

## XXXIX.

**Defective Learning.**

“He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.”—*1 Peter ii. 6.*



St. Paul declares that faith is the gift of God (*Ephes. ii. 8*). His words, “And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” refer to the word “faith.”

A new generation of youthful expositors confidently assert that these words refer to “by grace are ye saved.” The majority of them are evidently ignorant of the history of the exegesis of the text. They only know that the pronoun “that” in the clause “and that not of yourselves” is a Greek neuter. And without further examination they consider it settled that the neuter pronoun can not refer to “faith,” which is a Greek feminine.

Allow us to put our readers on their guard against the thoughtless prattle of shallow school-learning. It should be remembered that while our exegesis is and always has been the one accepted almost without exception, the opposite opinion is shared by only a few expositors of later times. Nearly all the church fathers and almost all the theologians eminent for Greek scholarship judged that the words “it is the gift of God” refer to *faith*.

1. This was the exegesis, according to the ancient tradition, of the churches in which St. Paul had labored.

2. Of those that spoke the Greek language and were familiar with the peculiar Greek construction.

3. Of the Latin church fathers, who maintained close contact with the Greek world.

4. Of such scholars as Erasmus, Grotius, and others, who as philologists were without peers; and in them all the more remarkable, since personally they favored the exposition that faith is the work of man.

5. Of Beza, Zanchius, Piscator, Voetius, Heidegger, and even of Wolf, Bengel, Estius, Michaelis, Rosenmüller, Flatt, Meier, Baumgarten-Crusius, etc., who to the present day maintain the original tradition.

And lastly, Calvin, altho he is said to have favored the other exegesis. But if he had surrendered the original interpretation, he would have given some reason for it; for he was thoroughly acquainted with it. And this makes it probable that he never intended to discuss the question. That he adhered to the traditional exegesis is proven from his own words, in his “Antidote Against the Decrees of the Concilium of Trente” (page 190, edition 1547): “Faith is not of man, but of God.”



Even our educated Reformed laymen are acquainted with the fact, if it were only from the study of the magnificent commentary on the Ephesians by Petrus Dinant, minister at Rotterdam, who flourished in the latter part of the seventeenth century. He published it in 1710, and the book had such a large sale that it was reissued in 1726; even now it is in great demand. We quote from it the following (vol. i., p. 451): “And that not of yourselves, it is

the gift of God.’ The word ‘that,’ (GR. tau omicron upsilon w/tonos tau omicron), refers either to the preceding ‘being saved,’ or to ‘faith.’ To the former it can not refer, St. Paul having stated already that salvation is a gift of God. Hence it must refer to faith. It is true the Greek (GR. tau omicron upsilon w/tonos tau omicron), is a neuter, while (GR. pi iota w/tonos sigma tau eta sigma), faith, is a feminine. But Greek scholars know that the relative pronoun may refer just as well to the following (GR. delta omega w tonos rho omicron upsilon), gift, which is neuter, as to the preceding (GR. pi iota w/tonos sigma tau nu sigma), which is feminine, according to the rule in Greek grammar governing this point. Hence ‘that,’ viz., *‘faith, is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.’*”

But recent discoveries may have upset this ancient exegesis. If the modern expositors of Utrecht, Gröningen, and Leyden, who make a hobby of this modern exegesis, will therefore show us this recent discovery, we will give them an attentive hearing. But they fail to do this. On the contrary, they say: “The matter is settled, and so plain that even a tyro in Greek can see it.” And by saying this, they judge themselves. For brains incomparably superior, such as Erasmus and Hugo Grotius, knew so much of Greek that they were at least acquainted with the Greek rudiments. And we may venture to say that all the Greek scholarship now lodged in the brains of our exegetes at the universities just named would not half fill the cup which Erasmus and Grotius together filled to the brim. Wherefore we confidently maintain the traditional exegesis.

The positive assurance wherewith these young expositors make their assertions need not surprise us. The explanation is easily found. They were nearly all prepared at universities whose professors of New-Testament exegesis seek to estrange their students from the traditional interpretation of the Scripture by making surprising observations; e.g., the students had learned at home that “the gift of God,” in [Ephes. ii. 8](#), refers to faith; but they had never consulted the original text. Then the professor observed, with perfect correctness, that it does not read (GR. alpha w/tonos upsilon tau eta) but (GR. tau omicron upsilon w/tonos tau omicron), adding: “The gentlemen can see for themselves that this can not refer to faith.” And, unacquainted with the subject, his inexperienced hearers suppose that nothing more remains to be said. If their Greek scholarship had been more thorough and extensive, they would have been able to judge more independently.

With this conviction they enter the church; and when a simple layman repeats the old exegesis, they delight, at least on such occasions, to parade the fruit of their academic training; and the simple layman is made to understand that he knows nothing of Greek, and that the Greek text plainly reads the other way, and that therefore he may not support the antiquated exegesis.

When sometimes the *Heraut*<sup>27</sup> dares to repeat the old, well-tried opinion, these youthful savants can not help but think: “The *Heraut* does not act in good faith; the editor knows

27 A religious weekly publication edited by the author.—Trans.

perfectly well that it reads (GR. tau omicron upsilon w/tonos tau omicron), and that (GR. pi iota w/tonos sigma tau eta sigma) is feminine.” Of course, the *Heraut* knows this very well—just as well as Erasmus and Grotius knew it—and, knowing a little more of Greek than these childlike rudiments, has taken the liberty, supported by the goodly company of the scholars just named, to entertain an opinion different from that of the Utrecht graduates.

Undoubtedly every man has a right to his own opinion and to reject the traditional exegesis. Moreover, in [Phil. i. 23](#), it is distinctly stated that faith is gift of God. But we protest against the shallowness and artlessness of men who in their ignorance pose as scholars, and make it appear as tho even a tyro in Greek, if he be only an *honest* man, could not support the opposite opinion for a moment. For this is inexcusable in one who presumes to pronounce judgment upon another who knows what he is talking about, as will appear from the postscript of this article.

The reader will kindly bear with us for treating this matter somewhat extensively, for it touches a principle. Our universities deny our confession of faith. They may still concede that God is the Author of salvation, but faith (such as they interpret it) is taken in the sense of a medium which originates from the union of the breath of the soul and the inworking of the Holy Spirit. Hence their manifest preference for such novel exegesis, apparent also from the energetic and persistent effort to popularize it.

And this tendency is manifest in many other directions. For individual, original research there is little opportunity. Hence the instruction received at Utrecht is the only source of information. And this is so thoroughly rooted in heart and mind that the student can not conceive that it can be otherwise. Moreover; the arguments have been presented so concisely and incessantly that convincing arguments for opposite views seem utterly impossible.

This being the case, our young theologians, honest in and loyal to their convictions, declare from the pulpit and in private conversation that uncertainty regarding various doctrinal points is out of the question; so that it must be conceded and acknowledged that the ancient expositors were decidedly wrong. And this is the cause of the strong opposition against many established opinions, even among our best ministers; not from love of opposition, but because sincere convictions forbid them to follow any other line of conduct, at least as long as they are not better informed,

And this may not remain so. There is no earnestness in that position. It is unworthy of the man, scientifically trained; it is unworthy of the minister. There is need of *individual* research and investigation. These Utrecht novelties should be received with a considerable grain of salt. It may even be freely surmised that the learning of the Utrecht faculty, when they oppose the learning of the whole Church, must be discredited.

And thus our young men will be compelled to return to original research. Not only that, but they will be compelled to buy books. The libraries of nearly all our young theologians contain scarcely anything but German works, products of the mediation theology; hence



exceedingly one-sided, not national, foreign to our Church, in conflict with our history. This lack ought first to be supplied. And then we hope that the time soon will come when every minister in our Reformed churches shall be in the possession of at least a few solid and better works. And when thus the opportunity is born for more impartial and more correct study, the rising generation of ministers should once more *resume their studies*, and obtain the conviction by their own experience, even as others have done, that the work of study and research, which will bear good fruit for the Church of God, is not yet finished, but really only just begun. Then a generation of more earnest and better-trained men will treat the opinions which we have advanced with a little more appreciation, and, what is of much higher importance, they will treat the being of faith with more thoughtfulness.

It is of vital interest that the *exercise* of faith and the *faculty* of faith be no longer confounded, and that it be acknowledged the latter may be present without the former. Otherwise there will be a complete deviation from the line of the Scripture, which is also that of the Reformed churches. It will make salvation dependent upon the *exercise* of faith, *i.e.*, upon the act of accepting Christ and all His benefits; and since this act is an act, not of God, but of man, we imperceptibly lose our way in the waters of Arminianism.

Hence everything depends upon the correct understanding of [Ephes. ii. 8](#). For faith is not the act of believing, but the mere possession of faith, even of faith in the germ. He that possesses that germ or faculty of faith, and who at God's time will also exercise faith, is saved, saved by grace, for to him was imparted the gift of God.

Formerly theologians were used to speak of faith's being and well-being; but this had reference to another distinction, which must not be confounded with the one thus far treated. Sometimes the plant of faith seems more vigorous in one than in another, and its development riper and fuller, bearing branch, twig, leaf, blossom, and fruit—which is evidence of the well-being of faith. It may also be that, in the same person, faith seems to pass through the four seasons of the year: there is first a spring-tide, in which it grows, followed by a summer, when it blossoms; but there is also an autumn when it languishes, and a winter when it slumbers. And this is the transition from the *well-being* of faith to its mere being. But as a tree remains a tree in winter, and will possess the *being* of a tree even tho it have lost its well-being, so faith may remain still living faith in us, tho temporarily without leaf and blossom.

For the comfort of souls, our fathers always pointed to the fact, and so do we, that salvation does not depend upon the *well-being* of faith, so long as the soul possesses the *being* of faith. Altho, after the example of our fathers, we add, that the tree does not live in winter, except it hastens on toward spring, when it shall bud again; and that the *being* of faith gives evidence of its presence in the soul only by hastening on toward its *well-being*.

#### Postscript.

It is necessary to point out two things regarding the shallowness of which we complain.

First, that the construction of a *neuter* pronoun with a *feminine* noun as its antecedent is not a mistake, but *excellent Greek*.

Second, that the Church had reasons why until now she made the words “and that not of yourselves” refer to faith.

In regard to the *first point*, we refer not to a Hellenistic exception, but to the ordinary rule, which is found in every good Greek syntax, and which every exegete ought to know.

A rule which, among others, was formulated by Kühner, in his “Ausführliche Grammatik der Griech. Sprache,” vol. ii., I, p. 54 (Han., 1870), and which is as follows: “*Besonders häufig steht das Neutrum eines demonstrativen Pronomens in Beziehung auf ein männliches oder weibliches Substantiv, indem der Begriff desselben ganz allgemein als blosses Ding oder Wesen, oder auch als ein ganzer Gedanke aufgefasst wird.*” Which is in English: A *neutral* demonstrative pronoun is frequently used to refer to a preceding masculine or *feminine* noun, when the meaning expressed by this word is taken in a general sense, etc.

The examples cited by Kühner deal a death-blow to the Utrecht exegesis. Take, for instance, these from Plato and Xenophon:

Plato, “Protagoras,” 357, C.:

Ὅμολογοῦμεν ἐπιστήμες μηδεν εἶναι κρεῖττον, ἀλλὰ τουτο αἰε κρατειν, οπου αν ενη, και ηδονης και των αλλων απαντων.

Plato, “Menon,” 73, C.:

Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ἡ αὐτὴ ἀρετὴ πάντων ἐστὶ, πειρω εἰπειν και αναμνησθηναί, τί αὐτό φησι Γοργίας εἶναι.

Xenophon, “Hiero,” ix., 9.

Εἰ ἐμπορία ὠφελεῖ τι πόλιν, τιμώμενος ἀνὸς πλείστα τουτο ποιων και ἐμπόρους ἀνὸς πλείους ἀγείροι.

To which we add three more from Plato, and a fourth from Demosthenes:

Plato, “Protag.,” 352, B.:

Πως εχεις προς ἐπιστήμην; πότερον και τουτό σοι δοκει ὡσπερ τοις πολλοις ἀνθρώποις, ἢ ἄλλως.

Plato, “Phaedo,” 61, A.:

Ἐπελάμβανον; . . . και εμοι ουτω ἐνύπνιον ὑπερ ἐπραττον, τουτο ἐπικελεύειν, μουσικην ποιειν, ὡς φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὐσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς, ἐμοῦ δὲ τουτο πράττοντος.

Plato; “Theætetus,” 145, D.:

Σοφία δὲ γ οἶμαι σοφοί;–ναί–τουτο δὲ νυν διαφέρει τι ἐπιστήμης.

Demosthenes, “Contra Aphob.,” 11:

Ἐγὼ γὰρ, ὡς ἀνορεὶς δικάσται, περὶ τῆς μαρτυρίας τῆς ἐν τῷ γραμματικῷ γεγραμμένης εἰδὼς ὄντα μοι τὸν ἀγῶνα, καὶ περὶ τούτου τὴν ψήφον ὑμᾶς οἰσοντάς ἐπιστάμενος ὡθήην δεῖν κ. τ. λ.

For the present we postpone the discussion of the *second point* to another time.

But it is evident that these citations upset all the quasi-learning of this defective scholarship; and that the words, “And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” just with the neutral pronoun, in purest Greek, can refer to *faith*; hence that all this fuss about the difference of gender, not only is without any foundation, but also leaves a very poor impression regarding the scholarship of the men who raised the objection.

Moreover, we must also show not only that the ancient rendering of [Ephes. ii. 8](#) may be correct, but also that it *can not* be anything else but correct.

It reads: “For by *grace* are ye saved through *faith*, and that *not* of yourselves, it is the *gift of God*; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are *His workmanship*.” ([Ephes. ii. 8-10](#)) The principal thought is the mighty fact that the causative worker of our salvation is *God*. St. Paul expresses this in the most forcible and most positive terms by saying: “You are saved *from* grace, *through* grace, and *by* grace.” If then it should follow, “And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” we would have a dragging sentence of superfluous clauses, thrice repeating the same thing: “You have received it by grace, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” And this might do, if it read, “You are saved by grace, and *therefore* not of yourselves”; but it does not read so. It is simply, “*and* that not of yourselves.” The conjunction “and” stands in the way.

Or, if it read, “Ye are saved by grace, not of yourselves, it is God’s work,” it would sound better. But first to say, “Ye are saved by grace,” ([Eph. ii. 8](#)) and then without adding anything new to repeat, “and that not of yourselves,” is harsh and halting. And all the more so, since in the ninth verse it is repeated for the fourth and fifth time, “*not of works*; we are *His workmanship*.” And while all this is stiff and forced, labored and superfluous, by adopting the exegesis of the ancient expositors of the Christian Church it becomes all at once smooth and vigorous. For then it reads: “You are saved by mere grace, by means of faith. (Not as tho by this means of faith the grace of your salvation would be partly *not* of grace; no indeed not, for even that faith is *not of yourselves*, it is the *gift of God*.) And, therefore, saved through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are His workmanship.”

But then this creates a parenthesis, which is perfectly true; but even this is truly Pauline. St. Paul hears the objection, and refutes it again and again, even where he does not formulate the contrast.



XL.

Faith in the Saved Sinner Alone.

“And they believed in the Scripture.”—*John ii. 22.*



Faith is not the working of a faculty inherent in the natural man; nor a new sense added to the five; nor a new soul-function; nor a faculty first dormant now active; but a disposition, mode of action, implanted by the Holy Spirit in the consciousness and will of the regenerate person, whereby he is enabled to accept Christ.

From this it follows that this disposition can not be implanted in sinless man, and that it disappears as soon as the sinner ceases to be a sinner. The saint believes until he dies, but no longer. Or more correctly: faith disappears as soon as he enters heaven, for then he lives no more by faith, but by sight.

The importance of this distinction is obvious. The Ethical theologians, denying that faith is a specially implanted disposition, but rather a sense or its organ, first dormant then awakened, can not admit this, but repeat that faith is perpetual, basing their opinion upon *1 Cor. xiii. 13.* According to their theory, there is no absolute difference between the sinner and the sinless; they do not believe that to save the sinner the Holy Spirit introduces an extraordinary expedient into his spiritual person. Hence their persistent effort to make us understand that Adam believed before the fall, and that even Jesus, the Captain and Finisher of our faith, walked by faith.

But this whole presentation is opposed by the apostolic words: “We walk by faith, and not *by sight*” (*2 Cor. v. 7*). And again, “Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known” (*1 Cor. xiii. 12*), in connection with the preceding: “When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall *be done away*” (*vs. 10*). And not less by the word of our Lord, that we shall see God as soon as we are pure in heart (*Matt. v. 8*).

And starting from this point, we know positively that faith in the sense of saving faith is not perpetual; that it did not exist in Paradise, but can only be found in a lost sinner. To be endowed with saving faith, he must be a sinner, just as much as relief from pain can be given only to one suffering pain.



Very well,” say the Ethicals, “we accept this. But when the physician tries to improve the breathing of the asthmatic by making him inhale fresh air, it does not follow that a healthy person does not inhale. On the contrary, a healthy man inhales strongly and deeply, and it is the physician’s purpose to *assist* the *normal* function of breathing. And the same applies to faith. True the Holy Spirit can give faith only to the *sinner*, but a healthy saint, like Adam before the fall and Christ, did most assuredly believe; for faith is but the breath of the soul. In Adam and Christ this breathing was spontaneous; in sinners like ourselves it is disturbed. Hence we need help to be healed. But when our souls once more freely inhale the breath of faith, we have received only what Adam and Jesus had before us.”