

PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Logo: a graphic mark, symbol or emblem used by institutions and enterprises to promote immediate public recognition of their mission, goods and services. In some cases, the logo that defines a company or endeavor becomes more valuable than the combined physical assets of the corporation it identifies.

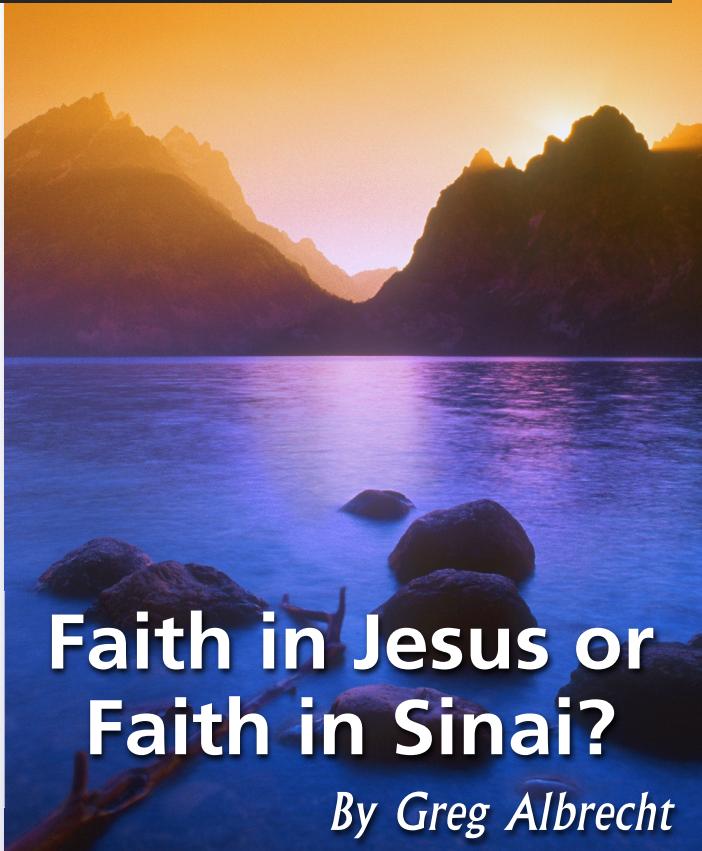
Logos are so instantaneously and distinctively recognized they become part of our language, central to communication in an ever changing world.

The graphic illustration of an apple from which someone appears to have taken a bite brings to mind the Apple computer/tech company and its products.

The words "Walt Disney" over the image of the Fantasyland Castle of Disneyland and Disney World, or appearing at the beginning of a Disney movie set the stage so that the viewer expects a journey into the "magic kingdom."

The graphic of Golden Arches stimulates brains of people all over the world to fire up taste buds and trigger pleasant memories of "McDonalds" burgers and fries consumed in the past.

Some corporations are so traditional and so historically secure in their particular endeavor that they simply use letters of the alphabet to form an acronym for the longer corporate title of a company—"AT&T" brings phones and cable television and other communication services to mind.



Faith in Jesus or Faith in Sinai?

By Greg Albrecht

For many who live within the world served by the British Broadcasting Corporation the letters "BBC" bring to mind radio and television programming.

A decade or so ago, while visiting the West Bank, I met with the former president of Bethlehem Bible College and remarked to him that I had seen the acronym BBC on many of the documents of the college—but of course, we joked, the British Broadcasting Corporation was far more likely to be thought of when someone saw those letters appearing next to each other.

Do you remember the logo of the Prudential Insurance Company? Sure—the logo of the Prudential Insurance Company is the "Rock of Gibraltar." Prudential wants their clients and customers to feel that their investments are safe, stable

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and secure—they've even used the slogan, "Get a Piece of the Rock." The Prudential Insurance Company wants us to trust in them, and to believe that they are there for us—they're not going anywhere—they are a rock.

The faith that God gives us by his grace is just like that—safe, stable and secure—and of course it is faith based on the sure foundation of the Rock of Ages—Jesus Christ, the Rock of our faith.

In the shifting sands of a culture and society where fundamental assumptions about value and identity seem to be changing rapidly, we are thankful that Jesus is our sure foundation.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm, to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded:

"If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,

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to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.—Hebrews 12:18-24

The Law or Jesus?

This passage addresses Hebrews in transition, many of whom were trying to straddle the old covenant and the new covenant, so that they had one foot in both. As the past



Their faith was not grounded in the fear of Mt. Sinai, but the joy of Mt. Zion. Their faith was now fully expressed by the spiritual Rock of Jesus Christ...

2000 years richly demonstrate, they were not the last to attempt the impossible—to live in both worlds.

Many of the original readers of Hebrews were finding it impossible to follow both Moses and Jesus at the same time. The more things change the more they stay the same—many within Christendom today are still trying to live in two different worlds.

Mt. Sinai is the logo for the old covenant—physical stones and rocks (some of which are volcanic) of endless rules, regulations and rituals combined to form the mountain of the old covenant. The original recipients of the book of Hebrews were in transition from the “old covenant logo” of Mt. Sinai to the “new covenant

logo”—the Rock of Jesus Christ.

The original audience addressed by the book of Hebrews had already experienced the difficulties involved in leaving the laws of Judaism, leaving the trust they had placed in their own abilities to please God by obeying him—as they embraced freedom in Christ, and the grace of God which we are given without merit on the part of humans.

As new Christians they had joy in Christ, they wanted to wholeheartedly embrace God’s grace but there were times when they yearned for the comfort of their old ways and customs.

Their entire belief system about God and how he operates (what he expects and the relationship we humans can have with him) had been shaken, and while what they were now experiencing was wonderful, they were still standing on new and (for them) untested spiritual ground.

Eventually, all who followed Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,

came to think of and remember him by the image and logo of a cross—but while Jesus had died on his cross at least three decades before these words were written, it would be centuries before the logo of a cross galvanized Christ-followers.

One of the main purposes of the book of Hebrews was to demonstrate to the original readers and listeners, as well as for all Christians of all time—including of course you and me—that Jesus Christ is superior to all Christ-less religion, with its rituals, sacrifices, traditions, regulations and restrictions.

But their faith was about to be subjected to an earthquake—for the very temple in Jerusalem, where

Jews believed that God himself lived, was going to be utterly destroyed.

Within a few years after the book of Hebrews was written (during the war of attrition waged by Rome against the city of Jerusalem in 69-70 A.D.) the temple in Jerusalem, another symbol—another logo—another emblem of the faith of those who followed the rules of Mount Sinai, was completely and utterly destroyed.

As Jesus prophesied in the second verse of Matthew 24, not one stone of the temple was left standing on another. The book of Hebrews is encouraging these original recipients that what they had now—Jesus—was better than anything they ever had or could ever have in a law-based, Christ-less religion.

Physical Mountain or Spiritual Rock?

The Hebrew Christians who had fully accepted and trusted their faith to Jesus were no longer fearfully trembling before the old covenant, as their ancestors had done before Mt. Sinai—but instead they were rejoicing at Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the eternal kingdom of heaven, because of Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Their faith was not grounded in the fear of Mt. Sinai, but the joy of Mt. Zion. Their faith was now fully expressed by the spiritual Rock of Jesus Christ, the mediator of a new covenant, rather than the rules, regulations and rituals of the old covenant.

There are two kinds of faith—**faith in laws, religious traditions, customs and ceremonies**—or, there is **faith in Jesus**. Faith in laws is built on human abilities to please and appease God by virtue of obedience to law. Faith in Christ is not based on rituals or rules—faith in Christ is based on an eternal relationship of love, an unshakable commitment from God to us.

The faith of a Christ-follower is not solely based on what one reads about God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, in the Bible—the faith of Christ-followers is far

beyond faith in a book. As Christ-followers our faith is based in and on Jesus Christ alone—*faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone*.

Hebrews 12:18-24 describes the fearful sights and sounds at Mt. Sinai, as the ground shook, with darkness, gloom and storm. It was a terrifying sight—*when humans place their faith in laws rather than Christ humans are destined to live in fear*.

When we place our faith in Christ-less religion, then life is filled with uncertainty and instability. When our faith is in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ, we live in a precarious, shaky, slippery world of doubt—because our faith depends on how well we measure up to rules and regulations.

When our faith ultimately rests on our own abilities, then we will forever be filled with fear. We will be terrified before an unstable Mount Sinai—our spiritual lives are bleak and dismal because they are based on human ability to please God.

Life in our physical world is shaky and precarious. We live at the mercy of other humans, and governments and religious institutions—and as a result we experience economic depressions, wars, religious animosity and hatred of all kinds. The nature of the physical creation at large is unstable—that's the world into which we were born and the world in which we will die. This world is unstable.

That fact is proven over and over again when earthquakes, tidal waves, tornadoes, hurricanes and floods wreak havoc and devastation. Accidents and warfare claim lives—as do diseases and illnesses of all kinds. Life itself is fragile—far from solid and secure.

Faith That Cannot Be Shaken

...we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken... (Hebrews 12:28)

While our grip on life in this physical world is far from secure, we may have, by God's grace, unshakable faith in Christ. At the end of what is often called his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

Jesus gave the metaphor of a house built on rock contrasted with a house constructed on sand to illustrate the two ways in which faith might be expressed:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash—Matthew 7:24-27.

You may remember the words from an old hymn, "On Christ the solid rock we stand, all other ground is sinking sand." If we have faith in Sinai our spiritual house is constructed on a foundation of sand. If we have faith in Christ, our spiritual house is a house whose builder and maker and architect is God—built on the sure foundation of the Rock of Ages. Our faith in Christ centers and grounds us, giving us peace and assurance—a steadfast hope—a living faith.

All four Gospels record the fact of Jesus' resurrection. All four clearly state that he died and was buried and rose from the dead. They also record the incredible change that the resurrection brought into the lives of Jesus' disciples.

Immediately after Jesus died on the cross his disciples were dismayed—they felt lost—they had no hope. But then, when Jesus rose from the dead they were given courage and hope—by God's grace they were given faith in the risen, living Jesus Christ—and that faith was alive, vibrant and dynamic.

The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is the foundation upon which authentic Christian life—authentic relationship with God—is based. Christianity without the living, risen Lord Jesus is dead—without

Jesus Christ Christianity is no longer Christianity—it might be called Christianity, people might meet in a building which calls itself a church, but without Christ it becomes a human religion, a life of going through the motions.

Take away the living, risen Lord Jesus from Christianity and all that is left is Christ-less religion, with all of its control techniques, fabrications, fear and threats.

Take away the living, risen Lord Jesus, mediator of the new covenant, and we're back at Mt. Sinai, terrified, in fear, without hope.

Take away Jesus and all that is left is an empty shell, a religious system where inmates endlessly go through the motions, endlessly enduring meaningless drills and programs, trudging along in spiritual chains, in bondage to those who lord it over them.

Take away the living, risen Lord Jesus, mediator of the new covenant, and we're back at Mt. Sinai, terrified, in fear, without hope.

Faith in Christ is based on the fact that God came to us, in the person of Jesus, to be one of us—to be with us. Faith in Christ is based on Jesus Christ living "with" us.

Our faith in Christ is based on his life "with" us—and of course, he works "with" us in our daily lives. He was not simply with us in a historical sense—not simply with those who knew him personally when we walked this earth—but he continues to be with us now. He is alive—and he is with us.

Faith in Christ is based on the fact that he is now living "in" us.

Here's how Paul expresses this facet of our faith:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained by following the law, Christ died for nothing!—Galatians 2:20. □