

## **Hope For C-Students**

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Let's face it: we are not all four-point students! A great number of students are happy to settle for a C or D, and many find that too difficult. We just do not possess the same gift of learning. Some who are gifted in specific fields may lack the ability to readily comprehend what they read.

Since our religion is based upon truth and a proper comprehension of certain facts, does the A-student have the advantage over the C-student? Is it necessary to understand the deep meanings of Scripture in order to be spiritual? Must the head be full of knowledge for the heart to be full of spirituality? Well, I've asked more questions here than I can answer – being intellectually disadvantaged myself.

I have worked my way through two books dealing with hermeneutics (how we interpret God's message to us, for you C-students), one being much more scholarly than the other. It was reassuring to learn how the most intelligent and dedicated of believers through the centuries have struggled with the matter of interpretation. For me, much of it was like listening to classical music. I can detect that it is of highest quality, but I don't possess the sensitivity to understand it! The most devoted of scholars do not agree on methods of interpretation and they continue to wrestle with the matter. Perhaps the main difference in them and us C-students is that they wrestle in the upper stories of the ivory towers while we wrestle in the basement.

Most every investigation I make of matters relating to faith leaves me short of knowing with certainty that I have the ultimate answer. I know I am not supposed to admit such a thing, but you other C-students may take some comfort in knowing you are not alone in your confusion, bewilderment, or lack of possession of indisputable proofs.

As for me, I cannot even prove the existence of God, much less explain how the one God can be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I cannot prove God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. Some seem to have a handle on all this. I cannot explain the pre-incarnate state of Jesus, how divinity could be born of a woman, how he could bear my guilt, how he could rise from death, and what became of his fleshly body. Was he fully God with divine powers of discernment at his conception in Mary's body, as theologians have contended? Or did full empowerment come at another time, or gradually? I don't know the answers to these and countless other questions about divinity.

Many believers testify how God has revealed himself to them, spoken to them, and intervened in their lives with indisputable miracles. Claims are made for all sorts of supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Some claim a gift of knowledge! If God and the Spirit work in such manners in others, that is fine with me, but their subjective testimony offers no proof to me. I trust that God and his indwelling Spirit works in my life, yet I have never even suspected that I heard his voice nor have I witnessed an indisputable miracle. However, I give God credit for the good things in my life and for answering prayers even in less conspicuous ways. I fear that

subjective experiences only confirm wishful thinking rather than being revelations of reality. I realize that such statements rub the fur the wrong direction, but some of you other C-students understand what I am saying.

I believe that God has preserved his written message to us in the Bible, but I have no way of proving the authenticity of any portion of it. Some portions make no claim of inspiration, and the canon was debated for generations after the apostles before our “66 Books” of Protestant Bibles were decided upon. Other Bibles include the apocryphal books also. I have to depend upon belief in God’s providence through the work of dedicated men and on internal evidences to sustain belief in the inspiration of the books composing the Scriptures. I suspect that even some four-pointers feel the same way.

How can an intellectually disadvantaged person like me ever understand and prove justification, regeneration, and sanctification? About the time I think I grasp the relationship of faith and works, another question arises to confuse me. I realize that we are saved by grace through faith. If faith is a gift from God, then the believer has been elected by God and given salvation which he cannot lose since God gave the faith and salvation aside from the will of the person. If faith is not a gift, how much faith is required? What is involved in faith? Salvation is not of our works, yet all are called upon to obey God in order to receive grace and to live a life of sanctification which certainly involves works. Great theologians of the past and present have not agreed on these matters. How could I hope to know with certainty? If you already have this all figured out, don’t let me confuse you with the bewilderment of us C-students!

Some believers can give you detailed descriptions of the state of the dead, the resurrection, the judgment, and the eternal realm of heaven. While admitting that those things are Biblical subjects, I do not find the subjects treated all that definitively. Since we are of physical surroundings, we cannot comprehend the spiritual apart from physical imagery. Many terms are employed in Scripture to accommodate our earthly understanding. In 1946, Lea and I heard some of Foy E. Wallace’s lectures in Houston which were composed into God’s Prophetic Word. I was surprised when he suggested that Chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation were not descriptions of heaven but were depictions of the church in Hebrew imagery. From the preterist viewpoint of prophetic fulfillment, that makes sense. So I am not too clear on these matters. We C-students may expect fantastic surprises.

Have I discouraged you by this reality check? I hope not, for there is hope for us who question in our search. Jesus promised, “Seek, and you will find” (Matt. 7:7). Find what? All truth? The answer to all puzzling questions? No. Our salvation and security is not dependent upon knowing all factual answers but in knowing Him who is the Truth, the answer to all spiritual needs.

“Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’” (John 8:31f). Was Jesus implying that they would know all the facts and that facts would free them? Facts cannot free us of our sins. He further explains, “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (8:36).

The liberating truth that those Jews would learn was that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. That was a fact, but it was the Messiah who would set them free rather than their full knowledge of facts. Must we not know some facts about Jesus? Surely. How many? Well, Peter preached enough of them in one sermon on Pentecost to enable them to find the saving Truth, the Person who declared, "I am the Truth" (John 14:6). (Consider also the conversions of the Ethiopian, Cornelius, Lydia, and the Jailer who had no previous course of instruction.) They did not have to wait for the epistles or a course of indoctrination in all true things. They heard enough to cause them to believe in Jesus. That was sufficient.

We are saved through faith rather than knowledge. "*We walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith is conviction and assurance based on evidence which is less than proof. Knowledge is based on proof. We walk (live) by faith (conviction, assurance), not by sight (that which is demonstrated to our senses, hence, knowledge). If you know a fact, you no longer believe it. When you base conviction on inconclusive evidence, that is faith. "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). "*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?*" (Rom. 8:24). We do not hope for what we see/know, but for what we believe.

Since neither the A-student or C-student depends upon knowing everything, one may have faith as strong as that of the other. The truth may be that the four-pointer has more unsettling, unanswered questions than we who need Special Ed tutoring.

While it is true that faith may be nurtured and strengthened by deeper investigation of evidences in all matters, all factual answers will not be forthcoming until we cross the veil into the true light of God's presence. And if you could prove everything now, whether by study or some special revelation from God, you would no longer be living by faith. It is recognized here that there are different facets of meaning of the word know. Often, for instance, it indicates a relation between the person knowing and the object known (Vine). We have been referring to knowledge gained by proofs.

So by your faith, trust in Jesus rather than trusting in having all the factual answers. Seeking security through intellectual knowledge will always leave one insecure and dependent upon a meritorious accomplishment. I have always felt a kinship of spirit with the concerned father who brought his epileptic son to Jesus, pleading, "*If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.*" And Jesus said to him, '*If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.*' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, '*I believe; help my unbelief!*'" (Mark 9:22-24). []