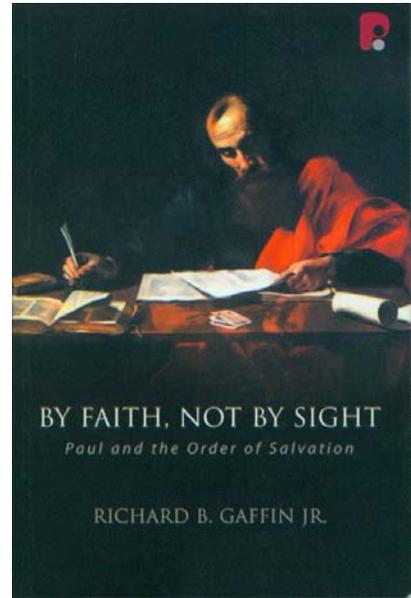


“By Faith, Not By Sight”: Paul and the Order of Salvation, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Paternoster Press, 2006, 114 pages. Reviewed by John W. Mahaffy.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ, at least in the western world, lives in a sound bite culture and breathes an atmosphere which affects the way Christians interact with one another. Inadequately considered internet postings caricature opponents’ positions, and sweeping anathemas pollute the ether of theological discussion. Like a breeze flowing in off the ocean, Dr. Richard B. Gaffin’s most recent book, “*By Faith, Not By Sight*,” refreshes the reader. No, it doesn’t solve all of the problems of pollution. But, in addition to wrestling with issues of substance, it models how believers can and should communicate with and about one another.



Some of Gaffin’s earlier writings focused on the accomplishment of our salvation (known as *historia salutis*) as developed in the writings of the apostle Paul. In this book he emphasizes the application of salvation (*ordo salutis*) and the relationships of the two.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4, with its emphasis on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, describes the center of Paul’s gospel. “What effects this transition from wrath to grace, from the wrath of being ‘outside’ Christ to the salvation from that wrath of being ‘in Christ’?” Gaffin asks as he deals with Romans 16:7 (pp. 37-38). He answers that question with: “union with the exalted Christ by Spirit-created faith. That is the nub, the essence, of the way or order of salvation for Paul.” And lest we think that “de-centers” justification, he adds: “Deny or distort his teaching on justification and that gospel ceases to be gospel; there is no longer saving ‘good news’ for guilty sinners. But no matter how close justification is the heart of Paul’s gospel, in our salvation, as he sees it, there is an antecedent consideration, a reality, that is deeper, more fundamental, more decisive, more crucial: Christ and our union with him, the crucified and resurrected, the exalted, Christ. Union with Christ by faith – that is the essence of Paul’s *ordo salutis*.” (p. 43).

In the concluding chapter Gaffin takes up the controversial question as to whether there is a future aspect to our justification. Interestingly, he mentions several passages of Scripture that are cited as supporting the idea of a future aspect to justification, but which are contested. He sets aside discussing those texts, and instead develops his argument from the way that other passages of Scripture treat our death and resurrection in Christ, our adoption, and the final judgment and resurrection. Gaffin denies that there are two justifications, one present, by faith, and a future one, by works. Rather, he sees a future, not-yet, aspect to our justification, just as is true of other benefits that manifest our union with Christ.

Gaffin understands this emphasis, not as something novel that developed with the New Perspective on Paul, but as reflected in the Catechisms of the church, which speak of believers being “openly acquitted” in the day of judgment. Justifying righteousness is not God’s

renovating work in the believer, but rather, “Christ’s righteousness as distinct from theirs” (p. 87). The believer is *not* only partially justified, leaving him uncertain about the outcome. Gaffin decries a “current readiness to dispense with imputation” (p. 51).

Particularly helpful is the section on pp. 99-100, in which he draws out the implication, “as important as it is obvious,” that believers, appearing bodily in the final resurrection, “will appear there as *already openly justified*” (emphasis original). “. . . Everything at stake here, including their assurance, depends on Christ, specifically, if it needs to be said again, his finished righteousness imputed to them and received by faith alone. At the same time, Paul’s teaching on the final judgment and the role it will have for believers does put in ultimate perspective the integral, unbreakable bond he sees between justification and sanctification, and on the truth that faith as ‘the alone instrument of justification . . . is . . . not alone in the person justified’ (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 11:2).”

The primary weakness of this little book is that it is too short, leaving one wishing for more. Gaffin admittedly has contented himself at a number of places with “having to assert rather than argue, with affirming instead of developing” (p. vii). A Scripture index would have made the book even more useful.

The target readers are not professional theologians, but “pastors and other teachers in the church, and more generally, interested students of the Bible.” This reviewer strongly recommends the book for any in those categories. It makes an excellent addition to church libraries. Borrow or purchase a copy, but open it, feel the fresh breeze as you read, and breathe deeply.