

To borrow a phrase from Proverbs 31:29, many Pauline theologies have been written, but “you surpass them all.” *A Theology of Paul and His Letters* deserves pride of place among all previous Pauline theologies. Prior to this book I would first consult the theologies by Schreiner, Wright, Ridderbos, and Dunn, and I will continue to do so. However, Moo’s tome will now be first in line, and I cannot recommend it strongly enough to anyone who wants to study and know Paul’s theology.

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*What Is Saving Faith? Reflections on Receiving Christ as a Treasure*, by John Piper. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 304 pp. \$23.99.

John Piper, famously committed to the priority of the gospel, says, “There are a thousand needs in the world, and none of them compares to the global need for the gospel.” People who realize their own desperate need feel like responding. That felt and real need is the focus of Piper’s newest book. The author is founder and lead teacher of desiringGod.org. He is also former pastor for teaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church and current chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary. Piper has written more than fifty other books.

In the book’s first chapter, “The Roots of My Concern,” the author addresses the affective aspect of faith in its historical and theological depth. The second chapter, “Seeing Reality through Six Hundred Lenses,” reflects on the many and diverse ways of looking at our faith including our feelings. As a corrective, the author prescribes nine clarifications. In chapters three and four, “Receiving Christ as Our Supreme Treasure” and “Christ the Believer’s Treasure and Satisfaction,” Piper summons believers to examine their faith for its emotional veracity. In a nutshell, faith feels. The final chapter, “Calling for Faith When Faith is Affectional,” explores Piper’s convictions about the essential nature of feeling our faith as a response to God. From cover to cover, John Piper echoes the dictum for which he is best known: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.”

In our soul care, we often hear people say, “Sometimes I just don’t feel like I’m saved.” These words echo in our mind’s ear along with what we say in response. We may not feel like we handled it well. What is saving faith? Many ask this question, but not all are looking for the same kind of answer. Piper queries, “Does the very nature of saving faith include a treasuring of Christ as supremely valuable—that is, an affectional dimension that may hold the key to why saving faith necessarily severs the root of sin and bears the fruit of glad obedience?” (32). In short, he asks, “Is faith really an experience?” Or is it, as some argue, an act of the will? “Not about affections but about volitions” (12).

What are affections? “Does saving faith include any element of love

for Christ, or admiration, or adoration, or treasuring or cherishing, or delighting, or thankfulness, or revering? All these words are affectional. They represent experiences in the human soul that I am calling *affections*" (13–14). As a point of grammar, all these terms are abstract nouns, they describe acts, events, or experiences. They are heart actions. We might rightly ask ourselves, what our heart is feeling in response to anything. The author clarifies what he means by experience.

I am asking about the *experience* of saving faith—what are the conscious dynamics of it? What is it like in the head—the reason? What is it like in the heart—the affections? What is it like to experience it?... I want to know what the Bible reveals to us about the experience of faith. What is its nature? Faith is not a theory. It is not an idea. It is *experienced* in the mind and heart, or we are not saved (12–13).

If this so, what is the source of affections? The author says, "I am thinking of them as the special work of the Holy Spirit...the love, delight, and satisfaction I am asking about are not merely natural human experiences. They are divine gifts. They are the work of the Spirit" (14). The implications of this point lead the author to ask the question about cause and affect/result:

I am not asking if such affections are the *result* of saving faith. I am asking whether such affectional realities are in the very exercise of faith itself. That is, are they part of the nature of faith? Are any of these affections so *integral* to saving faith that, if they were not there, we would not have saving faith.... Saving faith has affectional elements, without which the faith is not saving.... Jesus saves, and faith is the Spirit-given human instrument through which he does it.... Faith is the *instrumental* cause (not the ground) of our justification (15–16).

Several questions beyond the book's content might be worth considering: First, although the author has given us a treatment of the topic, we might have expected a discussion or mere mention of anthropopathism. If we are repeatedly called on in scripture to feel like God does, what are God's feelings like? Does the divine nature make these feelings different for God. If so, how so? Since the essence of feeling or experience is at the center of the book's message, what God's feelings and experiences are like should be important.

A second matter is beyond the scope of the present volume but remains an issue with which we must reckon. We know that the heart is the center for thinking, feeling, and willing. These functions (not body parts or locations) describe what our heart does. But we may not legitimately force distinctions among these three functions. Is willing that much different than thinking? And to the point of this study, is feeling a separate function from the other two? If it is not, then should we argue that one gets the priority in exercising faith over the other two?

We must thank John Piper once again for taking us to a deeper level of commitment to Christ. This reviewer highly recommends the book to all who counsel as part of their ministry, indeed, to any Christian who

wants to understand better and appreciate the feelings associated with their faith.

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*Reprobation and God's Sovereignty: Recovering a Biblical Doctrine*, by Peter Sammons. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022. 296 pp. \$25.99.

Author Peter Sammons engages the difficult doctrine of reprobation as a rhetorical Valiant-for-Truth, eager to defend the glory of God against the proud pretensions of man. We cannot help but admire his daring, and any such effort to glorify God certainly attracts the goodwill of all who love God.

Sammons states in his introduction that his purpose is “to properly define reprobation and explore God’s use of secondary causes in this doctrine” (15). He situates his discussion at the beginning of the book with two chapters on God’s lordship. He follows this with a four-chapter exposition of Romans 9. Chapters 8 and 9 lay out the parts of predestination following a typical Reformed template. Chapter 10 discusses “Concurrence, Compatibilism, and the Origin of Objections,” and the following three chapters lay out and respond to various objections to reprobation. Here Sammons introduces the concept of primary and secondary causes in order to respond to concerns that reprobation makes God responsible for sin. This sets the stage for his further discussion regarding human volition and ability (chap. 15), categorizing causes and the causality of divine abandonment (chap. 16), the causality of hardening (chap. 17), the causality of personal and nonpersonal agency (chap. 18). Sammons intends his book to clarify this difficult doctrine, and he does so from a self-consciously Reformed perspective. Those familiar with this tradition will recognize much of what he has to say, as this is well-trodden ground.

Having said all of that, the book needed more refinement to achieve its objectives. First, the book needed refinement in editing. Typographical errors and/or misspellings are surprisingly common. There are a few punctuation errors. Sometimes entire words are missing from sentences. Some sentences lack subject-verb agreement. The writing style could have benefited from the hand of a skillful editor, eliminating circumlocutions, clarifying ambiguous turns of phrase, and clarifying pronominal antecedents. Normally, this kind of error is not worth commenting on in a book review; however, in this case the problem is pervasive and can be a real source of consternation to the attentive reader. One is surprised that a publisher would allow this kind of work to go out under its label.

Second, in a couple instances, the book cites sources without giving attribution. On page 45, a sentence is put in quotation marks, but no source is cited either in the text or in the footnotes. On page 97, a