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Maimonides and Saul of Tarsus on Reason, Revelation and the Apprehension of God

*It is an act of redemption when it is granted to us to discover the higher unity of
reason and revelation. – Abraham Heschel*

The adage says, “From Moses to Moses, there’s been no one like Moses”. These men are of course, *Moshe haNavi*, the greatest prophet in Judaism, and Moses Maimonides, the greatest Jewish thinker of the Medieval Age. Maimonides was a physician and leader of the Jewish community in Cairo, but his authority extended beyond Egypt, and as far as France and Yemen. As a rabbi and scholar, he was extremely familiar with traditional Jewish writings such as the Talmud, which he later codified in his work, *Mishneh Torah*.

But the great Rambam also had an impressive knowledge and appreciation for the philosophers because of his birthplace. Cordoba, Spain was renowned for being an important center of Jewish and Muslim scholarship with predominantly Aristotelian influences (Pines lxi), a place where the Eastern faiths of Judaism and Islam wrestled with the ideas propounded by the Western philosophers. One of his most influential works, *The Guide of the Perplexed* seeks to use philosophy to harmonize the Scriptural revelation about God and His creation.

Approximately ten centuries earlier in the late Second Temple Period, another rabbi named Saul of Tarsus (better known in Christianity as the Apostle Paul), a disciple of one of the Sages of the Talmud, had a divine encounter, resulting in his belief that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Like Maimonides, Saul was born in a cultural and philosophic center and home of several noted Stoic philosophers of the first century C.E., including Zeno, Antipater and Nestor. (Padfield 7) In addition to its commercial and cultural import, the location of Tarsus in Asia Minor made it a cosmopolitan melting pot where East met West.

While Saul was familiar with the Greek philosophy of his day, he was first and foremost a Pharisee, “of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews”, as he described himself. (Phil. 3:5) He was sent to Jerusalem at an early age to study with the great Raban Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel. Gamaliel was one of the most influential rabbis in Judaism in the days of Saul. His opinions have been preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, and one commentary says of his legacy: “After Rabban Gamaliel died, the honor of Torah was lost.” (Megillah 3:4) Interestingly, unlike many of his contemporaries, Gamaliel encouraged his students to study Greek literature.¹ His views certainly influenced Saul’s perspective on non-Jewish literature and

¹ “The Greek language and Greek wisdom are distinct. But is Greek philosophy forbidden? Behold Rab Judah declared that Samuel said in the name of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel, What means that which is written: Mine eye affecteth my soul, because of all the daughters of my city? There were a thousand pupils in my father's house; five hundred studied Torah and five hundred studied Greek wisdom, and of these there remained only I here and the son of my father's brother in Assia! — It was different with the household of Rabban Gamaliel because they had close associations with the Government (See T. Sotah 15:8)”. (Yuter; Padfield 15)

wisdom. Saul's knowledge of Greek literature comes to light in his writings (which account for half of the New Testament), in which he quotes Greek poets.²

These brief biographical synopses have tried to demonstrate that Saul and Maimonides, -- although separated by more than a millennium -- had similarities in their background and training, sharing more in common than just the "Judeo-Christian" ethic that would normally come to mind. This paper will focus on comparing and contrasting the thought of Maimonides and Saul in their views of the role of reason and faith as a means of apprehending God.

Before embarking on this task, it is important to bring to light the problems that arise when one tries to harmonize Greek philosophy with the Judeo-Christian revelation for at least two reasons. First, the worldview of the Greek philosopher is vastly different from the Hebraic worldview expressed in the Scriptures, which impact the modern reader's comprehension of seemingly overlapping concepts. The Biblical understanding of "wisdom", for example, is at least a culture apart from the Greek understanding. Secondly, the assumptions and starting point of philosophy are inherently different from those of faith. As Abraham Heschel so aptly put it:

One of the marks of philosophical thinking is that ...it is not a self-sufficing pouring forth of insight, but the explicit statement of a problem and an attempt to offer an answer to a problem. Philosophy is, in a sense, a kind of thinking that has a beginning but no end. In it, the awareness of the problem outlives all solutions. Its answers are questions in disguise; every new answer giving rise to new questions. Philosophy deals with problems as universal issues; to religion the universal issues are personal problems. Philosophy, then, stresses the primacy of the problem, religion stresses the primacy of the person. (Heschel, 4)

Maimonides was certainly aware of this tension between faith and philosophy. He brings it to the forefront in the Introduction of *The Guide*. When the Torah and philosophy appear to contradict each other, should a person follow his intellect over revelation, and "consequently consider that he has renounced the foundation of the Law?" (GP 5) Or, should he turn his back on reason, "moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving" that he has "brought loss to himself and harm to his religion"? (GP 6) In other words, are reason and speculation completely incompatible with the life of faith? Surely not. Philosophy and religion can serve to challenge each other in their assumptions. However, revelation, precisely because of its divine source, is insight and knowledge unlike any other, and consequently, cannot ultimately be subjected to the limitations of human reason and philosophy.³ The differences between Greek and Hebraic culture on the one hand, and philosophy and faith on the other are formidable and perhaps impossible obstacles to overcome. Although extremely thought provoking for any careful reader, *The Guide for the Perplexed* fails to successfully harmonize philosophy and the Jewish faith, and in the process, adulterates the biblical revelation from the Creator to His Creation.

Views of God

In comparing the thought of Maimonides and Saul regarding the roles of reason and faith in man's apprehension of God, it is first necessary to examine how each of these men view God and

² Saul quotes or alludes to Greek literature in Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12, 1 Corinthians 15:33. (Padfield 7)

³ See Heschel, especially the first chapter, for a more detailed discussion of this topic.

man. The Book of Acts records Saul's view of God in his discourse to a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers:

Men of Athens!... what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us... (17.22-31)

It is apparent from his discourse that Saul views God as the self-sufficient Creator of the world and everything in it. But God is also particularly provident, intervening in history and demonstrating His care by appointing the time and place in which His creatures should live with a specific purpose in mind: so that man would look for his Creator. According to Saul, it is possible to find Him, and His intention is that all people would turn away from idolatry and to the one true God.

What is Maimonides' conception of God? Among the major themes in this work is God's incorporeality. Maimonides' philosophic argument for the incorporeality of God follows the Aristotelian premise that bodies can be divided into matter and form. This dichotomy implies that a body is divisible. Because God is one in essence (in accordance with the Bible and the fundamental tenet of Judaism), it is impossible for Him to be corporeal, for this would violate the principle of the unity of God.

Another recurring theme in *The Guide* dealing with the nature of God is providence. As he contemplates philosophy on the one hand, and revelation on the other, Maimonides wrestles with whether God ultimately is particularly or generally provident. The question points to a tension encapsulated in the Bible that cannot be fully resolved. For a philosopher, in which reason and theoretical knowledge reign supreme, it is necessary for man to have freedom of choice, which necessarily implies a generally provident God, for how can man be free to choose if a God intervenes in the circumstances of his life at will? Maimonides also favors this conceptualization of God because it combats the determinist views of the Ash'ariyyas and many Jews. However, as a Jew, it is impossible for Maimonides to completely reject the view of a particularly provident God. Why? There is no way to rationally explain his identity, since it would be impossible for a generally provident God to covenant with Abraham, make the Jews His chosen people, and give them the Torah. In addition, the Torah requires a particularly provident God that will punish those who disobey it. In the end, although Maimonides presents arguments to support both views of God, it is not apparent that he views God as strictly one or the other.

Negative theology is another major theme in *The Guide* related to apprehension of the Creator.⁴ With the exception of incorporeality, the concept of divine attributes and negative theology are deemed "obscure matters" to be discussed only with the few who have been prepared (GP 1.35, 80), for these matters are only appropriate for men engaged in speculation and who do not take the literal sense of the Biblical text. Maimonides argues that any attribute of God mentioned in the Bible is an attribute of action (including the thirteen attributes God

⁴ Although Paul does not resort exclusively to negative theology, this kind of apprehension does appear at times in his writings, such as in Romans 11:33, "How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

reveals to Moses in Exodus 33) since attributes of action are the only kind that do not imply a deficiency in the essence of God (implying imperfection), or multiplicity of His essence (violating the principle of God's unity).

In his development of negative theology, Maimonides hearkens to Aristotle, positing that it is not possible to predicate God attributes of relationship between Himself and His creation. Why? Unlike His creation, God cannot be described or categorized. His essence transcends human apprehension.

While Maimonides appeals to the Bible to support his point, citing Isaiah's and Jeremiah's declarations that God transcends any comparison that could be thought by man, his contention that it is not possible to predicate a relationship between God and man is problematic. Although Maimonides allows for divine attributes of action, he fails to take into account that it is possible for actions to cause relationships. One might argue that the Scriptures allow us to apprehend the Creator through parables that use concepts familiar to man, but these terms cannot necessarily be taken literally. This is certainly a valid objection. However, ultimately Maimonides' argument that no relationship is possible between God and man effectively invalidates the omnipotence of God. Man may not be able to establish a relationship with God, but it does not mean that the Creator cannot move to establish relationships with men, even if the relationship is not within full grasp of man's comprehension.

Maimonides' choice to conceptualize God in harmony with the Greek philosophers is achieved at the expense of the God represented in Scriptural revelation, for the God of the Bible is clearly a personal God, intervening in the lives of men and specific nations. Specifically, Biblical revelation demonstrates divine providence and relationship through the calling of one man (Abraham) with whom He makes a covenant, and whose descendants became a chosen nation (Israel) through which the Messiah would come to redeem the whole world.⁵

Views of Man

How does Saul view the condition of man in relation to his divine apprehension of God? In his epistle to the congregation in Rome, Saul states in no uncertain terms that both Jews and Gentiles are all bound by sin, the cause of wickedness. To support this truth he cites the Psalms: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3.10-11). Although God's existence and omnipotence are apparent to men, they "suppress the truth by their wickedness" also "exchanging the truth of God for a lie" and worship created things instead of the Creator. (Rom. 1.18, 25) In other words, sinful man is hostile to the knowledge of God. This sin has hardened his heart, darkened his understanding, made his thinking futile, and ultimately separated him from the life of the Creator. (Eph. 4.17-18)

From the opening chapter of *The Guide*, and in line with the Greek philosophers, Maimonides emphasizes that what distinguishes man from the rest of creation and also connects him to the divine is his rational faculty. Maimonides defines the rational faculty as "the power found in

⁵ A convincing demonstration that the Bible is divine revelation is the preservation of the Jewish people through millennia of persecution, and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy with the rebirth of the modern state of Israel in 1948 after the dispersion of the people from the land for 1500 years. Can another people or nation existing today make the same claim?

man by which he perceives intelligibles, deliberates, acquires the sciences, and distinguishes between base and noble actions. Some of these activities are practical and some are theoretical...By means of the theoretical, man knows the essence of the unchanging beings...” (EC 63-64)

While Saul argues that man has suppressed the truth about God which has resulted in evil and wickedness, Maimonides argues that privation or lack of knowledge is the cause of evil. (GP 3.11, 440-441) Man perpetrates evil because of his ignorance. Consequently, a true intellectual knowledge of God will abolish evil. To support his point, Maimonides quotes Isaiah 11:9: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”. The question is whether Maimonides’ philosophical meaning of knowledge can be applied to this verse since it is based on the Greek way of thinking.

It is doubtful that Isaiah’s definition of “knowledge of the Lord” coincides with that of Maimonides. As one progresses through *The Guide*, it becomes very evident that his view of knowledge is the theoretical knowledge espoused by the philosophers. In the Epistle Dedicatory Maimonides explains to his disciple Joseph ben Judah that *The Guide* was composed for him and other religious men like him (those with a desire for speculative matters and who have had training in logic and natural science), “however few they are”. Later in this treatise, he goes on to state that one can only truly apprehend God through the intellect and that this apprehension depends upon each person’s individual capacity. The implication is clear: not everyone can reach a true apprehension of God. And in fact, throughout the *Guide*, Maimonides’ elitist views regarding a true apprehension of God surface with frequency, echoing the philosophers’ distinction between the multitudes and the privileged few who attain true wisdom.

In 1.34, Maimonides enumerates the reasons that a true apprehension of God can only be attained by a select few. These include the difficulty of the subject matter, the intellectual capacity of the person, the length of the preliminary studies⁶, the perfection of moral virtues, and the distraction of worldly cares. It is no wonder that Maimonides believes true apprehension of God is not possible for most. These are formidable obstacles that require a lifetime of pursuit for the very few who have the intellectual capability to be perfected. Thus, Maimonides defines the “remnant whom the Lord calls” to be the small group of “solitary individuals” who can meet these requirements. (GP 1.34, 75)

Is this the Biblical definition of the “remnant whom the Lord calls”? The careful reader will observe that “the remnant whom the Lord calls”, a phrase from the book of Joel, has been taken out of its context. The passage actually describes a future time when God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh and also states that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be delivered. (Joel 3.28, 32) Clearly, Maimonides’ interpretation could not be farther from the prophet’s meaning. And so again, Maimonides fails to respect revelation as such, and subjects it to the interpretation of philosophy.

⁶ In 1.34, Maimonides teaches that those who seek perfection in the theoretical intellect should first study logic, then mathematics, followed by the natural sciences, and finally the divine science.

Saul rejects this elitist view of divine apprehension. He reminds the community in Corinth of the words God revealed through Isaiah, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate”. (Isa. 29.14) Then he proceeds to ask, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”. Saul writes that among those called by God “not many ... were wise by human standards...but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise”. (1 Cor. 1.26-27)

How man reaches out to God

According to Saul, how can man reach out to God? Through righteousness. But in implying a distinction between God’s righteousness and man’s righteousness, Saul makes a radical departure from the traditional Jewish understanding. While Romans makes it clear that the Torah is holy and good and helps man identify his sin, it does not have the power to make man righteous. Man’s righteousness consists of good deeds springing from the Torah; God’s righteousness comes through faith: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe”. (Rom. 3.21-22) To make his case, Saul quotes passages from the Tanach, reminding his readers that Abraham, the father of faith, believed God and this was credited to him for righteousness, *even before he was circumcised* [emphasis added]. (Rom. 4.3,9-10) Man achieves righteousness not by relying on his own limited power, but by believing in God’s unlimited power to put him in right standing.

A reasonable expectation is that Maimonides would emphasize good deeds and morality as a means to righteousness, in line with traditional Jewish thought. Indeed, in many passages of *The Guide*, he emphasizes the need for asceticism, but not because that lifestyle in of itself makes one righteous before God. Morality, in his view, is largely a preparation to be successful in the study of divine science. (GP 1.34, 77) Moral virtue is just a means to attaining true righteousness. What is Maimonides’ conception of true righteousness? In a particularly revealing passage, *The Guide* suggests that a righteous man is one whose supreme goal is to be a philosopher.

For in his dictum, *But the righteous giveth and spareth not*, the word *righteous* is not antithetical to *slothful* except according to the explanations we have propounded. For [Solomon] says that the just one among men is he who gives everything its due; he means thereby that he gives all his time to seeking knowledge and spares no portion of his time for anything else. (GP 1.34, 76)

In redefining righteousness, he goes even further to say that “those with sick souls need to seek out wise men [philosophers], who are the physicians of the soul” because they can help men in their moral habits. (EC 66) The implication is that problems of morality are actually problems of ignorance (lack of knowledge), and therefore the “truly righteous” philosophers are equipped to solve them. Scriptural revelation is not completely adequate to the task; the help of philosophers is also needed. As on other occasions, Maimonides is bold enough to redefine the Scriptural meaning of righteousness (Gen. 15.3), and place philosophy on the same level as divine revelation.

How God reaches man

Saul establishes that man draws near to God through faith in the Messiah, while God -- who is not distant but near -- also moves to reach man in different ways. Nature is an instrument of general revelation by which man can understand God's invisible attributes, specifically, His eternal power and His divine nature. Furthermore, Saul emphasizes that it is God Himself who has made His existence evident through His Creation and in each person. (Rom. 1.18-20) These verses indicate that God has deliberately communicated to His creation at least a minimum knowledge of God's existence and omnipotence and that man has understood it.

In addition to nature, Saul teaches that God reveals Himself through special revelation. The first source of special revelation is the Scriptures. In one of his letters, Saul reminds his Jewish disciple Timothy of his knowledge of the Tanach from infancy. He describes the authority of the Tanach⁷ and its purpose: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training for righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". (2 Tim 3.15-16)

The ultimate source of specific revelation, according to Saul, is the Holy Spirit, whom God grants to those who put their trust in the atoning work of Jesus the Messiah: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life". (Titus 3.5-7) Through faith, the Spirit effectively comes to make his abode in man (Rom. 8.11) -- the most intimate and life-transforming connection possible between God and man. As a result of this transaction, the Holy Spirit transforms man's corrupt desires (Rom. 8.5), grants power (1 Cor. 2.4), divine revelation (1 Cor. 2.12) and virtue (Gal. 5.22-23).

How does Maimonides conceive of God's revelation to man? In his introduction, Maimonides mentions that one of the purposes of *The Guide* is to address the difficult points in Scripture's Account of the Beginning (which he equates to natural science) and Account of the Chariot (which he equates to divine science). (GP, 6) These two divisions of *The Guide* could be interpreted to address his view on God's revelation to man.

In 1.9 of *The Guide*, Maimonides uses Isaiah 66:1 to explain that God's existence, and omnipotence are manifested in the heavens. (34-35) Later, Maimonides goes as far as to state that the *only* way to know God is through His creation: "There is moreover, no way to apprehend Him except it be through the things He has made; for they are indicative of His existence and of what ought to be believed about Him ...". (GP 1.34, 74) For the author of *The Guide*, the study of nature and the mastery of natural science is a stepping stone to apprehending the much more mysterious divine science (prophecy). (GP, 9) Creation is a documentary of God's actions, the only means by which man can describe God.

⁷ Although Christians understand "Scriptures" in this passage to include both the Tanach and New Testament, it is important to consider the historical context. It is estimated that 2 Timothy was written c. 66-67 C.E., within several years of the time many other books of the New Testament were penned. Since Timothy was Jewish and knew the Scriptures from infancy, long before the compilation of the New Testament, it is reasonable to conclude that in this verse Saul is specifically referring to the Tanach.

As a Jew, Maimonides recognizes the divine inspiration of the Bible. In his “Letter on Astrology”, he instructs his readers that the only trustworthy sources of knowledge are reason, sense perception and what is received from the “prophets and the righteous”. (MR, 464) In *The Guide*, he states that the Law “although it is not natural, enters into what is natural”. The Law is a tangible demonstration of God’s wisdom revealed to man and a pointer to man’s faculty of ruling. (GP 2.40, 382)

On what basis does Maimonides deem the Law to be divine in origin? In *The Guide*, he differentiates the Torah from all other corpus of law of the Gentiles, explaining that the Torah is divine because it was given to man through a prophet, whereas all other nomoi are simply the creation of rulers. (GP 2.39, 381)

In accordance with Jewish tradition, Maimonides states that one of the purposes of the Law is the perfection of moral virtue, but argues that the Law is divine because its goal is to perfect the rational faculty:

...if in that Law attention is not at all directed toward speculative matters, no heed is given to the perfecting of the rational faculty, and no regard is accorded to opinions being correct or faulty...you must know that that Law is a nomos...If, on the other hand, you find a Law...takes pains to inculcate correct opinions with regard to God...and with regard to the angels, and that desires to make man wise, to give him understanding, and to awaken his attention so that he should know the whole of that which exists in its true form ... you must know that ...this Law is divine. (GP 2.40, 383-384)

It is evident that Maimonides and Saul do not have the same view regarding the purpose of the Torah. According to Saul, the primordial purpose of the Torah is to make men conscious of sin (Rom. 3.20), lead men to the Messiah (Gal. 3.24), and the Tanach in general makes men “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”. (2 Tim. 3.15) In other words, the Scriptures lead men to a knowledge of the Messiah, the only means by which man can truly apprehend God. While Maimonides also holds that God reveals himself to man through the Scriptures, the primary purpose of the Scriptures is to direct man toward philosophy and intellectual knowledge as a means to a true apprehension of God.

In *The Guide*, prophecy is one of the most important ways in which God reveals himself to man. Maimonides’ interpretation of prophecy is almost identical to that of the philosophers. A prophet is one who has reached perfection, in which all of his potential has reached actuality. Only a man who has reached moral virtue and prepared to reach perfection in his rational faculties can become a prophet. Maimonides declares that in every point this philosophic description is the correct Jewish understanding; he only qualifies this definition by adding that prophecy can be hindered by divine will. (GP 2.32, 361) Prophecy is a result of the Creator’s essence overflowing to an intermediary called the Active Intellect, which in turn overflows to man’s rational and then imaginative faculty. (GP 2.36, 369)

Maimonides fails to coherently harmonize the philosophic view of prophecy with the Scriptural view, subjecting the Scriptures to philosophy, instead of the reverse. He posits that prophecy can only be experienced through sufficient study (by implication an older person who has had dedicated years to study). There is, however, no Scriptural or historical evidence that the prophets of the Bible engaged in the study of natural science before becoming prophets. Thus, it

is clear that Maimonides' intention is to characterize the Biblical prophets as philosophers. (Pines cxx)

Nearness/Remoteness to God.

Finally, how can man determine his nearness or remoteness to his Creator? In 1.54 of *The Guide*, Maimonides gives the reader a glimpse of the answer when he states that His nearness or remoteness are directly related to man's ignorance or knowledge. (1.54, 124) He picks up this thread again and elaborates on it in the last few chapters of *The Guide*. To illustrate how near or remote a person may be to God, Maimonides tells the reader a parable of a ruler (God) who lives in a palace located in a city with a wall around it. Then he proceeds to define seven levels of nearness to the Creator through this parable. Those outside the city are interpreted to be those who have no doctrinal belief based on either speculation or religious tradition. Maimonides interprets those who seek the ruler's palace but never see it as the multitudes, "the ignoramuses who observe the commandments". (GP 3.51, 619) Those who are actually in the presence of the ruler are those who have reached perfection in the divine science and have become prophets.

How does Maimonides' view of drawing close to God square with the Scriptures? The Tanach clearly portrays God as a personal and particularly provident God, but also one who because of His holiness is distant from corrupt man. Only Moses was allowed to ascend the mountain to draw close to God. (Ex. 24.2) As a reflection of his perfection, God did not permit any Levites with physical defects to approach Him. (Lev. 21.21) And the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple only once a year on the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16.1) Man approached God through blood sacrifices to atone for his sin, not through speculation.

Saul still acknowledged the problem of sin in drawing near and knowing God, but in his epistle to the Corinthians he states that God gives "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" in the face of the Messiah. It is through Jesus the Messiah that one can know the glory of God. (2 Cor. 4.5-7)

In conclusion, Maimonides characterizes the apprehension of God purely as an intellectual endeavor while acknowledging that man is limited in his ultimate acquisition of knowledge. Because he emphasizes man's pursuit of God and fails to fully account for God's pursuit of man, he ultimately fails in his apprehension of God. He deceives himself in his belief that the privileged few who have studied natural science and developed their rational faculty can stand apart from divine authority in their study of the divine. In his attempt to harmonize the Scriptures with philosophy, he imposes a foreign system and forces the Scriptures to fit into it. The result is that true apprehension of God becomes possible only for the privileged few gifted with sufficient intellect, time and resources for study and contemplation. In addition, Maimonides minimizes the crucial role faith plays in apprehending God, and consequently fails to grasp that the Scriptures are really an account of a personal and omniscient God who seeks to redeem and relate to His Creation.

Saul of Tarsus was a scholar in his own right who had devoted a significant part of his life to study; and he used his rational faculty very effectively in his defense of the gospel. He exhorted his disciple Timothy to study in order to correctly interpret the Scripture. (2 Tim. 2.15) However, he did not relegate his trust in divine revelation over to his limited rational faculty.

Saul understood that the Scriptural definition of knowledge of the Creator is ultimately relational in nature, not intellectual. Fully aware of his limited comprehension of God, but confident of the relationship with his Creator, he wrote: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Cor. 13.12)

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