process performed on milk. This confirms what I shared earlier, that even Jim must acknowledge the presence of some *basic* understanding, some *foundational* knowledge, in order to believe a thing. This is why I disagreed when Jim made understanding and belief unequivocal; it is ridiculous to assert that belief can accompany *total* misunderstanding, for then we must dismiss the questions, “Believe in *what?*” or, “Believe in *Whom?*” questions which are not only viable, but reasonable (and, in the case of the evangel, extremely important). It is only as Jim adds qualifiers or qualifying phrases to words like “believe” and “understand” that I can enter into agreement with him.

Along that line, notice the qualifying words in this example. First, Jim claims he held “a mistaken belief *about* pasteurization.” Then he says, “My belief in their statement was dependent upon my trust in them; it was not dependent upon any knowledge of my own *of* the process claimed to have been performed.” Then he says, “I did not possess either knowledge or understanding *of* pasteurization.” The underlying fact here can’t be denied, namely, that even as a child, Jim Coram understood that pasteurization was a process performed on milk. It was only certain aspects *of* pasteurization that escaped him, and mistaken beliefs *about* it. He at least knew it was a process, and did not believe, not even as a child, that “Pasteurized” was a city in Wisconsin, or that “Pastor I. Zation” was the name of a clergyman, who also endorsed milk. Jim’s assumption of a basic understanding is *so* assumed here (as well as throughout his article, as touching the traditionalist’s understanding of death), that he does not even entertain the idea that anyone could be so stupid as to think these other things. In the case of religious traditionalists, however, and their concept that death is but another form of life, Jim assumes way too much.

“Alleging themselves to be wise, they are made stupid, and they change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and flying creatures and quadrupeds and reptiles...They alter the truth of God into the lie, and are venerated, and offer divine service to the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed for the eons! Amen!”

—the apostle Paul, Romans 1:22-23, 25

FAITH IN GOD’S WORD

The truth concerning those who are called and in Christ, is not that they will correctly understand this or that “fundamental doctrine,” but that they will perceive in Christ, God’s own wisdom and power. They will be convinced of the declaration of faith that Jesus died and rose, whether or not their knowledge should be flawless concerning the correct sense of either “die” or “rise,” in this connection.

How is it that traditionalists perceive in Christ, God’s own wisdom and power? Even by the standard of Jim’s own evidence (that the traditionalists will perceive God’s power in Christ), the traditionalists fail miserably. According to their traditions, God did *not* raise a helplessly dead Christ. Rather, Christ raised Himself by returning to His body. According to their traditions, the cross of Christ had *not* enough power to save the world, let alone an individual human; for according also to their traditions, each human must be wise enough to appropriate the cross to

himself, else he is not saved. And so, according to the traditionalists, *the cross, by itself, saved no one*. Tell me, how is *this* a perception of God's wisdom and power? And by what wild stretch of the imagination could we ever call it such?

Indeed, rather, these traditionalists fit Paul's definition of men who, in perilous periods, will "have a form of devoutness, yet deny its power" (2 Tim. 3:5).

Who is looking for a flawless conception of the death of Christ? Who is asking for it? All we are looking for and asking for is a conviction concerning the declaration of faith that Jesus died. And yet, as I have already plainly shown (and has been painfully experienced by me, and by any reader of these lines who has tried to show the unscripturalness of the doctrine of the Trinity to a traditionalist), not one traditionalist believes that Jesus died. *Not one*. They all believe He is "God the Father," for Whom death is impossible.

For the reasons already stated, the notion that one is simply not a believer or in Christ until he accepts certain important correct doctrines while rejecting certain other incompatible, incorrect doctrines, is necessarily mistaken.

I would do well to let the apostle Paul answer this statement himself:

Now I am making known to you, brethren, the evangel which I bring to you, *which also you accepted*, in which also you stand, through which also you are saved, if you are retaining what I said in bringing the evangel to you, outside and except you believe feignedly.

—*the apostle Paul*, 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

It is true that popular myths such as the Trinity, free will, immortal souls, and eternal torment, are incompatible with and militate against the truth of the evangel. Because of their adherence to such contradictory views, many are kept back, whether to a great degree or even entirely, from a true understanding of the evangel.

This is an interesting statement. Is Jim saying here that such ones who are kept back "entirely" from a true understanding of the evangel, can also be members of the body of Christ? If so, he must be counting on the qualifier "true,"—as in "a *true* understanding"—to perform that miracle.

Jim admits in this paragraph that the popular myths such as the Trinity, free will, immortal souls and eternal torment are "incompatible" with the truth of the evangel. That's a very strong statement.

"Incompatible" positions are, according to the Random House Collegiate dictionary, those positions which are "unable to be held simultaneously by one person." This is precisely my position. The Trinity denies the truth of the evangel, that Jesus Christ died. So even Jim is admitting here (though perhaps unwittingly) that it is impossible to hold to the Trinity *and* to the truth of the evangel, which puts forward the death of Christ. That means that Trinitarians *cannot* believe in the death of Christ while holding to Trinitarianism, and must therefore believe

the opposite of the truth of the evangel. So now I would like to ask: How is it that one who believe *the opposite* of the truth of the evangel, can be considered a believer right along with one who *believes* the truth of the evangel?

Also notice that Jim's statement in this paragraph contradicts what he just said in the paragraph before. In the paragraph before, Jim stated that neither the acceptance nor the rejection of incompatible doctrines has anything to do with being a believer, or with being found "in Christ." And yet, in this paragraph, he says that the incompatible doctrines militate *against* the truth of the evangel. If this is *not* a contradiction, then Jim is here stating that one may militate against the truth of the evangel, while at the same time believing *in* the evangel.

We feel this tragedy deeply, and frequently need to be reminded that this, too, even as all else that is wrong with the world, is in God's purpose and will eventuate for good. Yet we rejoice that wherever God gives faith even though He does not yet grant understanding, faith remains, even as all the positional benefits which are afforded to God's chosen ones, who, *incidentally*, are also those who are believing.

Yes, God gives faith—but faith in *what*? Is faith utterly stupid and blind and devoid of an object? Or does God give faith to believe some real *thing*, to believe in some real *Person*? Jim would quickly steer us away from such thoughts, away from the idea that any kind of actual *knowledge* should accompany a saving faith. For then we should be accused of believing in salvation by works! And then to think of all the poor people who would not possess that knowledge; how unfair that they should miss out on eonian life, simply because they do not know something.

A plan! How much communion can we forge between light and darkness? What will it take to contort all the traditionalists into the circle of faith? How much agreement can we wring out between Christ and Belial, in order to swell the gates of the "faithful?" A solution! Let it be that one may believe *anything, anything at all!* Yes! And they may even go so far as to believe *in themselves*, if they wish, as long as they gild their humanism in Scriptural phrases and whitewash their hypocrisy with the name of Christ. Hypocrisy and feigned faith are quite good enough for *our* fellowship. What communion has light with darkness? Why, *every!*

How wonderful it is to know that faith is a privilege, not a requisite. Albeit that it is indispensable and essential, in relation to our present exalted position in Christ and our future eonian life and glory, it is but a concomitant: ever an accompanying means of further blessing; never a contrivance of human merit (*cf* Rom. 8:28-32; *cp* 1 Cor. 1:21-25).

Faith is always and everywhere a gift of God. But what is so far-fetched about believing that God grants faith to those He has chosen beforehand? What is so odd about faith being *evidence* that one has been designated beforehand for the place of a Son?

We are thanking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying concerning you, on hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus...from the day on which you hear and realized the grace of God in truth, according as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful dispenser of Christ for us.

—the apostle Paul, Colossians 1:3-4, 6-7

Faith comes by hearing. By hearing what? By hearing lies about man's part in the scheme of

salvation? By hearing falsehoods concerning the character of God? By hearing nightmares concerning the outcome of the universe and the eternal well-being of our loved-ones? By hearing the deception first sprung on humanity by Satan himself, “You shall not surely die”? No! Faith comes, according to the apostle Paul, by “hearing and realizing the grace of God *in truth*.” Such grace, in truth, is *learned*. It is heard, realized and learned. How is it dispensed? By disqualified teachers who love tradition rather than truth? By fraudulent workers being transfigured into apostles of Christ? No! The truth comes from fellow-slaves of Christ such as Epaphras, trained men who are faithful dispensers of the true message of God.

I ask: what would be the motivation to present oneself an unashamed worker, if shameful workers rank right along with the faithful ones in bringing people to Christ? If it makes such little difference whether Epaphras teaches the Colossians, or if Elymas the magician from Crete teaches them, why should anyone bother? These may not be the concerns and questions of the mature, but certainly these thoughts would enter the minds of newcomers to the faith, newcomers who would read Jim’s article. They would easily be led to believe, from the article, that, while truth is a handy thing to have, it is certainly no essential in either dispensing or believing the evangel. So it would appear to them. It would appear to them that it makes no difference at all, as far as eonian life is concerned, whether one teaches lies or truth. One is as good as the other, for both lies and truth, according to the article, are sufficient to make one a believer in Christ—provided, of course, one mimes the right words and names the right names.

It is my conviction that such teaching as this has drained the blood from evangelism in this era of spiritual drought. The remedy? 1) a fresh and healthy gulf re-established between light and darkness, 2) strong teaching that correctly cuts between righteousness and lawlessness, and 3) a straight proclamation of the gospel that refuses agreement between Christ and Belial.

We have no promise that within the course of our present lifetime even relative maturity of faith will be given to all who are chosen. We only know that, whether sooner or later, concerning the one who is infirm in the faith: “he will be made to stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” In the meantime, the ecclesia will continue to consist of all those who are *chosen and called*, to whom it is *given* to believe that Christ is the wisdom and power of God and that Jesus died and rose—however limited or faulty their apprehension of these glorious declarations may be.

J.R.C.

We should not hope for faultless and *full* apprehensions of these glorious declarations, for who among humanity can attain to perfection this side of immortality? But *apprehensions*, yes. Apprehensions are as essential to the evangel as blood is to the soul. Let us teach, that others may apprehend.

Likewise, soulless things, giving a sound, whether flute or lyre, if they should not be giving a

distinction to the utterances, how will the fluting or the lyre playing be known? For if a trumpet, also, should be giving a dubious sound, who will be preparing for battle?

—*the apostle Paul*, 1 Cor. 14:7-8.

How can our message be heard if we make a dubious sound? How will any stop long enough to listen, if we meet their interest with wavering or hesitating opinion? How will any understand if we do not make clear distinctions between light and darkness? Only by distinguishing the true from the false, and by drawing sure and heavy strokes in the sand between these, will truth shine out with the clarity and conviction it enjoyed in the hands of men like Epaphras and Paul.

Apprehension! Even Satan realizes the importance of it. For he, the god of this eon, “*blinds* the apprehensions of the unbelieving so that the illumination of the evangel of the glory of Christ, Who is the Image of the invisible God, does not irradiate them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

To the writer of the foregoing article, a blinded apprehension is merely an unfortunate blemish in the life of a believer. To the apostle Paul, who was so keenly aware of the stratagems of the Adversary and his doctrines of demons, misapprehending the evangel of the glory of Christ is commensurate with unbelief itself.

Apprehension *is* the battle ground today. Knowledge is the trumpet. The evangel is the power.

How the cry of “tolerance!” has permeated our culture, to the extent that even those who would proclaim the true gospel have placed apprehension on par with misapprehension, and knowledge on par with ignorance. In conformity to the wicked eon *and* to the wiles of Satan, we have dragged down the evangel to the level of Satan’s lies, if only to save the liars.

God *will* save the human servants of Satan who today embrace and peddle his doctrines—at the consummation. In the meantime, the ecclesia will continue to consist of all those who are chosen and called, to whom it is *given* to believe that Christ is the wisdom and power of God.



