

# Do You Need a Faith Lift?

## The Dangers of Misplaced Faith and Those Who Are Responsible

by G. Richard Fisher



"I'll be the first to say that we dare not give to any human being — let alone an impostor — the worship and praise that belong to God alone and His Christ ... It is possible, I suppose, that the world is making a horrible mistake here," writes Paul Maier in his theological thriller novel, *More Than a Skeleton*.<sup>1</sup>

Some would suggest that faith consists of believing strongly in something or believing in something one knows isn't true. Others consider it just upbeat, positive thinking.

One respected Christian leader, writing about "Ventures of Faith," likens it to trial and error. Quoting Hebrews 11:6 ("Without faith it is impossible to please God"), he builds to:

"God has a work that He desires to do, and God is simply looking for people who are in harmony with what He desires in order that He might show Himself strong on their behalf. The key is to discover what it is that God wants to do. I've found that the best way is by just stepping out. Try it and see. Maybe God will work. Maybe God is wanting to work. Let's give Him a chance. But again, always have the attitude 'If it doesn't work, let's not push it.' Maintain that flexibility of being able to walk away from a project. If it's obvious that it isn't working, then let's not push

it and try and make it work."<sup>2</sup>

If the above were true, then the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah failed miserably and many of today's cults must be under God's blessing.

This same writer further says:

"So, take a step in faith. If it works, rejoice. If it doesn't, look for something else. Give God the opportunity. I believe strongly in giving God an opportunity, and when it works, glorious! But when it doesn't work, you haven't really gotten that deeply into it so that you can't just walk away and say, 'Well, it sure looked like a great idea, didn't it?' Don't lock yourself on to it and get yourself in so deep that you can't walk away."<sup>3</sup>

So we are to "take a step in faith" and see if it pans out. But pragmatism isn't faith.

Many pastors have done it God's way according to Scripture and saw little success, as measured in nickels and noses, then have done it their way and achieved such "success." The operative questions are "Is it right?" and "Is it biblical?"

Many evangelicals seem confused these days. The root of the confusion is that the Church at large has lost the biblical meaning of the word "faith." We don't define words today; we try to "feel" them.

The word "faith" is tossed around like a piece of putty that can be molded by anyone holding it. We are told that faith is this, or that, or some other thing until we feel as though we are with Alice, in Wonderland, where words can mean whatever we wish them to mean.

### LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER

The word "faith" has been divorced from the Scriptures and its biblical definition. Loss of the true understanding of faith will undermine Christianity. After all, we are "saved by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) and "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

Cults thrive on confusion. Faith, as they define it, becomes a weapon of control and exploitation. It is imperative that we understand what is, and what is not, biblical faith.

### EVERYONE CAN DO IT

There is a sense in which everyone can exercise some form of faith. It is a human faith. We are created with the ability to exercise faith and to commit to certain things. The essence of human faith is unquestioned belief, anything believed, or allegiance to something or someone. We can believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, our government, America and apple pie. We can believe and trust in mutual funds or stocks and bonds. Every human has the ability to believe

things — true or false — and the ability to have allegiances.

Theologian Louis Berkhof writes:

“The word ‘faith’ is not exclusively a religious and theological term. It is often used in a general and non-religious sense, and even so has more than one connotation.”<sup>4</sup>

Charles Hodge concurs:

“Faith in the widest sense of the word, is assent to the truth, or the persuasion of the mind that a thing is true. In ordinary popular language we are said to believe whatever we regard as true.”<sup>5</sup>

## A TWO-EDGED SWORD

The rub comes in when we skew this general ability to trust (have faith, believe in, or commit to) and put the wrong objects between ourselves and God, trusting them for eternal life and spiritual guidance. We may be able to trust our mom and dad, the local bank, a friend or neighbor, and that is all well and good on a human level, but what we commit to for eternal life, salvation, and divine guidance is another matter.

When it comes to our eternal destiny we can have *misplaced faith*. Misplaced faith can imperil our souls. Cult leaders can thrive in an environment of misplaced faith. What are the forms of misplaced faith and what does the Bible say about saving faith or rightly placed faith? The various forms of misplaced (religious) faith are:

**1. Faith in an individual leader.** This can be easily illustrated from a recent novel, *More Than a Skeleton*, by Paul Maier. In modern day Israel, a man named Joshua Ben Yosef (Jesus Son of Joseph) gathers followers worldwide as he claims to be the returned Jesus Christ. Joshua appears in what he calls an “intermediate coming” to warn humanity and prepare them for his coming in power and glory. Born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, he begins to do the miracles in the same places and in the same way that Jesus performed them in the Gospels. He even raises

one of his disciples, Shimom, from the dead.

Shannon Weber, the wife of one of the novel’s key characters, encounters Joshua as he heals a blind man. She is dumbfounded. Maier narrates the scene:

“It was too much for Shannon. She, too, fell to her knees, hands clasped, head bowed in reverence, eyes brimming with tears. Joshua stopped, walked over to her, layed his hand on her head, and whispered, ‘You, too, daughter, will be free of your problem.’ ... He caressed her cheek lovingly and moved on. A feeling of incredible peace came over Shannon, a soft featherbed of faith displacing the demons of doubt that sometimes tormented her.”<sup>6</sup>

Maier is portraying faith, trust, and commitment of one individual in another.

Many years ago, author Dave Breese wrote, “*Only Jesus Christ deserves disciples!*”<sup>7</sup> Nearly every cult requires allegiance to an overly presumptuous leader and Messiah figure. Yet Christ alone is to be followed. However, as Breese correctly notes, “How fearful is the contrast of the life and ministry of many religious leaders in our time. The cults are replete with the stated or implied suggestion on the part of leaders as to some unusual divine capability that might well inspire worship on the part of their followers.”<sup>8</sup> And Breese further recognizes:

“The cult leader also strengthens his presumptuous leadership by arrogating to himself the position of being the only repository of divine truth. He frequently talks about ‘my message, my revelation, my leadership, my people.’ In doing this, he is pushing the heretical proposition that he has been made the true custodian of some private revelation from God.”<sup>9</sup>

## “FAITH” ON THE FRINGE

On the edge of the fringe of the Charismatic movement we have many self-proclaimed “apostles” and

“prophets” who promote themselves as conduits for the Godhead. They say they are God’s “anointed.” They claim to channel and impart the Holy Spirit and enamor followers with their messages purportedly from heaven itself. They readily dispense “revelations.” God, it seems, is always speaking to them or through them. Even their false prophecies, which should incur the wrath of followers, hardly make a dent because long ago, their followers abandoned Scripture and its tests of a prophet in Deuteronomy 13 and 18. They have unwavering faith in a presumptuous messianic leader. They are so invested in their “prophet” that they have complete faith in him. They are deceived and blind. Long ago these followers have abandoned the biblical criteria for the identification of Apostles, which are:

“1. He must have accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry, which was from His baptism until His Ascension (Acts 1:21-23). 2. He must have been a *personal* witness of the resurrected Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7; 1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22; 4:33; 10:39-42). 3. He must have received a personal call from Christ to Apostleship and a commission to fulfill its duties (Lk. 6:13; Mk. 3:14-15). 4. He must have had, as his field of labour, *the whole world*, rather than a local church or group of churches (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15).”<sup>10</sup>

We could add that the Apostles were the foundation of the Church, and a foundation needs to be laid but once. The Church is the building, not the foundation (Ephesians 2:20-22). To try to lay a foundation all over again one must disrupt the building and cause havoc.

Finding counsel, guidance, and help from a concerned pastor or fellow Christian is a far cry from putting one’s trust in their spiritual guru, feeling they cannot function or live without his (or her) help and prophetic vision. The examples of Jim Jones’ cult in Jonestown, Guyana; David Koresh’s Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas; and Marshall Apple-

white's Heaven's Gate cult in San Diego show the sometimes horrific end of cultic and presumptuous messianic leadership. It illustrates that our faith must be in God and His Word if we are to be safe.

Next on the list of misplaced (religious) faith is:

**2. Faith in an institution.** In this case, the organization takes the place of God and has the final word on all matters of spirituality. All truth and interpretation reside in a group of autocrats and "group think" is demanded. This has ancient roots and was a major issue in the Reformation. Curtis Crenshaw explains:

"It was the church that was infallible, the Spirit of God guarding the church, speaking directly to it and through it. This is how a new doctrine such as the Immaculate Conception originated. The Reformers rightly saw that this would lead to enormous subjectivity, to endless new doctrines, and to continued enslavement of the lay people to the hierarchy of the church. They argued that though the Holy Spirit was a person and the Bible a book, nevertheless He always spoke through Scripture alone. To separate the Holy Spirit from the written Word was the very essence of Roman Catholicism, locating infallibility to those who could 'hear' Him and essentially placing the Bible in the background. ... In several such statements, it was obvious to Calvin that Sadoleto had made the church leaders the custodian of the truth and the elite of the church the official interpreter of the Bible, thereby separating the Holy Spirit from the Bible."<sup>11</sup>

In short, Catholicism sees faith as a commitment to all that the Roman Catholic Church has ever taught — biblical or unbiblical — and summarizes this in the latest official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* authorized by the late Pope John Paul II:

"Through the centuries many professions or symbols of faith have been articulated in response

to the needs of the different eras: the creeds of the different apostolic and ancient churches, e.g., the *Quicumque*, also called the Athanasian Creed; the professions of faith of certain Councils, such as Toledo, Lateran, Lyons, Trent; or the symbols of certain popes, e.g., the *Fides Damasi* or the *Credo of the People of God* of Paul VI."<sup>12</sup>

A mirror image of this is the cult of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They deny major Christian doctrine, including the triune nature of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the personage of the Holy Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Christ, salvation by grace, and the right to save a life through a blood transfusion. They claim their organization and bureaucracy alone is God's "channel of communication"<sup>13</sup> to its followers. Slavish obedience is demanded under threat of future eternal annihilation.

One source on the Jehovah's Witnesses, apologist Robert Bowman, writes:

"It is universally argued by evangelical critics of the Jehovah's Witnesses that their beliefs are based on the authoritative teachings of their religious leaders in the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. In one sense this is quite true. Certainly the Jehovah's Witnesses today learn their doctrine from the Society's publications and representatives, a fact that the Witnesses themselves generally would not dispute. And the publications of the Society are filled with warnings to follow the organization's teachings without question."<sup>14</sup>

To the indoctrinated Jehovah's Witness, his or her leadership is virtually infallible and not to be questioned. From its inception, the organization stated its exclusive patent on truth. A 1919 Watchtower publication rhetorically asked, "Is not the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society the one and only channel which the Lord has used in dispensing his truth continually since the beginning of the harvest period?"<sup>15</sup>

This idea of the one and only channel is almost laughable (if not so tragic) as it is claimed by most all the major and minor cults. We have more "one and only channels" than we need. One can channel-surf the cults; they are all on Satan's network.

Having considered misplaced faith in an individual, as well as in an institution, we must also contemplate:

**3. Faith in an idea.** This characterizes the mind set of those in what is called the Word Faith camp. The Word Faith movement is a loosely connected group of ministers and writers that defines faith in metaphysical terms. They borrow these ideas from one another and they describe faith as a force that can be harnessed and used by anyone. This impersonal force can be manipulated and used to create new reality. Our words, we are told, capture and direct the force of faith. Therefore we must always say positive things. Our faith ends up being faith in faith or faith in the positive words we can utter to affect our own reality. This never comes to grips with all the real, but negative, statements of almost every single Bible character, including Jesus. God instructed the Old Testament prophets to vocalize all kinds of negative statements. It is obvious that Word Faith is not God's message. This idea seems to always work in cultures that are rich and greedy, but not in the slums or poverty nations.

#### NAMING NAMES: THE HALL OF SHAME

Names attached to this idea are Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, Gloria and Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, Charles Capps, T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, Jerry Saville, Norvel Hayes, Robert Tilton, and Jan and Paul Crouch. Pat Robertson inhabits the fringe of the Word Faith by promoting many of the above. There is little doubt that this idea appeals to the greed of most humans and, as a result, it has become a lucrative business with its promoters busy building their own little kingdoms and, in some cases, multiple mansions. The Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC News), for instance, reported

that Benny Hinn has a “parsonage” in Southern California overlooking the Pacific Ocean worth \$10 million!<sup>16</sup>

The roots of Word Faith go back approximately 70 to 80 years to the ideas of Smith Wigglesworth and E.W. Kenyon. If Wigglesworth could be said to be the grandfather of this idea, then Kenyon can be called its father.

British-born Wigglesworth (1859-1947) is more mythical because documented evidence of his spiritual powers and exploits is scarce.<sup>17</sup> We know he was a plumber who had no formal education, and who actually started working at six years of age. His wife taught him how to read. The writings that survive him show he was no prophet: he predicted Christ would return in 1900.

Wigglesworth said faith “is the personal, inward flow of divine favor which moves in every fiber of our being.”<sup>18</sup> And he further claimed that, “there is within you a divine force, the power of limitless possibilities.”<sup>19</sup>

So faith is a power, a flow, a force that we can manipulate from within. Electricity or gravity are forces as well: impersonal, possible to manipulate, and everywhere available to everyone.

Kenyon (1867-1948) absorbed many of the religious ideas of his day, including strains of metaphysical thought and mind science. It can be established that “E.W. Kenyon is the twentieth century father of the Word of Faith movement, even more so than Kenneth Hagin. Kenyon is the source of their theology, and Hagin is the popularizer.”<sup>20</sup> Like a virus, the idea of faith as a force passes from one false teacher to another. Kenneth Copeland says, “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force. It will move things. Faith will change things. Faith will change the human body.”<sup>21</sup> We become mini-gods and controllers of our own fate and destiny.

So, according to these above and many more, faith is a metaphysical force that we can manipulate and use to create and change reality. Through

the force of faith, we can speak ourselves healthy and rich.

## LITTLE GODS

The twisted logic is as follows: God manipulated and used the force of faith by speaking faith-filled words to create the universe. In the same way, we can speak faith-filled words and create a new reality for ourselves. The problem is simply that God created everything by and through His own omnipotence, and we are not omnipotent. Assigning the attributes of God to man is idolatry.

Curtis Crenshaw has an accurate read on the Word Faith camp:

“It is the essence of the charismatic movement that the Bible is not *sufficient* for life and godliness. It is *necessary*, but not sufficient. We hear much from the charismatics about the necessity of Scripture; but since they believe in new revelation in the form of dreams, visions, impressions on the heart, and statements like ‘God told me in my spirit man,’ they say nothing about the Scripture *alone* being all we need.”<sup>22</sup>

This now brings us to the next misconception:

**4. Faith in an image.** Those who know the Bible are familiar with the Ten Commandments. They are familiar with God’s command to “make no graven image” (Exodus 20:4). No Bible believer would consider bowing or kneeling before a religious statue or a religious image. It is just another form of idolatry. However, religious statues are just one type of image.

A bit more subtle is the concept of image today, as it is used to speak of pictures, films, drama, PowerPoint, and other visual images used to enhance truth. There is definitely a tidal wave in regard to the use of image and images in the modern sense as they relate to Bible stories and spiritual truth. There is the constant drumbeat that we are a visual society. We have no argument with the idea that the soul is moved by more than word and that the power of images can reach souls. Jesus re-

peatedly used word pictures, as well as common illustrations (sower and seed, thorns, flowers, a king and his son, etc.).

Any thinking person, though, would assent to the fact that there is a danger that the image *could* become an idol or be seen as more powerful, seductive, and desired than the Word of God. The image is to be a window letting light in to shine on truth. God forbid that we would be so enamored with the glass and the frame that we forget the rest of the room. But it can happen.

## A CHILLING TREND

Having said the above, very few would want to get rid of pictures, films, and so forth in the illustration of truth. The frightening thing, however, is a trend within the Church to displace the Scriptures with images. Having lost the concept of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), we hear such forbidding statements as:

“Reformed Christians are examining what it means for them to seek God *apart from the spoken and written word of Scripture*. Answers vary, especially since the craze has touched both conservative evangelicals and liberal mainliners, who sometimes have different agendas for the use of images. But on at least one point, there is agreement: a longstanding hallmark of Reformed tradition is disappearing.”<sup>23</sup>

Let’s pray this “craze” ends quickly.

So some think we can seek God apart from Scripture. What God? Who or what defines Him? How can we have images without content? Do we give the images any meaning we wish? Some pastors need to get honest and just admit: 1) They have no confidence at all in the Bible and reject the words of all the prophets and Jesus Himself. 2) That they are too lazy to put the time into preparing vital, dynamic, and interesting sermons, and that it is their dullness, not the Scriptures, that are the turn off. 3) That they may as well stop calling their churches “Christian

churches," because they have jettisoned what defines them. The command to "preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:1) has not become obsolete and neither has "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). We are to proclaim the Gospel, making disciples as Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

There is no inherent power in an image, but there is in the Word of God. Blessing only comes as we invest ourselves in the teaching and preaching of Scripture. If people want to go to the movies or the art gallery, then they should go. The Church, however, *must* be what it is, the pillar and ground of truth. Imagery may be helpful at some level, but when the images displace, rather than illustrate, the Word of God, we are in deep trouble.

Let's move on and now consider:

**5. Faith in insanity.** Some place their faith in things that defy all reason and rationale. This gross idolatry launches people headlong into what can only be called religious insanity. The "flagellants" of Italy are a vivid example of this. Flagellation is the "Whipping or beating a person in order to improve health or morals" and it "dates back to ancient times in western culture. Flagellation has been employed to induce spiritually elevated states of consciousness."<sup>24</sup>

This practice still goes on today:

"Some Roman Catholics belonging to the organization called Opus Dei ('Work of God') whip themselves for purification and ecstasy. Some members of the modern witchcraft movement in England, particularly in the Gardnerian and Alexandrian branches, have included ceremonial scourging in their initiation rituals to symbolize that painful experiences can expand one's consciousness."<sup>25</sup>

### GETTING STRANGER AND STRANGER

India is replete with religious and moral insanity. One recent news article reported that, "One of the major

Hindu festivals in Nepal and India is Tihar, which was celebrated November 10-15. Each day features a different type of worship. Day one is crow worship. Day two, dog worship. The other three days are set apart for the worship of wealth, brothers, and COW DUNG."<sup>26</sup>

Then, there is a local church fighting a legal battle to use hallucinogens in their services. In an Associated Press article titled, "Church can serve sacred tea," it was reported:

"The Supreme Court sided Friday with a New Mexico church that wants to use hallucinogenic tea as part of its services this Christmas. ... The Bush administration contends that the hoasca tea is illegal and dangerous. Nancy Hollander, attorney for the Brazil-based O Centro Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal, told justices in a filing that hoasca is not only safe, but to members it 'is sacred and their sacramental use of hoasca connects them to God.'"<sup>27</sup>

Moving on, we will also weigh:

**6. Faith in our intuition.** A song by Josh Groban tells us, "You have everything you need, If you just believe. If you just believe. If you just believe. If you just believe. Just believe." One has to be amazed at the raw humanism and mysticism and then ask, "Believe what?"

In the motion picture, *The Polar Express*, the conductor (Tom Hanks) says, "One thing about trains: It doesn't matter where you're going. What matters is deciding to get on." What if the train is heading for a bridge that is out? We'd better be sure that any train we board or any endeavor we commit to has a known outcome. Materials are available which offer suggestions to pastors on preaching and teaching on this movie's themes.<sup>28</sup> While we may learn acting techniques by watching movies, there are safer sources to consult for theology. Imposing theology on secular movies is as creative as seeing images in clouds or the face of Jesus on a tree trunk.

## BURIED TRUTH

Faith in an individual, an institution, an idea, an image for the image's sake alone, moral insanity, or our own intuition are all at the bottom of the proverbial "slippery slope" when it comes to the health of our souls. All of these are misplaced and destructive faith.

It is surprising that all of these have a thread of truth woven through them, but those threads are so overlaid with so much error that truth is lost. Committed Christians do have faith in an individual: Jesus our Savior. We promote an institution because Jesus said He would build His Church. Certainly, we promote ideas and constructs in the many Christian doctrines we teach. Images such as pictures and film can be an aid to our teaching the Bible.

The Apostle Paul was accused of being mad. Unbelievers think of biblical things as odd and perhaps crazy. Also, at times, our intuition, guided by Scripture, has us doing things that we know please the Lord. The (human) "faith" commitments that we've surveyed are a negative broken mirror image of the truth. They totally distort any germ of veracity.

### ONLY ONE PLACE TO FIND IT

So what is *true* faith? True faith must be defined by the Bible. God's Word is the only sure and unchanging foundation. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root word for "faith" is the word *he'emin*. This word is often translated "believe" and carries the idea of trust or trusting in something or someone. Theologian Charles Hodge affirms that the "primary idea of faith is trust."<sup>29</sup> The next question is: Trust in what?

Inherent in the idea of faith is an object. What or who, according to the Bible, is it that we are to ultimately trust? We cannot just say, "believe, believe, believe," because the issue is: Where will what we trust in take us? Will we believe, trust in, and commit to an individual, an institution, an idea, an image, just plain insanity, or our own intuition when it comes to eternal issues, eternal health, and eternal life?

Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs us to, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." The context is God's commands, God's truth, and God's directions (vv. 1-3). We must trust the Word and bring our thoughts and ideas to its grid. Ultimately saving faith is simply trust in God, the saving work of Jesus, and God's Word. The Bible is always our starting and ending point.

The Scriptures are very clear as to the objects of our faith. Faith not only implies an object, as we stated, but mandates it. The Greek word used throughout the New Testament is *pisteuo* and the classical use was clear, "conveying the thought of a movement of trust going out to, and laying hold of, the object of its confidence."<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, as far as religious faith is concerned, the only worthy objects of faith are God and His Word. If my faith is not grounded in God and His Word, my faith is misplaced and my trust will be disappointed.

Hebrews 11:1 *does not* give to us a definition of faith, but a description of its essence when it says, "faith is the substance [or realization] of things hoped for, the evidence [or confidence] of things not seen." The foundation and object of our faith here is "the Word of God" (v. 3).

*The Ryrie Study Bible* instructs us thus:

"Faith is described in this great verse as the *assurance* (or reality, the same word translated 'nature' in 1:3) of things hoped for, the conviction (as in John 16:8) of things not seen. Faith gives reality and proof of things unseen, treating them as if they were already objects of sight rather than of hope."<sup>31</sup>

The words of respected theologian Louis Berkhof are equally helpful:

"If faith in general is a persuasion of the truth founded on the testimony of one in whom we have confidence and on whom we rely, and therefore rests on authority, Christian faith in the

most comprehensive sense is man's persuasion of the truth of Scripture on the basis of the authority of God. ... The knowledge of faith consists in a positive recognition of the truth, in which man accepts as true whatsoever God says in His Word, and especially what He says respecting the deep depravity of man and the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."<sup>32</sup>

J.I. Packer opens the rich meaning of the word "faith":

"The Reformers restored biblical perspectives by insisting that faith is more than orthodoxy — not *fides* merely, but *fiducia*, personal trust and confidence in God's mercy through Christ; that it is not a meritorious work, one facet of human righteousness, but rather an appropriating instrument, an empty hand outstretched to receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ; that faith is God-given, and is itself the animating principle from which love and good works spontaneously spring; and that communion with God means, not an exotic rapture of mystical ecstasy, but just faith's everyday commerce with the Saviour."<sup>33</sup>

R.E. Nixon concurs regarding the objects of our faith, stating, "God is supremely the One in whom confidence may be placed ... but His word and His promises are also reliable (Rev 21:5)."<sup>34</sup>

#### NOTE THE DIFFERENCE

In the New Testament we see a distinction between the word "faith" and the words "the faith." While the word "faith" has to do with intellectual assent and trust in the Living God and His Word, "the faith" (e.g., Jude 3) has to do with the content of our faith, sometimes called "the Apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). "*The faith*" is what we believe. It really is the sum total of Christian doctrine.

We should all be concerned about the great basic doctrines of our faith. In 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul calls it "the good deposit."

T. Ernest Wilson says that "the faith" is a "synonym for the message itself. It is not just the act of believing, but the doctrine believed."<sup>35</sup> Wilson also warns that "an undefined faith produces a weak and shaky paradise of peace and tranquility, a heretic's haven, a peace at any price."<sup>36</sup>

Faith, that is, trust and confidence in God, His Word, and His Savior, is the safest route to travel. We need not worry whether our faith is strong enough. We can take this as paradigm: Strong faith in a weak bridge will cause us harm and loss, but even weak faith in a strong bridge will get us across safely. It is not the strength of our faith, but the strength of our Savior that is all important.

For a person confronted with a swollen stream with a rotted tree that fell across its banks, faith in that tree will be in vain. Likewise, lack of faith in a steel bridge will not make a difference in that bridge's integrity. Christ is our strong bridge. Individuals (cult leaders), institutions, ideas, images, mystical insanity, and our intuition are all rotted weak passage ways. Our faith must be in the strong, eternal bridge of our loving Heavenly Father, a Savior, and His infallible and inerrant Word. These alone are safety and assurance.

The great hymn writers caught the biblical concept of faith with these words:

"Simply trusting every day,  
Trusting through a stormy way;  
Even when my faith is small,  
Trusting Jesus, that is all."<sup>37</sup>

And:

"My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name.  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,  
All other ground is sinking sand;  
All other ground is sinking sand."<sup>38</sup>

#### Endnotes:

1. Kevin Sullivan to Jon Weber from the

novel, *More Than a Skeleton*, by Paul Maier, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), pg. 156.

2. Chuck Smith, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*. Costa Mesa, Calif.: The Word For Today Publishers, 2000, pg. 134.

3. *Ibid.*, pg. 137.

4. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975, pg. 500.

5. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 3, pg. 42.

6. *More Than a Skeleton*, op. cit., pg. 119.

7. Dave Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 45, italics in original.

8. *Ibid.*, pg. 47.

9. *Ibid.*, pg. 56.

10. Alan Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross*. Birmingham, England: K&M Books, 1994, pg. 493, italics in original.

11. Curtis I. Crenshaw, *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement*. Memphis: Footstool Publishing, 1994, pg. 236.

12. U.S. Catholic Conference, Foreword by Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1995, pg. 59, italics in original.

13. See, for example, *The Watchtower*, Dec. 1, 1981, pg. 27.

14. Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses*. Grand Rapids, Mich.:

Baker Book House, 1991, pg. 47.

15. *The Watch Tower Reprints*, April 1, 1919, pg. 6414.

16. Bob McKeown, host, "Do You Believe in Miracles?," CBC News, Nov. 3, 2004.

17. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "Back to the Source, The Truth About Smith Wigglesworth," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1995, pp. 1, 11-14.

18. Smith Wigglesworth, compiled and edited by Wayne E. Warner, *The Anointing of His Spirit*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Vine Books, 1994, pg. 27.

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20. *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement*, op. cit., pg. 54.

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27. The Associated Press, "Church can serve sacred tea," Dec. 11, 2004. Document available at: [www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/nation/10390553.htm](http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/nation/10390553.htm).

28. Promotional DVD, copy on file.

29. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., Vol. 3, pg. 43.

30. James I. Packer in Everett Harrison, Editor, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973, pg. 208.

31. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, annotation for Hebrews 11:1, pg. 1850, italics in original.

32. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., pp. 501, 503.

33. Packer in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit., pg. 211, italics in original.

34. R.E. Nixon in Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, Vol. 2, 1975, pg. 483.

35. T. Ernest Wilson, *Mystery Doctrines of the New Testament*. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1975, pg. 15.

36. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.

37. Edgar P. Stites, "Trusting Jesus."

38. Edward Mote, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" ("The Solid Rock").



## A RETREAT FROM REASON

(continued from page 4)

Regarding Bonhoeffer, Boyd is clear when he states, "my thesis has been greatly inspired by my reading of Bonhoeffer. Indeed, this work can be understood as a consistent interaction with his thought."<sup>8</sup> It's clear that Boyd must have made some kind of judgment that Bonhoeffer was a safe guide to be trusted and followed. Boyd's lack of discernment — or judgment — betrays him here. We are only as good as our sources.

Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor (1906-1945) who participated in an abortive plot to overthrow Hitler. He eventually was hanged in a German concentration camp on April 9, 1945. Bonhoeffer's thoughts and writings are obtuse enough to inspire even "the ephemeral 'death of God' theologians."<sup>9</sup>

In some instances, Bonhoeffer denied some major fundamentals of the

faith and was ambiguous about others, such as the resurrection of Christ. David Becker has investigated the theology of Bonhoeffer and in the *Christian News* wrote:

"I don't mean to be critical of people, but I do want to speak the truth in love, and one of my pet peeves is when I see people, especially those who consider themselves to be, and present themselves as, theologically conservative, praise Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer espoused a so-called religionless Christianity, and expressed doubt about God as a working hypothesis. He was a father of the so-called 'death of God' 'fad' of a few years ago. He wrote a lot and also wrote some things that sounded orthodox but he consistently had a low view of the Bible, considering a lot of it myth."<sup>10</sup>

Bonhoeffer set up the most unlikely premise by suggesting that while

Jesus may have been without sin, His body or flesh was sinful:

"In his flesh, too, was the law that is contrary to God's will. He was not the perfectly good man. ... The assertion of the sinlessness of Jesus fails if it has in mind observable acts of Jesus. His deeds are done in the likeness of flesh. They are not sinless, but ambiguous. One can and should see good and bad in them."<sup>11</sup>

Bonhoeffer is contradicted by the Apostle Peter and Holy Writ: "[Jesus] committed no sin and, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Certain Gnostics and the Nestorians divided the humanity and deity of Jesus in much the same way as Bonhoeffer did.<sup>12</sup>

Bonhoeffer called the Virgin Birth a "hypothesis" and added, "It is both historically and dogmatically questionable. The biblical evidence for it is uncertain."<sup>13</sup> One may choose to deny the Virgin Birth, but to say the biblical