

THE TRINITY REVIEW

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

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The Church

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The reader is asked to study these passages of Scripture while reading this essay: 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 1 Corinthians 14:26-37; 1 Timothy 2:8-3:13; Titus 1:5-2:8; Acts 6:1-7; and Ephesians 4:1-24.

Contemporary popular theology and practice, including the doctrine and practice of the church, is a confused and unbiblical mess. To quote Augustine and Calvin, many sheep are without and many wolves are within the churches. The confusion can only be eliminated by studying the Scripture. It is the Bible and the Bible alone that furnishes us with the information we need for a correct understanding of the church. Tradition, history, the needs of men and women, and the ideas of men are simply irrelevant to the doctrine of the church. The Bible alone is the source of our information about the purpose and the organization of the church. A reading of what the New Testament has to say about the purpose and organization of the church quickly leads one to the conclusion that most of those societies that pass for churches today are not churches at all.

In 1989 there are all sorts of ideas being published about the church, its reformation and its reconstruction. Some want the church to be a place of worship, whatever "worship" is. Others claim that their church already is a place of worship. Some want the clergy to wear costumes and crowns, and children to drink wine and eat bread. In other churches the clergy already wear costumes and crowns, and the children already drink wine and eat

bread. Some advocate a return to iconography; others practice it. Some advocate a return to Rome; others, like Thomas Howard, run ahead of the ecclesiastical herd. Some believe women should be ordained; others ordain both women and homosexuals. Still others don't believe in ordination at all. But in this babble of voices there seems to be some agreement: Nearly everyone wants the church to be something other than what God says it should be.

The Purpose of the Church

What is the purpose of the church? Is it to induce a feeling of awe and dependence in worshippers? A warm glow of fellowship? Is it to re-enact the Gospel or the sacrifice of Calvary? Is it to appeal to the whole person? Is it to do good works? Is it to be a social action, anti-abortion, antiwar, and anti-poverty organizing center? If once we understand what the purpose of the church is, all the rest of the doctrine of the church falls neatly into place. But if we do not know what the purpose of the church is, then we cannot understand how the church is to be organized and operated.

The purpose of the church is really quite simple: education in the truth. All its activities are to be educational activities, and all its education is to be education in the truth. In his first letter to Timothy (3:15), Paul stated his purpose in writing: "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of

the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." In his commentary on this passage, Calvin wrote: "The reason why the church is called the pillar of truth is that she defends and spreads it by her agency.... The church maintains the truth, because by preaching the church proclaims it, because she keeps it pure and entire, because she transmits it to posterity." Calvin warns pastors: "How dreadful is the vengeance that awaits them if, through their fault, that truth which is the image of the divine glory, the light of the world, and the salvation of men, shall be allowed to fall! This consideration ought undoubtedly to lead pastors to tremble continually, not to deprive them of all energy, but to excite them to greater vigilance." Calvin concludes by arguing that "if the church is the pillar of the truth, it follows that the church is not with them [clergymen] when the truth not only lies buried, but is shockingly torn and thrown down and trampled underfoot.... Paul does not wish that any society in which the truth of God does not hold a lofty and conspicuous place shall be acknowledged to be a church."

In his letter to Timothy, Paul stated his purpose as being to instruct Timothy how to conduct himself in the church. Here are a few of those instructions: "Remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies.... Instruct the brethren in these things.... These things command and teach.... Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Meditate on these things, take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.... Teach and exhort these things...."

In his letter to the Ephesians (4:11-14) Paul wrote: "And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive...."

In this passage Paul says that the purpose of the church is education: the edifying of the body of Christ until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. For this purpose, God has established several sorts of teachers: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. All of these men are teachers, and all are supposed to equip the saints. The apostles, prophets and evangelists did so not only by speaking, but more importantly by writing the Scriptures, and pastors and teachers teach from these documents today.

Another Scripture that is relevant to this question of the purpose of the church is *John* 21:15-17: "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'

"He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my Sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord you know all things, you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.' "

Some trendy holistic gospel people will no doubt think that Christ was talking about literal sheep and food, but Christians know better. He was talking about his chosen ones and the truth. Feeding them is figurative language for educating them in the truth.

Let me mention one more passage, if you will. I do not wish to belabor this point about the purpose of the church, but it is both foundational to a proper understanding of the doctrine of the church and absolutely necessary in this anti-intellectual twentieth century.

Matthew 28:19-20: "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...." Christ's command to the church is to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach all the things he had taught. The purpose of the

church is education in the truth. Here he speaks literally, while to Peter he spoke figuratively.

Now in this benighted twentieth century, many people, including many who claim to be Christians, do not know what the truth is or how it is communicated. Some think that truth is personal, not propositional; when one has a religious experience, one encounters persons, not believes propositions. One trusts in Christ, not believes that Christ died according to the Scriptures, and was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Believing propositions, believing doctrines is belittled as "historical faith." Even the devils have that kind of faith, we are told. One needs a living, vibrant, personal relationship with Christ. Some people think that truth is emotional, not intellectual: The truth stirs one's heart, not enlightens one's understanding. Some think that truth is practical, not theoretical: One does the truth, not believes it. After all, doesn't James say that faith without works is dead?

These modern views of truth, all of which are rejections of the Biblical view, pervert both the doctrine and the practice of the church. Many of the worst practices of those societies professing to be churches stem from their false views of truth and how it is communicated: idolatry, ritual, invitations, dance, drama, and music.

Granted that truth is propositional and therefore must be communicated by language, granted that truth is the propositions of the Bible and their logical implications, and granted that the purpose of the church is the propagation of the truth, several things follow: Virtually all non-educational functions, whether they be charitable,* political, social, ceremonial, ritual, aesthetic, or economic are not proper functions of the church. The church's principal and essential job is education in the truth, and the only source of truth is the Bible.

Several years ago I taught a class in the doctrine of God at a large and allegedly conservative Presbyterian church near Washington, D.C. There were two or three people in the class, none of whom was a member of the large Presbyterian church in which the class was being held. On the same

evening, in the same church, a man and a woman were leading an aerobics class of 25 or 30. That church enjoys a reputation of being alive. And the aerobics class was certainly lively enough. But I doubt it.

The Teachers of the Church

If teaching the Bible is the function of the church, then there ought to be a lot of teaching going on in the church. Well, in the apostolic churches that was so: There was so much teaching going on that one man could not do it all, even though that man was an apostle or a prophet. In the accounts given in the book of *Acts*, the traveling bands of apostles and evangelists were always just that: traveling groups of men. The apostles would no more have thought of sending one man out to start a church or to be a missionary than they would have thought of sending a woman alone. Yet that is precisely what many denominations, including those that pride themselves on their orthodoxy, do today. In *Acts* 13 we are given a list of five men who were prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch. Five! There was no one teaching elder, no one priest, no one pastor, no one minister. There were five. Moreover, they were all equal. There was not one pastor, and an associate pastor, and a youth minister. There was no hierarchy. There was none of the various offices that modern churches have invented in their foolish attempts to manage the church efficiently. The early Christians took the educational function of the church very seriously. And when the five teachers sent men – or rather when the Holy Spirit sent men – to Cyprus, he sent two, Saul and Barnabas, and they took John with them. By verse 14, the reference is to "Paul and his party." Apparently the party had become so large that John could return to Jerusalem.

This plurality of teachers was the common practice of the apostolic church. *Acts* 14:23 says that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church. Plural, not singular. One kind of leader, not two, three, four or five. There were no bishops, no right reverends, no cardinals, no archbishops—and certainly no popes. Elders, we are told in *1 Timothy* 3 and *Titus* 1, are to be teachers. There was no such thing as a ruling elder who did not teach in the

apostolic church order. There is only one set of requirements for the office of elder, and an elder is to be able to teach. Paul did not require seminary training of some elders and not for others. Nor, and this is also very important, was there a teacher who was not ordained. This is because the only way of ruling in the church is by teaching.

When Christ sent out the seventy disciples two by two in *Luke* 10:1, he followed the same practice. Perhaps this practice of Christ and the apostles has something to do with the Biblical doctrine that the testimony of two or three witnesses is necessary to establish and confirm the truth.

In *1 Thessalonians* 5:12 Paul exhorts the Christians to "recognize those," please notice the plural, "who labor among you...and admonish you." *Hebrews* 13:7 and 17 also contain the plural. In *Acts* 20 there are several elders of the church at Ephesus. *James* 5:14 refers to the elders of the church. *Titus* 1:5 says that Paul commanded Timothy to ordain elders, plural, in every city. *1 Timothy* 5:17 refers to elders in the plural. And *1 Corinthians* 14 specifically instructs the Corinthians to limit the number of men speaking in church to six!

In failing to recognize the importance of teaching and therefore the need for several teachers in each church, virtually all modern churches part company with the apostolic church. From the Roman State-Church, headed by the pope, with each local parish headed by a priest, to the local Baptist church headed by a pastor, the institution of one-man rule has been with us since the days of Diotrephes. Diotrephes, as I'm sure you recall, was the church pastor described in *3 John* "who loves to have the pre-eminence among them" and who did not receive John or the brethren. He and his church were the prototypical one minister-one church institution. It is his example, and not the apostles', that the churches have followed from that day to this.

The Election of Teachers

But there are several other important lessons to be learned from the Scriptures if we will be willing and teachable.

First, the congregations from among their own membership elected the teachers in the church. Perhaps the most familiar example of this is *Acts* 6, in which we are told that the congregation at Jerusalem elected seven men on the specific instruction of the apostles. Apparently we are given a complete account of the election of leaders in *Acts* 6 because this is the first time it had happened in the history of the church.

Here, in part, is what the apostles said: "Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

In this one example, written for our learning, the apostles overthrow some of the most cherished practices of ecclesiastical societies today. First, their appointing of leaders, including teachers like Stephen and Philip, was not done without the consent of the congregation. Second, the apostles specified men. Please note that no women were elected or ordained, yet if this were permissible, it should have been done here, for the problem concerned the distribution of food to widows. This would seem to be (according to modern thinking) a perfect illustration of why women deacons and elders are needed. But the apostles commanded that seven men be chosen, and they were. Third, the apostles specified a plurality of men. Fourth, they specified men full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. Paul makes the qualifications for leaders more explicit in *1 Timothy* 3. But the choice of men is left to the congregation. The congregation elects the men from their own number, not imposed on the congregation by "higher" authority. When we read later in *Acts* that the traveling apostles ordained elders in every city, we ought to assume that they used the same method: congregational election followed by apostolic appointment or ordination. Indeed the Greek word that is used in *Acts* 14:23, as Calvin argues, means elected by show of hands. Once the procedure was described in *Acts* 6 there was no need to repeat it every time it happened. The apostles regarded ordinary Christians as competent judges of who was filled with the Holy Ghost and with wisdom. This means, of course, that those modern societies that do not elect their leaders are not following the apostolic pattern. It means that

those societies that elect women are not following the apostolic pattern. It also means that those churches that do not elect their leaders from among their own number are not following the apostolic pattern. If the congregation is expected to judge, then the congregation must be informed about the men on whom they are to vote. This cannot be done, as modern churches seem to think, by listening to ministerial candidates preach trial sermons. The men whom the apostles appointed leaders in every city were local men, not immigrants. They were familiar with the congregation, the town, and the gospel.

The Equality of Teachers

Let me go on to my next point, which is that all the leaders of the church are equal. There is no hierarchy, nor even a first among equals. God is a democrat.

"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your teacher – the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on Earth your father; for one is your Father, he who is in Heaven. And do not be called teachers; for one is your teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:8-12).

God is a democrat

By these words Christ outlawed all titles and marks of distinction or nobility in the church. No one is to be called Rabbi, nor Father, and, what seems most harmless of all, not even Teacher. All such titles are both inaccurate and signs of pride. Yet societies claiming to be churches call their clergy Fathers, Reverends, Right Reverends, and Rabbis. Worse, they reserve these titles for elite groups within their leadership: Not all elders are called Reverend; not all leaders are called Fathers; not all teachers are called Rabbis. Not only has the clear command of Christ been ignored, but a new group, not found in the New Testament, called the clergy, has emerged.

In *Matthew* 20 Christ expands on this prohibition: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it

over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The only authority elected leaders of the church have is both given and limited by the Bible. It is the duty to teach the truth. It is not, I shall briefly argue, the power of excommunication. Paul gives a good example of the proper exercise of excommunication in his letters to the Corinthians. In the first letter, as you recall, he wrote to them – and notice the involvement of the whole congregation, not simply the elders – "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

In his second letter, Paul wrote: "The punishment which was inflicted by the majority [note well] is sufficient for such a man, so that on the contrary you ought rather to forgive and comfort him."

The commands which Christ gave in *Matthew* 18 similarly involve discipline by the majority: Go to your brother first. If he will not hear you, take a witness. If he still does not listen, tell it to the church. If he will not listen to the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. The church does not mean the church leaders: It means the entire assembly.

Moreover, this procedure applies to all Christians, not just to laymen. There are no special courts set up for judging the clergy. All Christians are brothers, and to establish separate judicial procedures for leaders and for laity is unbiblical. The Bible regards ordinary Christians, assuming the teachers have been doing their job correctly, as entirely competent to judge, as well as to counsel, one another.

The Remuneration of Teachers

The next observation that I wish to make is that all the teachers in the church are to be paid: Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn. Paul did not ordinarily receive compensation from the churches he helped establish, but he was quite clear in asserting the propriety and the duty of paying teachers according to their competence and diligence. Today many churches pay only one teacher, the minister or priest or pastor, and if they are large enough his associate, his secretary, the janitor, the choir director, and maybe the organist. But that is not what Paul commands. All the oxen, all the teachers, especially those who do their job well and eagerly, are to be paid. That does not mean that they must live solely from the fruits of their labor in the church, but it does mean that their work is to be recognized as valuable by the congregation.

If men are to be elected from the congregation as teachers, chances are they will already have another job by which they can support themselves should the congregation fire them. This would have several beneficial side-effects. If teachers are not completely dependent upon the congregation for their livelihood, they might be less apt to suppress truths that the congregation does not want to hear. Second, if the teachers can partially support themselves, the congregation will be able to support all the teachers according to their competence and diligence. Rather than paying one large salary to one man, the congregation will be able to pay smaller salaries to several men.

This division of labor would have several additional benefits: First, it would tend to reduce burnout. No one man would be expected to carry the load for the church. Second, it would ensure that the church would continue its purpose uninterrupted should one teacher resign, die, or become involved in a scandal. Third, it would reduce the personality cult and conflict that sometimes cause people to attend and to leave the church because they like or do not like the pastor or the way he preaches. There would be no central figure to like or dislike. There are many more additional benefits from having a plurality of teachers, some of which may not become obvious until it is tried. It is difficult to imagine all the ramifications of a system of church

organization that has not been tried in modern times.

The Structure of Church Meetings

Finally, I want to say a few words about church meetings themselves. *1 Corinthians* 14 contains a wealth of information about the meetings, as does *1 Timothy* 2. Some of this information is angrily rejected today by those who think they know better than God, but this is what God commands.

First, he commands the men to pray: "I desire that the men pray everywhere" (*1 Timothy* 2:8). The women are to adorn themselves with modest apparel and with good works. In contrast to the men, who are commanded to pray, the women are to keep quiet: "Let a woman learn in silence."

Second, Paul makes provision for several men to speak, as many as six in one meeting. They are to speak, and the rest are to judge. Here again is the appeal to the congregation to judge. Moreover, after the men have spoken, there is to be a period of discussion and questions. This seems to be implied by the fact that the women are prohibited from asking questions in church, but must do so at home. Such a prohibition would make sense only if there were a discussion period following each sermon. This prohibition has two good effects: First, it maintains order in the church; and second, it ensures the continuation of teaching at home in the family. It requires each husband and father to be able to teach his wife and family.

While *1 Corinthians* 14 refers to prophets and tongues speakers, the principles stated in that chapter apply to modern church meetings even though there are no prophets or tongues speakers today. The elected elders today would assume the leadership of the congregational worship. They are the elected teachers of the people. Moreover, the assembly for worship would be an assembly of all the people; there would be no division into Sunday school classes with their programs of planned retardation for the youngsters. All the women and children would learn in silence during the assembly; any questions that arose in their minds would be asked at home.

The Ideal Church

In conclusion I would like to suggest to you several characteristics of the church as it might be and ought to be. There are many details that I have yet to work out in my own thinking, but I can present a sketch of the ideal church.

The church as it might be and ought to be would consist of a well-informed congregation taught by several elected, ordained, and paid married male teachers. There would be a great deal of teaching going on at the church, all for the purpose of building the people up in the knowledge of Christ so that they might spread that knowledge throughout the community.

The plurality of teachers would mean that teaching would be plentiful, that the rest could correct one teacher's errors, even before the error is propagated. The teachers would meet regularly to discuss their teaching, to offer each other criticism and guidance, to suggest appropriate books to read, to prepare for the teaching meetings on Sunday, and to encourage each other in the faith. Mutual constructive criticism would tend to keep the teachers humble. Burnout, which has become more and more common among one-man churches, could be virtually eliminated. The church was never intended to function with one teacher, and a plurality of teachers would get a much larger job done better.

A church so arranged would also eliminate some of the squelching of local talent that the present unscriptural system encourages. I believe that many of the para-church organizations, to the extent that they are performing jobs that the church ought to be doing, are doing so because the local churches could not find, or would not find, any way to use the abilities and energies of local Christians. In a one-man church, there is room for only one man.

The institution of the Sunday school, which is only two hundred years old anyway, would be eliminated. Families would worship as families. In the order of worship a sermon or lecture might occur after some singing and prayer, followed by questions from the congregation and a general discussion to make sure that the sermon has been

understood. During this discussion, all the men of the congregation might participate. In the *Institutes* Calvin says, "It is clear that every member of the church is charged with the responsibility of public edification according to the measure of his grace, provided he perform it decently and in order."

This discussion in turn would be followed by more prayer and singing, which, I might add, is also to be educational. Many have drawn a false dichotomy between learning and worship – a dichotomy that flows from the more fundamentally false dichotomy between the mind and the spirit, or between the head and the heart – so that what is worship cannot be educational or intellectual, and what is educational cannot be worshipful. But such people are far from the Bible. *Colossians* 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord." *Ephesians* 5:18 and 19 say, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Notice how neatly the two activities, teaching one another and praising God, fit together. If we sing with grace in our hearts to God, we are teaching and admonishing one another also. There is no incompatibility between worship and learning; they are inseparable. Indeed, the highest worship we can pay to a God who has given us a thousand page book to read is to study that book and believe what it teaches; and the most insulting thing we can do to an author, whether human or divine, is to refuse or neglect to learn what he has written. Nothing is phonier than those people who claim to know Jesus, or to have a religious experience or a personal relationship with God, but who show little interest in a serious study of the Bible. Christ said, If you love me, obey my commands. Of course, one must know the commands before one can obey them; but knowledge, according to some people, has nothing to do with religion. Perhaps knowledge has nothing to do with their religion, but then their religion is not Christianity.

In the order of worship after the first cycle of sermon, discussion, prayer, and singing, the cycle might begin again. Or perhaps two of the elders could speak on the same topic or passage of Scripture. The important thing is to end the monologue that characterizes most churches today, the sermon following which no discussion or asking of questions is permitted. That simply is not a procedure conducive to learning. Christ himself entertained questions from his listeners. He even answered the questions of the lawyers and Pharisees who were trying to trick him. It is intolerably arrogant for ministers not to permit discussion after their sermons.

But to return to the church: A group of elected teachers, all of whom earn part of their salaries from the church and part from secular pursuits, would be more likely to preach the whole counsel of God than a single man who is totally dependent on the congregation for his support or on the denomination for his pension and health insurance. The apostolic church model would increase both the quantity and quality of the teaching going on.

When one reads the book of *Acts* and discovers just how well the apostolic model worked, an additional though inconclusive reason is added to the argument for reforming the church. Of course, one can also point to the obvious success of the Roman State-Church, which is about as far removed from the apostolic church pattern as one can get. Obviously, success *per se* is not a very good argument. But my argument is that only the apostolic model of the church is consistent with the system of truth revealed to us in the Scripture. The Diotrephesian model followed by the Roman State-Church is not compatible with the truth, and the Roman State-Church has not succeeded in propagating the truth. A false church and false doctrine go together; the apostolic church and the apostolic doctrine go together as well. Not only have we been given a system of truth in the Bible, but also as part of that system of truth we have been given information about a form of organization designed to propagate the truth. The medium and the message go together because God has given us a message about the medium. As Christians we are

sinning by failing to teach the truth in the way that God commands.

*To keep charitable activities from interfering with the purpose of the church, Paul wrote *1 Timothy* 5:4-16. In verse 11 he commands that some widows be denied charity; in verse 17 he commands that competent teachers be paid well.

A Note on Faith

John W. Robbins

The traditional analysis of faith and saving faith into three components – knowledge, *notitia*; assent, *assensus*; and trust, *fiducia* – has been shown to be false by Clark in his books *The Johannine Logos* and *Faith and Saving Faith*. Faith consists of two elements, knowledge (understanding) and belief (assent). His arguments are presented at length in his books, and I shall not repeat them here.

There is another argument against the traditional three-element view of faith that I do not believe Clark presents. It also is conclusive, and one would hope that theology and theologians a century from now – especially if Christ returns before then – recognize the error of the three-element view of faith.

The argument that I wish to offer is this: If faith consists of three elements – knowledge, assent (or belief), and trust – and if a person does not have faith unless all three elements are present, then unregenerate persons may understand and believe—assent to—the truth. In fact, those who advocate the three-element view insist that unregenerate persons may understand and believe the truth – their prime example of such persons is demons. But if unregenerate persons may believe the truth, then the natural man can indeed receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are not foolishness unto him, contrary to *1 Corinthians* 2 and dozens of other verses. Belief – and the whole of salvation – is not a

gift of God. Natural men can do their own believing, thank you very much.

The three-element view of faith leads straight to a contradiction – faithless believers – and therefore must be false.

When a Sunday school teacher was espousing the three-element view of faith and supporting the analysis from his own experience, he said that when young, he knew what the Bible said about sin and salvation; he believed that what it said was true; but he still did not have faith and was not a Christian because he did not trust Christ. That view, of course, destroys the Biblical order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) for in the Biblical order, regeneration precedes belief. When questioned about this, the Sunday school teacher began talking about regeneration by stages and referred to the miracle of the blind man receiving his sight by stages – first seeing men as trees.

This, of course, is equally unbiblical – regeneration is instantaneous, not a process, and it occurs once, not several times or in stages. Faith – belief – is an effect of regeneration; the regenerate mind must believe the saving propositions; the unregenerate mind cannot believe the saving propositions. What occurs in stages is sanctification, not regeneration, and that is what the miracle of the blind man illustrates.

In conclusion, the three-element view of saving faith cannot be true because it implies a logical contradiction, faithless believers; and because it violates the Biblical doctrine that regeneration must precede belief. The teaching of the Bible is clear: "Repent and believe the Gospel" (*Mark* 1:15); "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (*Mark* 9:23); "The devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (*Luke* 8:12); "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (*John* 1:12-13); "But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you" (*John* 10:26); "Therefore they could not believe, because

Isaiah said again: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, lest they should turn...." (*John* 12:39-40); "by him everyone who believes is justified from all things" (*Acts* 13:39); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (*Acts* 16:31); "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved.... For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame.'" (*Romans* 10:9,11)

Not only have the theologians failed to understand what the Gospel is, teaching that Christ died for all men and desires the salvation of all, they have failed to understand what saving faith is, turning it into something that a person must "work up" within himself, rather than a gift of God. It has been a long time since true Christianity has been preached widely in America – too long. May God raise up men whose minds and voices are true and clear.