

## The Nature of Heresy

by Ray C. Stedman

This is the first of a new series on a new subject in First John: Maintaining Truth.

Of recent weeks, the attention of the Christian world has been captured by certain attempts to bring heresy charges against Bishop Pike because of his public denials of such important doctrines as the virgin birth of Christ, the Trinitarian character of the Godhead, and other headline-catching statements which he makes from time to time. Such attempts at heresy trials are not new in the Christian church. In every century there have been ecclesiastical leaders who have been charged with heresy. Such charges point up the concern of the church for maintaining the truth of God for which it has been put in the world.

I know there are many who feel a sense of sympathy with Bishop Pike, feeling that he is being unjustly persecuted, that he is an honest, rather gentle man, who is unjustly charged with dereliction from the faith. There are those who feel that the church has no right to make such charges as these, or to harass a man like this, and that the whole idea of heresy trials is ridiculous since every man must be allowed the right to his own opinion. I agree that we may well feel sympathy for Bishop Pike. I do myself. He is a rather pathetic figure. He is obviously attempting to be an authority in a realm in which he has had no real experience – that of Christian faith. Thus he fulfills that description the Lord used for certain religious leaders of his own day, “blind leaders of the blind.”

But there is no question that a charge of heresy is justified against ecclesiastical leaders who renounce the faith, and it is an exceedingly serious charge. We tend to discount its seriousness because ours is an age when we have made an idol of tolerance. We are told it does not really matter what anyone believes; it is what they do that

counts. But it does matter what people believe, if only because action invariably follows belief.

It is belief which produces action, and, therefore, belief is supremely important. This is why the practical sections of the epistles of the New Testament always come second. There is invariably a doctrinal division first. Each practical section begins with the word *therefore*, for action must follow belief. Belief, therefore, is a supremely important matter.

Now, as we have seen in these studies in First John, the Apostle John was called to be a mender, mending that which is broken. Toward the close of the 1st century, when John writes this letter, Christian truth had already come under severe attack and heresies had come into the church. John's function as an apostle is to call these early Christians back to fundamental issues, back to the essentials. That is why he centers upon this theme of maintaining truth. It is introduced to us in two verses, 18 and 19, in Chapter 2:

**Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. {1 Jn 2:18-19 RSV}**

This whole passage, which continues on to the end of the chapter, is a tremendous study on how to recognize a heresy when you hear one. I suggest that there is nothing more needed today, in this age of abounding confusion in this area. The whole passage is a foundational study on the difference between truth and error. John begins by setting forth certain characteristics of heresy.

**First**, he indicates that heresy makes its appearance in certain repetitive cycles in the Christian era, cycles which mark the possibility of the coming again of Jesus Christ. This is what he means by his phrase, “the last hour.” We will look at that more closely in a moment, but the very phrase has in view what James Russell Lowell has called “that one, far-off, Divine event toward which the whole creation moves,” the second coming of Jesus Christ. Of course, the poet calls it “far-off” because some 1900 years had gone by in the Christian era before he wrote these words. But, in a sense, this event has never been far-off – even in the 1st century.

John, of course, was present when our Lord himself said to his own disciples, speaking of his coming again, “of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son [i.e., himself, as a man], but the Father only,” {Matt 24:36 RSV}. John was present also when, after the resurrection, our Lord gathered with his disciples and said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority,” {Acts 1:7 RSV}. And he was present again, on that first occasion, when our Lord added these words, “Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near,” {Luke 21:28 RSV}. These passages indicate that there were to be certain portents of the coming of Christ, but the exact hour and day and time no one would know. Our text says here, “Children, it is the last hour.” But that is exactly the thing John did not say. He did not call it “*the* last hour.” Here the translators have inserted an article when it does not appear in the original language. What John said was, “Children, it is *a* last hour,” and it is very important to note that distinction.

Read through the prophetic writings of the New Testament and you will note that the whole time between the comings of Christ, his first coming in the flesh, and his second coming in glory, is called “the last days.” Contrary to the popular view, this term does not refer to the end immediately preceding his coming. The whole period, running now well over 1900 years, is called “the last days.” Even in this letter the apostle has said the age to come has already dawned, the darkness is passing away. Twice he has reminded us that the world is passing away, the darkness of it is disappearing,

the last days have already come, and we are moving toward the end of them.

Also, as you read these prophetic passages, it is apparent that the movement of the last days is in a constantly descending spiral of repetitive events. There will be cycles of events repeating themselves through these last days, moving at last to the coming again of the Son of God to earth. Paul describes these cycles very clearly and accurately in Second Timothy which, by the way, was the last writing from his hand. He says, in Chapter 3, “But understand this, that in the last days there will be times of stress,” {2 Tim 3:1 RSV}. Now he does not mean these “times of stress” will occur only at the end, just before the coming of the Lord, but these will be characteristic of the whole period of the last days, some 1900 years as we know now. There will come, during these days, repetitive times of stress, times when men will be “lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” {2 Tim 3:2b-4 RSV}. Then he notes this in particular: “holding the form of religion but denying the power of it,” {2 Tim 3:5a RSV}. Again, that is not something which characterizes only the end; that occurs repeatedly through this whole time. History confirms this, for there have been repeated times like this, times of stress coming in cycles, when men are characterized by these things and especially when they hold a form of religion but deny the power of it.

Now John says these are “last hours.”

- There was such an outbreak of heresies, as we see here, in the very 1st century itself. John says, “you have heard that antichrist [the man of sin – the man who will be in control of the world before the return of Christ], is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is a last hour.”
- There came another special attempt to twist and distort Christian doctrine during the 4th century at the time of the great doctrinal struggles over the nature of God. These were settled by the great councils of the church, such as the Council of Nicea, from which we get the Nicene Creed.

- Another outbreak of heresies, another cycle of heretical ideas, broke out again in the 7th century with the rise of Mohammedanism and the pretentious claims of the Bishop of Rome to supremacy over all of Christendom.
  - Again in the 9th century, as you trace historical events, there is the rise of strange and deceiving doctrines within Christian circles. During this century there was a widespread false expectation of the return of Christ which for almost a hundred years nearly paralyzed the economy of Europe.
  - Quite falsely, and contrary to the very thing that Jesus had said – that no one could know the day or the hour of his return – men were expecting him at the year 1000. For the entire year preceding, the economy of the world was paralyzed because people simply neglected everything.
  - In the 11th century, history records that the Crusades began an heretical fomenting of zeal for a false religious objective which captured the attentions of men and turned them from the things God wanted them to know. For several centuries these Crusades dominated the thought of Europe.
  - In the 13th century an outbreak of heretical concepts came in again, as the papacy consolidated its power over the ecclesiastical world. Then began the terrible days of the Inquisition with its persecution of the Waldenses and the Albigenses, those people hidden away in the valleys of Italy, and the Alps.
  - In the 15th century we can trace another outbreak, a heretical cycle, when “the papal antichrist,” as Martin Luther termed him, reigned unchallenged in his power. This was answered by the outbreak of the Reformation and the stirring days of Martin Luther, whose great hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, we sang this morning.
- Then again in the 18th century came the rise of German rationalism which simply undermined the supernatural characteristics of the gospel, and reduced the whole Christian message to nothing but an appeal to the intellect, leaving it dull, drab, and lifeless.
  - In the 19th century there was another outbreak. Think of the cults which exist today. How many of them began in the last century? To our shame, they bear the label “Made in America” – Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, Unity, etc. These all began in the 19th century.

See how these cycles are narrowing, coming faster and faster.

Now in the 20th century we are facing such an outbreak in the “Death of God” theology, the demythologizing of the Scriptures, and the goals of the ecumenical movement to establish one worldwide church, wielding vast political power. These are the issues of the hour.

All these, John says, are “last hours” when it looked, from the standpoint of the individual who lived through these days, as it looks to us now, that it was an hour when Christ could come. He himself had predicted that the days before his return would be marked by false christs, false prophets, and false teachers who would teach heresies in the name of Jesus Christ. We must remember, as Dr. Blaiklock has put it, that “nothing is so damaging in the study of New Testament prophecy as to imagine that the eternal God, who stands above and outside of time, is bound by the clocks and the calendars of men.” This is why our Lord warned that the factor of time, in predictive matters, would be very, very difficult to establish, in fact, it would be impossible.

But we can note certain things. We can see that, as the centuries roll by, the pace of events is picking up speed. Things move with frightening rapidity today. The pace has been accelerating and the spiral has been widening so that now it involves the entire earth. We are linked together as one people in these present times of crisis, this “last hour” which now appears in human history. All this suggests that we are rapidly moving closer to that very “last hour” which will occur before Christ’s return. That cyclical character is

fundamentally characteristic of heresies in their historic appearance.

Now note the **second** thing John has to say about heresy. In Verse 19 he continues a rather general description of heresies which is true in any age. The second thing he indicates is that they all begin within the Christian family:

**They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they are not of us. {1 Jn 2:19 RSV}**

The implication is clear that the beginning of heresy was within the circle of Christian truth and doctrine. That is where heresies have their root. That is what the word “antichrist” suggests. We often take the term to mean someone who is against Christ, much like the attitude we see in Communism, where there is a blatant denial of God and Christ. But that is not the thought here. It is true that the eventual outcome of any antichrist is that he is against Christ, but the word really means “instead of Christ.” It is someone who comes in Christ’s name, someone who declares that he is a Christian and is declaring the truth of Christianity. Yet, as we analyze his teaching it is contrary to what God, in Christ, has said. This is antichrist.

It is what our Lord himself predicted in the parable of the wheat and the tares {see Matt 13:3-9, 13:18-23}. He said (speaking of himself) that a sower went forth to sow, sowing the good seed of the Word of God, in human history. But, he said, an enemy came at night and sowed evil seeds as well “among the wheat,” that is, in the midst of the wheat, and the two grew up together – the wheat and the tares. They looked so alike at first that it was very difficult to distinguish between them. Our Lord said that as they grew men would become concerned about these things and say to the Lord of the harvest, “What shall we do about them? Shall we go in and root them out? And his word is, “No, let them grow together until the harvest.” To try to root them out, he said, would also root up the wheat along with the tares. How often this has been fulfilled in human history by zealous attempts to purify the church in false ways.

The Apostle Paul also recognizes the fact that heresies will arise within the church. In Acts 20, his farewell to the Ephesian elders, he says,

**“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves [i.e., from among the elders of the church, the bishops, if you like] will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” {Acts 20:29-30 RSV}**

All this is foretold. It is well-known. Therefore let us not be surprised by the Pikes, the Tillichs, and the Bultmanns of our own day, who arise within the Christian circle and say false things. It has always been so.

Notice the **third** thing the apostle indicates as a mark of heresy. He suggests that heretics adopt Christian terminology for their errors. That is, they begin within Christian circles and at first they sound truly Christian. You cannot tell what they are until they begin to break away. Their terminology is correct, but they substitute another meaning for the words. How widespread this is in our own day.

Perhaps the classic illustration of this is the book by the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy. Though she uses perfectly normal Christian words she invests them with an entirely different meaning, and, in order to explain that meaning, she must publish a glossary of terms at the end of her book. Words, which in the dictionary are universally taken to mean one thing, in her book are given a specialized meaning which is a departure from essential Christian doctrine. That is common practice everywhere today.

Take, for instance, the way the word “resurrection” is being widely used among so-called Christian leaders. They say, “We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ; we believe in the resurrection of the believer.” But what do they mean by that? They mean that the soul survives death some way, that the spirit of Jesus somehow survived the experience of death and his spirit is abroad today, though his body lies rotting in the grave. They do not believe what the New Testament states as the meaning of the resurrection – the raising of the body of Jesus. It was his body which came from the grave. Paul hinges the whole

of the Christian faith upon this doctrine, and says that if it did not happen our faith is in vain and we are yet in our sins.

Take, also, the use of the term “evangelism.” We hear much about evangelism, and many talk about the need for evangelizing to the uttermost parts of the earth. But in many circles that has a different meaning than we ordinarily understand. To many it means engaging in social work, doing helpful things, beneficial things in foreign countries. Such ministry is called “evangelizing,” preaching the gospel. But it is a far cry from what the New Testament means by evangelism, helpful as these things may be, and necessary as they may be.

Take, too, the use of the word, “prayer.” People use the term so glibly today. You can hear programs on the radio about prayer and many articles about it are being published in Christian magazines. But analyze their meaning and prayer is often only the thinking of helpful thoughts. People talk about gathering together in a room and praying for someone, and all they mean by that is to think beneficial things about that individual. What a far cry all this is from the Christian use of these terms! One of the marks of heresy is that it evacuates the meaning of biblical words and substitutes another meaning in its place. Or, perhaps, such heretics may simply give a different emphasis to certain aspects of the Christian message from that in the New Testament.

Take for instance the purpose of the church and the reason for the preaching of the gospel. What is it? Why, it is to change men from death unto life. The purpose of the gospel is to give men the gift of life. That is its supreme thrust. Without that it is not the gospel. Now, along with that there come other wonderful benefits – peace of heart, even health of body, a sense of guidance through life, etc. But heresy is to seize upon these secondary benefits and make them primary, and to offer the gospel only as a means of producing peace of mind. This is the Positive Thinking cult of our day of which you hear so much. They say men are after peace of mind, freedom from anxiety and troubled thoughts, freedom from the pressures and problems of life, and if you just think right, the gospel is a great release. They talk about the need to believe the gospel as a way to think right, to think properly, as though this were the major purpose of the gospel. But this is where heresy

comes in, for, the truth is, none of these things are permanently possible except there first be an imparting of life by Jesus Christ. Therefore, do not be misled into secondary issues, that is what the apostle is saying.

Notice that the **fourth** mark of an antichrist is that he will finally break away from the New Testament Christianity. All such invariably do. And when they do they will insist that they are the true mainstream of Christian truth and that we are living in the backwaters of Christian doctrine. John puts this very plainly, does he not? “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.” That is the mark of genuineness – continuity in the truth, continuance in true faith. What does he mean by us? Surely not Christendom in general. He means, of course, as he makes clear in the context of this whole letter, those who love the Word of God and who possess the Spirit of God, those who seek to obey the Word in the power of the Spirit. This is the emphasis he has been making all along. Those who share the life of Christ, by the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God. Heretics will invariably cut themselves off from these people.

If you love the Scriptures and seek to study them and open them up, or to gather together to study them, if you suggest it to these who are involved in heresy, you will immediately feel their scorn of the Scriptures, their dislike of the Word of God. If they read it at all they cull out certain portions, carefully edit them, omitting the parts they do not like, and then they say, “Yes, we’ll study the Scriptures right along with you.” But if you read what they are studying you find it to be emasculated of essential truth. We need not fear heresy if we find someone who wishes to study the Scriptures as they are. There are many people today who are utterly ignorant of the Scriptures, who do not know anything about them, and perhaps have very peculiar viewpoints about them, but they are quite willing to learn. They want to study, they want to know what the Bible says. Then do not worry about the fact they are way off about a lot of things now. Get them into the Scriptures. The Word of God has a marvelous ability, in the hands of the Spirit of God, to correct error and to channel interests into vital matters. They will soon be brought into line with the great, marvelous,

glorious, all-pervasive truth of God, these tremendous themes which grip the hearts of men wherever they are set forth in power.

What a defense this has been against error through the centuries. Through the Christian centuries there have been cyclical outbreaks of heresy arising within Christian circles to twist, distort, and pervert the truth. They bear always the same characteristics. Read church history and go right back through twenty centuries and you will see how invariably they have these same characteristics. That is the remarkable thing about the Word of God. It traces out and marks out this flowing stream of heresy through the centuries, as well as to mark out the flowing stream of God's truth. These are both exactly the same today.

We see the confluence of these in our own generation and day. Again these things are coming into conflict one with another and we will be disturbed and confused unless we view them in the light of the revelation of the truth of God. What a wonder this word is, which has been given to us that we might understand what is happening to us, understand the world in which we live, and thus be made to know what is going on. We can thus realize that history is utterly in the control of God and is moving exactly the way he planned. Our own individual lives can be brought into line with this to produce not that which is transient and ephemeral, as John spoke last time of the world

passing away and the lust thereof, but to be engaged in that which abides, that which will end up at last fulfilling the purpose of God in history, moving to the last consummation that he has in view. That is what he calls us to.

How important these themes are!

Let us give ourselves to careful study, that we might know the word of truth which is able to build us up and to give us an inheritance among them which are sanctified.

#### **Prayer:**

Our Father, our hearts have been moved anew as we have seen what is happening in our own day in the blazing light of these amazing Scriptures. God grant to us that we may act on this basis and that we not only know, but do. Let us not be hearers of thy word only, but doers. Thou hast said that he who hears the word and does it not is like a man who looks in a mirror and goes away and forgets what kind of man he was. But he who does the word and looks into the perfect law of liberty will be blessed in his doing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## The Hard Core of Truth

by Ray C. Stedman

We have already noted that the first note of this letter of the Apostle John is one of power, the power of a Christian. And the power of a Christian is Jesus Christ himself, living within a human being today. It is Christ living in you, being God again in you, expressing his life in terms of your personality. Therefore, the key to this is fellowship, the sharing of the life of Jesus Christ. This is the note on which this letter begins.

The second note of the letter is one of purpose. What is the purpose of the Christian in the world? The answer is, to tell the truth! That is what we are here for. Every Christian exists to be an instrument and channel by which the truth is to be made known, the wonderful, delivering truth, freeing truth which is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It may sometimes be unwelcome, but it is the one thing for which men search, and the one thing they desperately need. The task of the Christian therefore is to declare and demonstrate the truth as it is in Jesus.

John began this theme (in Chapter 2, Verse 18) on a rather negative note. He talked about heresies, about perversions of the truth, about the distortions and counterfeits that will exist from time to time, in cycles, throughout history. He went on to give us certain general characteristics of these heretical ideas, these anti-Christian doctrines which come disguised as Christianity, but which are often widespread caricatures of Christianity which most people, hearing, reject and therefore think they have rejected the real thing. John will give us later, beginning in Verse 22, certain specific details which characterize counterfeit Christianity, but in between he gives us a positive word of reassurance and hope.

These two verses, 20 and 21, will occupy us now:

**But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. {1 Jn 2:20-21 RSV}**

The King James Version, in Verse 20 says, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Now that is certainly not what John wrote. He did not say of Christians, "You know all things." That would make Christians "know-it-alls" and there is nothing more universally obnoxious than a "know-it-all." Christians obviously do not know all things. The correct rendering, adopted by the Revised Standard Version, is "you all know." Because of the anointing which you have received from Jesus Christ, the Holy One, you all know.

There is no doubt that this anointing is the Holy Spirit whom the Lord Jesus gives to those who believe in him. Remember in that great seventh chapter of John's Gospel we read,

**On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. ... 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" {John 7:37, 7:38b RSV}**

Rivers of power, rivers of energy, refreshing, changing and affecting the lives of others – out of his innermost being shall flow these rivers. John adds,

**Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; {John 7:39a RSV}**

When you received Jesus Christ, you received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you did not know it for you did not feel anything. This is what often leads people astray. They are often expecting some strange sensation when the Holy Spirit comes in. But the Holy Spirit is life: moral life, spiritual life, God's life, and just as there was no sensation when physical life began, so there is no sensation when spiritual life begins. Yet it is there.

If you have believed in Jesus Christ, you all have received this anointing from the Holy One, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, having received him, John says, "you all know," i.e., you have now been rendered capable of knowing as God intended man to know from the beginning. You have now had restored to you that which was taken away in the Fall, that which has been missing in your heart and life until you came to know Jesus Christ. No longer must you walk on in confusion, darkness and uncertainty, unable to find your way through the maze of contradictory opinions and forces, but you have something by which you can know. For the first time in your life, you have received the necessary equipment to know. To know what? To know the truth!

As he says, "I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it." Truth at the very center and ultimately, using the mind and emotions and will with which God has equipped you, and under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, to know truth out to the farthest reaches of its limitless shores, not only in time, but in eternity. That is a tremendous program, is it not? Yet that is the amazing program of God, which he has begun in those who have come to know Jesus Christ.

Look back at the Upper Room Discourse in the sixteenth chapter of John's Gospel, where our Lord is unfolding to his amazed disciples this fascinating, this almost unbelievable program of God for the future. They do not understand what he means, and are puzzled by what he says. It is not until the Holy Spirit comes on the Day of Pentecost that the pieces of this strange puzzle begin to fall into place. But, in Verse 12, he says to them, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now," {cf, John 16:12}. Why not? Well, because they did not have the equipment. That is the trouble with fallen men. God has many mysteries hidden in the universe, mysteries about ourselves, mysteries about the

world around us, and we do not understand them yet because we do not have the equipment. Unregenerate man lacks that which it takes to explore adequately himself and the universe in which he lives. Thus these men, not yet having the Holy Spirit, did not have what it takes to understand what he was saying.

**"When the Spirit of truth comes [the Spirit of reality, the Spirit who gets right down to the basics, the fundamentals, the essential issues of life], he will guide you into all truth;" {John 16:13a RSV}**

How will he do it? What is the curriculum, what is the course of study for this?

**"... for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come [to you]. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." {John 16:13b-14 RSV}**

This is the only way we can have Jesus Christ. By means of the Holy Spirit, the anointing which we have received from him, we can know him who says, "I am the ... truth," {John 14:6 RSV}. "All that the Father has is mine" {cf, John 6:37}, what a fantastic course of study! All that the Father has he will take and reveal unto you, "... therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Paul enlarges on this same remarkable curriculum of truth in First Corinthians, Chapter 2. He is explaining to these Corinthians why he did not come to them discussing philosophy and the teachings of the Greek thinkers. He says, I deliberately set these things aside. I did not come to engage in debate with you in these areas. I came to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Then in Verse 6, he says,

**Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. {1 Cor 2:6-7 RSV}**

Read that now in Phillip's translation.



**We do, of course, speak “wisdom” among those who are spiritually mature, but it is not what is called wisdom by this world, nor by the powers-that-be who soon will be only the powers that have been. The wisdom we speak of is that mysterious secret wisdom of God which he planned before the creation for our glory today. None of the powers of this world have known this wisdom – if they had, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory. {1 Cor 2:6-8 J. B. Phillips}**

What is missing from man’s knowledge today? Why do we have a world so filled with such obvious confusion and uncertainty? No one seems to know the answers to the overwhelming problems that face us. Why is it that we cannot solve problems even on the material and physical level?

Take, for instance, this matter of smog. I was in San Bernardino last week, 50 miles from the center of Los Angeles. I stepped outside and within seconds my eyes began to smart and water, my lungs were burning, and I literally could not stand to remain outdoors. Unfortunately, that is not limited to Southern California – we have it here, too.

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, lest some uncircumcised Philistine from Southern California hear it!

This very week the papers reported that New York City almost had to shut down because of smog. What causes it? Well, they tell us it is primarily the automobile, these sleek chariots we enjoy so much, and spend so much time and money on, that are causing the smog. The obvious answer is, get rid of the automobile, or change it. But the problem is, our whole economy is geared to the internal combustion engine and the petroleum industry. To change it would wreck the whole American economy. How do you solve that problem?

Obviously, there is something missing in man. He does not know enough, he does not understand himself. The New English Bible rendering of this verse in First Corinthians 2, reveals that what is missing is:

**God’s hidden wisdom, his secret purpose framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory. {1 Cor 2:7 NEB}**

That is what is missing. Man does not know how to bring himself to the glory God intended for him. He has lost the key, he has lost the program because he has lost the understanding of himself, and, lacking this, he gets involved in what seems to be perfectly right things but which end up as very serious problems. That is why he can build an automobile, complete in its technological perfection, but he puts a driver in the seat who cannot handle it, and within moments that beautiful automobile is a mass of wreckage. With that automobile we are killing 40,000 people a year, but, instead of solving the problem with the driver, we are trying to solve it by improving the car.

It is right here where philosophy and pseudo-Christian heresies come in. Every philosophy, every cult, and every heresy is an attempt to reveal how man can achieve greatness, how he can fulfill himself. Each is offering to unfold the secret to the nature of man, how he can operate correctly, how he can achieve what he longs to do. Each of these takes for granted that fallen man already has in himself all that it takes to understand himself and to explore the secrets of life, i.e., his reason and his observation. Therefore, each of them launches upon what they call, “a search for truth.” They are looking for the key to all things. They are examining the mystery of existence, both living and inanimate, to discover the secrets of the universe, looking for that which can give purpose and meaning to life. Lacking the necessary equipment and refusing to acknowledge the need for another teacher beyond man, superior to man, they become those whom Paul describes as “ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of truth,” {cf, 2 Tim 3:7 KJV}.

Is that not a significant statement? That could be written above every school of philosophy in the land today. “Ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of truth.”

Why not? Because truth is a Person. Truth is Jesus Christ. The fundamental characteristic of truth is consistency. It must fit every fact, every known and unknown situation. If you have something you think is the truth, but you must force things to fit, or squeeze pieces in because they do not quite fit, then you do not have the truth. The glorious thing about knowing Christ is that the longer you live and the more you observe life, with him at the center, you find that everything fits. Without struggle, without pressure, without

twisting or turning, all of life fits, for he is the truth. You know that truth, John says, “that is why I write to you.”

That is why man without this knowledge hasn't a clue as to the secret of his own existence. The only principle he knows is that of demonstrating his inherent ability. Is that not what you see around you? Did you ever hear someone say “Just let me show you what I can do”? Is that not the basis upon which most humans live? “Just give me an opportunity to show you what I can do; give me an education by which I can develop what I can do.” This is fallen man's understanding of the secret of his existence. He has in himself, he thinks, that which it takes to handle life properly. If he only has the opportunity to show what he can do, he can demonstrate his greatness. Now that works just well enough to give the appearance of actually being the secret, and most men are thus deluded. But man cannot understand why he cannot ultimately solve his problems. He is baffled and bewildered. He sees this principle work in certain areas, but he cannot understand why it doesn't work everywhere.

The apostle says it is because he is forever ignorant, apart from Jesus Christ, that the secret of a man's greatness, God's secret purpose, framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory, is not that of trying to demonstrate our inherent ability but that of declaring our utter dependence upon another. The man or woman, boy or girl, who learns that God living in him, and his utter dependence upon that God to make life full and rich, is the one who discovers what he is here for. The apostle says, because men did not know this they crucified the Lord of glory. If they had known it, as the Lord Jesus kept constantly setting it before them, trying to arrest their attention if they had but heeded him, they would never have crucified him. But because they rejected the principle he presented, because they would not believe what he said, in the end they became the murderers of the Son of God, and their hands were stained with the blood of the Lord of glory.

Now, John says, this is why I am writing to you Christians. You now are equipped to understand and know. I can point out to you the nature of error. You are worth writing to, for two reasons. He lists these for us in Verse 21:

**I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, {1 Jn 2:21a RSV}**

That is, you now have the ability to grasp and understand truth. It is profitable to explain to you, for you are able to grasp the secrets of living. There is no longer any reason for weakness in your life. If you will pay attention, if you will listen, if you will give heed to the anointing, the Secret Teacher within who will take these things that are written and explain them and unfold them, you can fully lay hold of life, life in all its fullness. That is why I am writing to you.

There is no use writing to someone who does not have this anointing. You cannot explain life to those who have never met Jesus Christ, they cannot understand it. To them, what you say is threatening, and they reject it. It looks to them like you are cutting the ground out from everything they built their lives on. They must start with receiving Christ before you can explain life to them.

John adds also a second reason:

**... you know that no lie is of the truth. {1 Jn 2:21b RSV}**

Do you know that? Have you learned yet, as a Christian, that no lie is of the truth, that there is no possible harmony between a lie and the truth?

In other words, that there are no grey areas in life? That a thing is either black (a lie) or it is white (the truth), and there are no gray areas though there may be a mingling of black with white. By virtue of the anointing, every Christian has an ability to exercise moral judgment to distinguish right from wrong.

It is amazing how many Christians have not learned this yet, and still go on echoing the lie of the world that there can be a blending of truth and error, and, therefore, there are areas of life that are gray where you cannot tell the difference between right and wrong. John utterly cuts the ground out from under that. He says it is not true. I wrote to you, he says, because you have found this out, if you know Jesus Christ. You may not have thought through the implications, but you must know that there is no possibility of blending a lie with the truth. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all,” {1 Jn 1:5b}.

One of the glorious things about God's secret purpose, i.e., the restoring of the life of God to the spirit of man, is that it also re-establishes standards of absolute values and makes possible moral judgments. It shifts us from control by a conscience of convenience to control by a conscience of conviction, from fear of consequences to faith in a Conqueror. That is the great difference.

These days we are hearing much about what are called "situational ethics," relativism in the realm of moral judgments. What are these? Well, if the boss sees you take fifty cents from the petty cash drawer, then obviously you have disgraced yourself and the company's name, having been caught red-handed, and that is wrong. But if you do it without getting caught, it is all right. That is situational ethics.

If you cheat on an examination because you do not like the teacher, then that is wrong, that is not reason enough. But if you do it because you are desperate to get a good grade and there is no other way to do it – you have been letting the whole thing slide until exam time and there is no other way but to cheat, and obviously, the important thing is to get a good grade – well, then, that is right.

Is that not what you hear?

It is this thing that results in a double standard in life. You borrow a book from your buddy and when you have finished reading it you put it in your own library. Later on, as you are running around together with the gang, he suggests to you that you steal a sports car out of the parking lot. You look at him in horror. "What kind of a guy do you think I am? I only steal books!"

It is what makes it possible to stand in church and sing with full-throated soprano,

Be like Jesus, this my song,  
In the home and in the throng,  
Be like Jesus all day long,  
I would be like Jesus."

But when you finish the song, you put the hymn book down and turn to the one beside you and say, "Get a load of Susy Jones – boy, how fat can you get!"

That is situational ethics, lumping together right and wrong, smoothing over the difference between truth and error.

John suggests that once you could do that without any concern at all, once all you needed was a desire to do something and you would soon find a way to do it, and make it look right. You would soon find some way to justify it, and make it look even necessary for you to do. That is the terrible power of the human mind called rationalization.

But John says, "No more!" Now you know the One who is the truth, and you cannot get by so easily any more. Sooner or later you must explain your actions to him, and all those wonderful excuses that went over so smoothly with your wife or husband or friends or neighbors sound very lame when repeated to him. He is totally unimpressed by them. He does not say anything; he simply folds his arms and looks at you, and when you feel his eyes upon you all your excuses sound watery and weak. You start stammering and pretty soon you stop. Because, as John says, "no lie is of the truth" and you know that now.

Therefore, he says, I am writing to you because you can be helped. You are not like these people that are caught up in the human falsehood, swept along by a lie, carried about by every wind of doctrine that blows. You are not like that anymore. I am writing to you because you can learn, you can grow, you can be helped, you are worth writing to.

Now give heed to these things. Begin to examine the voices you hear, the philosophies around you, the suggestions and explanations of life that are presented to you. Measure them according to the truth. Bring them to the One you have learned is the Truth. That makes you worth writing to.

- Have you come to know the truth as it is in Jesus?
- Are you ready to listen to the Word of God, unfolded by the Spirit of God, in order that you might understand the world in which you live and the person who lives in it – you?
- Are you willing to understand how God made you, how he intends you to function, how he wants you to react to situations?
- Will you let him teach you no longer to depend upon the false sense of ability that you have

## The Hard Core of Truth

lived on all your life, but to renounce that, and rely instead upon his life within?

That is why John is writing.

He writes these things, he says, because he knows the necessary equipment is there.

Now use it!

### **Prayer:**

Our Father, teach us this great principle.  
Help us to understand the truth as it is in

Christ. Make us to understand that he is the key to reality, the secret behind all things, the key to our own lives, and the key to the universe in which we live. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Help us to turn from every siren voice that beckons us away from him and to bring all the things we discover, all experiences, all observations, all reasonings, unto him, unto the testing of his Spirit and of his eye upon it. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## No Son, No Father

by Ray C. Stedman

In considering this letter we have already seen how John recognizes the existence in his day (as it is also in ours) of a counterfeit Christianity. He has described its general characteristics. It makes its appearance in cycles in human history. It is always characterized by an attack upon the person of Christ and those who teach along these lines eventually depart from New Testament Christianity, though they begin within the circle of the church, the fellowship of faith.

Then we have gone on with John to recognize the supreme fact that is always true of real Christians: they have received the Holy Spirit of truth, the One who has come to reveal Christ. Jesus said he would take of the things of his and reveal them unto us, and guide us into all truth. Because of this, John says, Christians are able to know, able to understand things that no man, apart from this instruction of the Spirit, can understand. Further, they are able to exercise moral judgment. This is manifestly what is missing in our present society where men and women seem utterly incapable of exercising moral judgments. Everything is relativistic, nothing is right and nothing is wrong. But the Christian is delivered from that attitude, and, by means of the Spirit of truth which is within him, is able again to exercise moral judgment.

Now John, in the second chapter of his letter, resumes his analysis of heresy, of anti-Christianity. He now unveils to us the nature of error in two verses. He exposes here the fundamental issue of error, i.e., the goal toward which all lies trend, and also the reason why this error is diabolically terrible and destructive in its character.

**Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? his is the antichrist, for he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. {1 Jn 2:22-23 RSV}**

Did you ever ask yourself, “Why is it wrong to lie?”

Many of us have a secret admiration for, if not agreement with, the little boy who defined a lie as “an abomination unto the Lord, but a very present help in time of trouble.” But we do take a serious view of lying, at least when it is done by other people. Why is it that parents often say to their children, “I’m not punishing you because what you did was wrong, though it was wrong. But what I’m concerned about, and what I’m punishing you for, is that you lied about it.” Why do they look so seriously upon lying? Do they not unconsciously sense that all lies are a pathway which can lead to the ultimate lie? That ultimate lie is the supreme expression of lying, of falsehood, of error. John says, this is the liar, the supreme liar, the one who has fallen victim to the supreme delusion, he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. That is the supreme lie of all ages.

I think it is evident that the name, Jesus, and the name, Christ, have somehow become fused together in our thinking. I have met people who think that Christ is the last name of Jesus. Just as we say, “John Jones,” they think “Jesus Christ” expresses the first and the last name of our Lord. But if you are acquainted at all with the Scriptures you know that this is not the case. The word,

Christ, is a Greek word which translates the Hebrew word *Messiah*, so that the word, *Christ*, means exactly the same as the word *Messiah*. *Messiah* is a word which means “the Anointed One.” It is this same root which forms the word John has spoken about a few verses previously, the “anointing” which has been given to each Christian. The Holy Spirit is that anointing, and the relationship of this to the word Christ is quite apparent. The disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch, because it was obvious they were anointed with the Christ, that Christ shone through their lives. They were called Christ’s Ones – Christians – because the anointing was so evident upon them.

This word, therefore, refers not to Jesus’ last name, but to his work. It is a reference to the office he fulfilled. Jesus is the Anointed One.

You recall in Isaiah’s great prophecy there is a passage which speaks specifically about this. In Isaiah 61, the servant of Jehovah, whom Isaiah has been describing, says,

**The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me [Here is the one anointed to do a certain work. What is that work?] to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, {Isa 61:1-2a RSV}**

Luke tells us that our Lord himself, in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, quoted this passage and stopped at a comma. The verse goes on to speak of “the day of vengeance of our God,” but our Lord stopped before that because his first coming did not include the day of vengeance. Closing the book at this point he said to these people in the synagogue, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” {Luke 4:21 RSV}. He had reminded them that the Lord had anointed him to proclaim the gospel, to give relief to the captives, to bind up the brokenhearted, etc. This is his appointed work.

Therefore, the great truth of Christmas is that the baby named Jesus, born to Mary in the stable in Bethlehem, that human baby is the predicted Anointed One whom Isaiah saw 725 years before the angels sang over Bethlehem. He is the same

one. Jesus is the Christ. He was named Jesus because, as the angel announced to Joseph, “He will save his people from their sins,” {Matt 1:21b RSV}. That is the work of Messiah, of the Anointed One, of the Christ. He is anointed to save. The great heart of the Christian proclamation is that Jesus, the human being who was born in Bethlehem, who grew up and lived in Nazareth, who walked and ministered on the hillsides and byways of Judea and Galilee, that human Jesus is the Christ, he is the Messiah.

In the Old Testament there were three kinds of men who were anointed:

- Prophets were anointed when they entered upon their office of proclaiming the word of God.
- Priests were anointed when they began their ministry of cleansing, healing, and forgiving.
- And they anointed kings when they ascended to the throne.

Read through the Old Testament and gather up the predictions concerning the coming of Jesus Christ and you can see how it is made perfectly clear that Jesus was to be God’s prophet, he was also God’s priest, and he was God’s king.

- Moses said, “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me; him shall you hear,” {cf, Deut 18:15}.
- It was announced to Hannah, the mother of Samuel, that the Lord would raise up for himself a faithful priest who would fulfill all his word {see 1 Sam 2:25}.
- And scattered through the Old Testament are many predictions that speak of the coming of Christ as God’s king. There is that one so familiarly connected with Christmas, Isaiah 9:6:

**For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government will be upon his  
shoulder,  
and his name will be called  
“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,**

**Everlasting Father, Prince of  
Peace.”  
Of the increase of his government  
and of peace  
there will be no end. {Isa 9:6-7a  
RSV}**

The glory of the Christmas message is that Jesus is that same Mighty One, he is the Messiah. He is God's prophet, he is God's priest, and he is God's king. When he is born again in your heart, as God intends should happen to any man or woman who is ready to believe, that is what he will be: God's prophet, God's priest, and God's king. Through the Holy Spirit he will speak to you the word of God. He will cleanse you, as God's priest, and he will rule your life, as God's king. This is because what he is, is what he was. Everything that he was, he still is. Remember that word in Hebrews, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever," {Heb 13:8}. Everything he was, he still is, and everything he will be, he is now, and all that he is, he will be, in you. When he comes into your life, he will be exactly what he was. Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is the Christ, the Christ is Jesus.

Now, the devil hates this truth above everything else and is constantly exerting every wile, every strategem, every clever ruse he can devise to twist and to distort this basic truth of the Christian message. All the history of the Christian centuries is an account of how the devil, in one way or another, succeeds in taking this basic, fundamental truth of Christian faith and twisting it to make it appear something else. One of the early forms of heresy, and one that is reflected here in John's letter, is that Jesus was nothing but a man upon whom the spirit of Christ came. The Christ is the Eternal Spirit from God, but Jesus was nothing but a man. As he grew up and came to the days of his ministry he was baptized, and then the Christ Spirit came upon him and dwelt within him. He remained yet Jesus the man, but the divine Spirit came to him and rested in him, dwelt in him, and this was the explanation of his amazing ministry. That same divine Spirit that came to Jesus the man when he was baptized, left him on the cross, and thus when he was buried he was buried as Jesus the man, no longer the Christ. It is the Christ Spirit which is available to men today. We have nothing

to do with a historical Jesus but with a Christ spirit.

Now, that was an early heresy and unfortunately it is still with us. It can be found today in the teachings of Christian Science. One of the basic claims of Christian Science is that Jesus was a man upon whom the Christ spirit came. But this is what John calls "the lie." According to such teaching, Jesus is not the Christ, he is only possessed by the Christ. This denies the incarnation, the fact announced in John's Gospel that "the word was made flesh," {John 1:14a KJV}. The truth is, Jesus is the Christ, he is that predicted One. The man Jesus is identical in every respect with that One whom the prophets saw.

There is a modern form of this heresy even more current among us. We are being told today that the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus, the shining of the star, the song of the angels, all these are but legendary accretions that have been added to the essential story of the humanity of Jesus. These are all myths, beautiful but incredible ornaments, that have been added in order to make the story more attractive, and that Jesus was but a natural man. Now, John labels that "the lie," and says he who denies that Jesus is the Christ is "the liar."

You find the final form of this lie in the predicted one who is referred to here in John as "the antichrist," and whom Paul calls the Man of Sin. In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians he says,

**Let no one deceive you in any way; [Note that word. We are constantly warned, are we not, that the enemy is exceedingly clever in his ability to deceive.] for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness [the Man of Sin] is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you remember that when I was still with you I told you this? [This is nothing new, says Paul, I am simply reminding you of what I taught you when I was with you.] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the**

**mystery of lawlessness is already at work;  
{2 Th 2:3-7a RSV}**

John says the same thing: “Even now many antichrists have gone out among us.” This is characteristic of all the Christian centuries: the mystery of darkness, the mystery of evil, the mystery of iniquity, the lie, is already at work.

But, says Paul,

**... only he who restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {2 Th 2:7b-10 RSV}**

Then he adds this very significant phrase,

**Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false [literally, the lie], so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. {2 Th 2:11-12 RSV}**

There again is the lie. Why is it so terrible? Why such strong language? John explains: Behind this truth that Jesus is the Messiah is hidden a deeper, more significant truth. “This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” That is the problem. To deny that Jesus is the Christ is to deny the Father and the Son.

Here we are confronting something of the mystery of the nature of God, this tremendous, eternal wonder to the human heart. I grant immediately that there is much that we cannot understand about God, about the Trinity. We know there are three persons who eternally exist as one God. Our minds boggle when we try to understand fully what that means, and to grasp how it works out in its implications. But it is nevertheless the truth, and John says the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ always, inevitably, goes on to deny the Trinity, the Father and the Son. He does not mention the Spirit here because in this particular reference John is dealing with an apostate, (i.e., a religious person who is without the

Spirit). He is without the Spirit because he denies the testimony of the Spirit that Jesus is the Christ.

You recall, in that profoundly significant passage which we call the Upper Room Discourse, when our Lord is gathered with his own (and it is John who records it for us), that our Lord himself reveals to us something of the wondrous relationship that has eternally existed between the Father and the Son. We know that in the beginning was God – God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. It is the supreme characteristic of God that he loves: God is love. Therefore the Father loved the Son, and it was always the Father’s delight to take the fullness in himself, and, through the Eternal Spirit, to give it to the Son. Love always gives, and God is forever giving. The Father gives of himself to the Son. All that is in the Father is, through the Spirit, given to the Son. This is why Jesus said in the Upper Room Discourse, “All that the Father has is mine,” {John 16:15a RSV}. And Paul adds, in Colossians, “In him [the Son] all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell,” {cf, Col 1:19}. Therefore, as man, he became “the image of the invisible God,” {Col 1:15a RSV}. All that the Father was, given unto him, became visible in the Son, as man.

But the Son also must love and give, for he too is God, as the Spirit is God. This is where creation comes in, for John has told us “All things were made by him [the Son],” {John 1:3a KJV}. Why? In order that all the fullness which is in him, which the Father has given to him, might be given to the whole creation, headed by man. Paul says, “All things were created through him and for him,” {cf, Col 1:16}. He is the full expression of the Father and the creation is to be the full expression of the Son. Everything that we see about us, the universe in all its wonder of complicated structure, is but an expression of the life of the Son.

But here limitation is very evident. The Son can receive all the fullness of the Father, but the lower creation cannot receive all the fullness of the Son. We know that inanimate matter does not express anything of the love of God. You cannot find any expression of God’s love in nature. Nature will treat you exactly the same way when your heart is grieved and crushed and broken as it will when you are filled with buoyancy and joy and blessing. There is no expression of God’s love in nature. Of his wisdom and power, yes, there is



very much. Analyze the structure of natural things, both animate and inanimate, and you can see the amazing wisdom of God, how marvelously he puts all things together. He creates animals with an instinctive drive that causes them to travel thousands of miles to a place they have never seen before. This migratory pattern repeats itself generation after generation. This is the wisdom of God.

Also the power of God is evident in nature. We have released some of it now with the hydrogen bomb. God never made a hydrogen bomb, but he made the atoms from which it comes, and the power of it is there. Even among the animals you can see the wisdom and power of God. They are governed by an instinctive interlock that makes them do what God wants them to do, but there is no love of God manifest there. In the animals you can see the goodness of God and the kindness of God, but you see nothing of the self-giving love of God.

Only in man, in all the visible creation, is there a being who can receive the fullness of the Son and return it again. This is because man has the power of will. He can make a voluntary choice. Love, of course, is always voluntary, you cannot compel love.

Thus the whole program of creation was intended to be the Father, taking of the fullness that was in him, and, through the eternal Spirit, imparting it to the Son; who in turn takes of the fullness that he has received, and, through the eternal Spirit, imparts it unto man and the whole creation to the end that the fullness may be reflected back in visible manifestation to the Father, and so the whole created world would glorify God. There will come a day when, as Paul tells us in First Corinthians 15, "all things have been put in subjection to the Son," {cf, 1 Cor 15:28}. Then he to whom all things have been subjected, will, in turn, subject himself to him who put all things under him, (the Father) "that God [the three-fold God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] may be everything to every one," {1 Cor 15:28b RSV}. That is God's design for the universe.

Now, what happened?

As you know, this program was interrupted by man's deliberate choice to repudiate his dependence upon the Son, through the Spirit, and to be his own god, to turn creation to his own purposes. Then the Spirit of God was removed from the spirit of man,

and man lost his ability to love God, and lost his capacity to know God as Father, for the heart of Fatherhood is love, and man has lost his awareness of the love of God. When he chose, by a voluntary exercise of will, to shut himself away from the love of God, he lost the experience of the fatherhood of God. Without a capacity to love God, he fell to the level of the animals, retaining only his mental cleverness and his superior emotional sensitivity. He thus became nothing but a very clever animal, made by God, intended for God, but living without God except as the animals receive, without worship, the goodness and the kindness of God. That is the way man is living today, is he not? That is exactly what has happened.

Thus, you see, when a man denies the testimony of the Spirit that Jesus is the Christ, (i.e., the eternal Son become flesh to die and to rise again in order that God may live once again in man) he also shuts himself off from the possibility of knowing God as Father and he cannot experience the love of God. This is why the devil attacks so vehemently this truth that Jesus is the Christ. Through a denial of this he can get at that secret, that basic thing, that relationship that God desires for his people, the glory of knowing the Father.

At a Pastor's Conference not long ago I heard Mr. Joe Blinco say that he has long since learned that the devil is no "pimple squeezer." He always strikes for the jugular vein. That is why these devilish, diabolical heresies that appear from time to time are forever striking at the heart of the Christian message. These are not insignificant things, these are not trivialities. They are aimed at the very heart of the thing God wants. They are an attempt to keep man from understanding and entering into the realization of the desire of God for man, that he may discover the true fatherhood of God, and the true brotherhood of man.

When a man receives Jesus Christ as his Redeemer, as the Lord who came to save him, and the Holy Spirit is, by that process of receiving Christ, restored to a man's spirit and heart, then the first words He teaches that man to utter is "Abba! Father!" He is restored to the love of God and to the family of God. That is why John says, "He who confesses the Son has the Father." The fullness of the Father is forever being given to the Son, therefore all that is in the Father belongs only to the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

Jesus said this himself. In the Upper Room he was amazed by the request that Philip could ask of him. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father," {John 14:8}. And Jesus said, "Philip, have I been with you all this time and still you do not know me, or what I have been saying to you? He that has seen me has seen the Father. If you have me, you have the Father. As you come to know me you discover that in knowing me you know the Father, for all that the Father has is mine," {cf, John 14:9 ff}. "As the Father has loved me," Jesus said, "and thus in his love has given all that he is and all that he has to me, so have I loved you and intend to give all that I am, all my fullness, unto you who believe," {cf, John 15:9}. John says of him, "Of his fullness have all we received," {John 1:16a KJV}. The amazing thing, the radical, revolutionary aspect of the Christian message, is this tremendous thing – that the fullness that is in God is given unto us who receive the Son.

Paul confirms this. He says, "In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him," {Col 2:9-10a RSV}. As he puts it in his prayer in Ephesians, you are intended to be "a body wholly filled and flooded with God himself," {cf, Eph 3:19}. That is the secret of Christian living. The Lord Jesus described that, in terms of our experience, as a well of living water that would be within us from which we could drink at any moment of thirst, any moment of demand, any moment of pressure, any moment of trial, heartache or sorrow. Anything that makes demand upon us can be immediately met by drinking of the well within. It is not something that we go to church to get, it is something God has already put within us.

Jesus said this to a woman at the well in Samaria, a poor troubled woman, a seeker after romance who already had five husbands, and still not satisfied, was living with a sixth man. Obviously her heart was tremendously athirst. Jesus said, "If you knew who it is who asks of you, you would have asked of him and he would have given you a well of living water, springing up to eternal life," {cf, John 4:10-14}. Not only would it be a well, but in another place he said it would become a river, flowing out in blessing to others. The heart in which the Son dwells has all the fullness of the Father, and that fullness will be evidenced by a manifestation of the attributes of the

character of God; a heart filled with love, with peace, with blessing. So at one with God, so well adjusted, so filled with internal blessing, that it keeps flowing out in rivers of refreshing to those around.

Do you know what that means?

That means to become easy to live with, a delight to be around, someone that people love to see, and to talk to, and to share your presence, as they loved to see and talk to and to share the presence of the Son of God. That is Christianity.

Do you see why the lie is the most hateful thing that could come into the world? It cuts man off from the blessing God has for him. All that God is, is available in Christ. There is no other channel, there is no other way.

There are those who point to certain people who do not believe in Christ and say, "Look at them, look at the blessing they have, look at the goodness of their life, look at their moral character." But they never seem to see the flaw in that argument. As we have seen again and again, part of the power of the devil is that he can so cleverly imitate for awhile the goodness that is in Jesus Christ. It will fool anyone – for awhile. But we only need to stop and think through the implications of such a thing to see how wrong it is. Anyone who says that, is essentially denying the Christian faith. He is saying that there was no need for the cross, there was no need for Bethlehem, there was no need for the Son of God to come, or for the death of Calvary and the resurrection from the grave, these things are of no value, of no significance. If a man can come to God in any other way than through Jesus Christ, then this whole story is a foolish fable and ought to be discarded. It is simply a wild, imaginative tale that deserves no intelligent consideration whatsoever. Thus, this becomes a denial of the faith.

But then, how do we explain Jesus Christ? And how do you explain the fact that through twenty centuries men and women, living in darkness, confusion, bewilderment and despair, in heartache, in failure, in emptiness, in meaninglessness and purposelessness, have found in Jesus Christ the satisfaction of their heart, the fullness of God, the riches of God imparted to them. It is only through Christ that these come. This is antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.

**Prayer:**

Our Father, we pray that we may understand these themes and the world in which they are made manifest; that grasping these we may lay hold of all that is potentially ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. How our minds are staggered by this concept that everything that is in you – the fullness of the Father – is imparted to

the Son, and everything that is in him is available to us. What riches, what amazing power, what magnificence of wisdom – all that we need for everything that comes in any moment of pressure, of danger, of trial, of need – has been provided in him. Lord, teach us to live on this level, for surely this darkened world of ours is crying out for this kind of a demonstration in this 20th century hour. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

## The Living Word

by Ray C. Stedman

You who have followed with us through these studies together in the great First Letter of John know that the concern of this apostle is to share with everyone the fellowship he himself enjoys. He said at the beginning of his letter,

**... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. {1 Jn 1:3 RSV}**

Perhaps one of the deepest hungers present in humanity today is its hunger for a God who is a Father. Men long to know that the universe is not merely a heartless, impersonal machine, no cosmic sausage grinder, but behind the universe is a Father with a Father's heart. You can sense this wistful searching after the fatherhood of God in many of the religions of the world, in much of the philosophy of mankind, and in man's constant restless cry for something beyond himself.

It is quite evident that man can see in nature all the proof he needs that there is a God. Oh, I know there are many who say there is no God. There is even a materialistic philosophy that has captured the imaginations and loyalties of almost half the earth which says there is no such a being as God. But it seems quite apparent, as one observes this phenomenon across a number of years, that beneath the surface is a great deal of evidence of a hunger and a search after God, despite the outward pronouncement that there is no God. Those who say there is no God have simply convinced themselves about something they have already determined to be true. But when man seeks for God in nature the God he discovers is always a distant God, a fearsome God, an austere God, a God who seems unrelated to the immediate needs, problems, difficulties, and heartaches of life. Men

are never satisfied with a God like that. They are looking for a Father. The great announcement of the Christian faith is that God can only be discovered as Father, and known as Father, through contact and fellowship with the Son of God. As Jesus put it, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me," {John 14:6 KJV}.

Now I realize that this claim to uniqueness on the part of Christian faith has given rise to a great deal of criticism. There are many who regard Christians as essentially bigots, narrow-minded religious fanatics, because they refuse to admit that any other line of approach to God is valid, that all men, if they find God as Father, must come through Christ. It does appear, superficially, that this is the case. But this uniqueness is essentially because of the nature of man himself.

As we have been learning from our studies together in the Scriptures, man consists of body, soul, and spirit. God is the creator of the body and the soul, but, according to Hebrews 12:9, he is "the Father of spirits." The God with whom we have to do is the Father of spirits and though he made us body and soul, he breathed into us a spirit, which was part of himself since he is the Father of spirits. But the problem is that in fallen man, as he now exists, as he is born into this world in this so-called "natural" state, the spirit is unresponsive. Man is dead, spiritually. The whole record of the Bible is that this is the underlying fact of human life which we must face if we are going to understand life at all. Man is not what God made him to be. He is unresponsive spiritually. He is dead in trespasses and sin.

Therefore, he cannot know God as Father because it is in the spirit that man understands fatherhood, and can know and appreciate the fatherhood of God. Just because man is dead in

spirit, it is also true that no teaching can help him. After all, teaching only instructs the mind. No philosophy can touch that dead and unresponsive spirit because philosophy is nothing more than an intellectual pursuit of truth. No ritual, no sacramental hocus-pocus, is able to change man spiritually, for these are things done by the body or the soul, and do not touch this realm of the spirit. That is the reason why all teaching, all philosophy, all religious performances of any kind are absolutely useless and bankrupt to help man in his spiritual need. They do not touch the heart of the problem, they do nothing to solve the basic difficulty.

The only thing a dead spirit needs is life, and the unique claim of Jesus Christ is that he alone has life. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," {John 14:6a}. "In him was life," John says, "and the life was the light of men," {John 1:4 RSV}. Later on in this very letter he says, "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," {1 Jn 5:11 RSV}. Therefore it is only by the touch of the Son of God that life is imparted to the unresponsive spirit of man. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, "You he made alive [in spirit]," {Eph 2:1a RSV}. As they believed in Jesus Christ they were born again, made alive in spirit. And when the spirit is made alive by receiving the Son, then God is known as the Father that he is. It is then we begin to know and experience the father-heart of God. We realize that behind the universe is no impersonal mind, or impersonal force, but a Father's heart, with a Father's love, and a Father's concern, so that even a sparrow does not fall to the ground apart from his will, and he knows the number of hairs on our head.

Now that is what John is saying. "He who confesses the Son has the Father also," {1 Jn 2:23b RSV}. And having led us to that place of understanding, John goes on to show us how to experience this. It is one thing to have the Father (and everyone who has come to know Jesus Christ has the Father indwelling him, as well as the Son, as Jesus promised would happen), but it is another thing to know the Father, to experience the fullness of God. How do you do that? What is the process? This is where we begin now, for John has brought us to that place where he unfolds in two short verses the process by which all of God's intention may be realized in your experience, right

where you are – in your home, in your life, in your family, in your job, right now.

**Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life. {1 Jn 2:24-25 RSV}**

There is the process. These are the logical steps that lead to the enjoyment of all God's intention for you. Notice them. There are three of them: Step No. 1 is an admonition to you. "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you." What is this that you heard from the beginning? That takes us right back to the very first verse of the letter. John begins, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life –" {1 Jn 1:1 RSV}. That is the message of Jesus Christ, all that concerns him. It includes, primarily, what he said, what he came to unfold and manifest about God and about man. All the words and deeds of Jesus Christ; that is what men have heard from the beginning, the message concerning him.

It means, of course, all that he said. There is a tendency on the part of many today to take certain of the words of Jesus and to ignore others. I do not understand this. I must confess I fail completely to understand this asserted loyalty to Christ that is accompanied by an indifference to his words. For instance, I find those who say they believe Jesus when he says that he is the light of the world, and he is the door, and he is the one who came to bring truth to men, but yet they say he is mistaken about the time of his return, or that he did not understand nature, he was only a creature of his times with regard to scientific knowledge, and that he did not understand many of the things that we understand today. They say that surely we cannot expect him to know the psychology that has been discovered by eminent thinkers in this area today, and therefore that men today know more about man than he knew.

Now, I do not understand that, for if we take the words of Jesus about himself, we find ourselves confronted with the claim that all power is given unto him and that he is the ultimate answer to the searches of man in any direction. All human knowledge converges at last in Jesus Christ. If we

are going to believe him, then let us believe him – everything he says, whatever he says. Whenever we set ourselves up as a judge of what he says, as being right or wrong, we are really saying we know more about the subject that Jesus Christ.

Now, John is simply reminding us here that if we are going to accept the words of Jesus Christ, we must accept everything that he said.

A friend showed me a book the other day, entitled *Jesus As Teacher*, in which there was a purported attempt to set forth the teachings of Jesus. But when I examined the book at length I discovered that the author had gone through and had taken out parts of sentences which Jesus had spoken and linked them with things he had said in another place; he had sometimes dropped out the whole point our Lord was making in a passage and inserted another point from another place, until the whole was simply a hodgepodge of collections from fragmented sayings of Christ, put together and labeled, *Jesus As Teacher*. But that is not a study of the teachings of Jesus, that is merely a study of the ideas of the author as to what Jesus taught. People are certainly not studying Jesus as teacher when they do that.

Sometimes you hear people say, “Well, we don’t want to follow the Bible, we want to follow Christ. Christ is our authority, not the Bible.” But, as you read the Bible, you can see that is an impossibility. You cannot distinguish between Christ and the Bible in the area of authority. It is the words of Jesus that form the Bible, and if we are going to receive the words of Jesus we must receive them as they are recorded in the New Testament. Our Lord himself reminds us of this. In the twelfth chapter of John he says these very significant words:

**“He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge at the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority [i.e., I did not originate what I came to say. Well, who did?]; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. [The very thing man is seeking is all wrapped up in these words which God has spoken.] What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.” {John 12:48-50 RSV}**

That is why, when John wants to help us to understand and to grasp all that God provides for us, he says we will find it in the Word, the word of life. We will find it in the message which was given us from the beginning. That not only includes the words of the Lord himself, but it also includes the apostolic expansion of those words which we call the Epistles of the New Testament. As you read these letters through you will see they are simply a fuller exposition, given under the direction of the Spirit of God, of all that Jesus said in capsule form in the Gospels. There are no departures, no contradictions, no divergences. There is no place where an apostle goes off on his own and says something that Jesus did not say. They are simply taking all that he said, and, under the leadership and influence of the Holy Spirit, expounding it in fuller detail that we might understand completely what Jesus Christ came to say and to be to men. That is why the Apostle Paul writes to the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another,” {Col 3:16a KJV}.

Now look a little more closely at the word which John employs here. He says, “Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.” That means more than simply reading your Bible once in a while. That means more than to read it in a rather cursory way, then shut the book and mark off on the list that you’ve done your Bible reading for today. This word abide, literally, means “to remain in you.” Or perhaps the closer word would be, “possess you.”

It is exactly what we would mean when we say to a guest who comes into our house, “Make yourself at home.” Of course, they know that we really do not mean that. It is a polite expression and does not mean, “Take over the house and do what you would like,” but, rather, “In the rooms that you have already been given access to, feel free to move around a bit, if you like, but don’t go in the bedrooms, and stay out of the closets.” But if we really meant that statement we would be saying, “Possess this house as though it were yours. Go anywhere you like, do anything you like, make yourself at home as though you were really home.”

And that is what this word means. John is saying, “Let this message which was from the beginning make itself at home in your heart, in your life, possess you – spirit, soul and body. Let it grip

you, mind, emotion, and will. Let it lay hold of you, your whole being.” This is the first and necessary step to the goal that he has in mind, the fullness of God manifest in you. See how he links this inescapably with the Word of God? Let the Word abide in you.

Now here is our trouble. When we read the Bible we really do not want it to move into the whole house, we only want it to move into one room or two. We want it to occupy the room of our mental acumen, the library, if you like, the study. Many people read the Bible that way. They study it intellectually for the knowledge of the times in which we live. Perhaps the prophetic passages because they are simply interested in discovering what the program of God is for the future. Or they study certain of the moral standards or ethical teachings of the Bible, like the Sermon on the Mount, since they are only interested in extracting from it certain intellectual, academic, moral teachings, and that is all they want.

There are others (I am afraid, perhaps, a majority), who study the Bible only for the stirring of emotions that it gives. You can do that, you know. That is why we love to read certain favorite passages. I know people who open the Bible and invariably read the same passages over and over – the 23rd Psalm, the 14th chapter of John, or the 6th chapter of Romans. Why? Because these truths, as they read, stir them. It blesses and stirs their hearts. These are beautiful passages, and beautiful thoughts, and they stir the emotions. That is why we turn to these favorite passages. We love the good feeling we get from reading these passages that have spoken to us in the past, and reading them again wakens memories and we are stirred anew. But that is all. After we have read them and our emotions have been stirred, we close the Bible and go out to live just as we have always lived. There is no difference.

When this happens, we may be religious, certainly we are “churchy,” and no one can deny that we are reading the Bible, but, yet, the Word of God is not abiding in us and that is the necessary thing.

Now, John is urging toward this. He is saying let the Word grip you. Let it confront you intellectually first, that is always the gateway through which God makes his appeal to man. Understand what God is saying. Meditate on these passages until you see the truth, you know what

God is saying. Read them again and again and let them burn into you, muse and meditate upon them until they grip you. Then as you find you understand the truth you will discover that it has done something to your emotions. It has moved and gotten hold of you, you are captivated by it, you are held by it, you are compelled by it. When that happens, that moving of your emotions, then respond to it: submit yourself, obey it. This is what the Scripture calls acting or living by faith; obeying the truth made known to the mind, gripping the emotions, and thus moving the will. That is the Word of God abiding in you, possessing you.

Let that happen, the apostle says, i.e., make provision for it, set a time for this, make room in your life for this. That will inevitably lead you to the next step which, as you notice, is an explanation for you.

**If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. {1 Jn 2:24b RSV}**

It is inescapable. If the Word, if the truth of God has possessed you, then you will be possessed by the Son and by the Father, i.e., by the fullness of God which is in the Son and the Father. Notice, it is the same word he uses, “then you will abide in [be possessed by, gripped by] the Son and the Father.” This is, of course, nothing more than what Jesus himself had said to his disciples in the Upper Room, as recorded in the 14th chapter of John. “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him,” {John 14:21 RSV}. We will abide in him, we will dwell in him, we will move in him, we will go about with him wherever he goes. We will be with him at his work, we will be with him at his home, we will be with him in his relationships with others, we will be with him in his problems, we will be with him in his joys, we will be with him when he is confronted with temptations to anger and temper, we will be with him all the time. We will make our home with him. This is what John is saying. “If what you have heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.”

Now there is a difference, as you know, between being “in” something, and “abiding in” something. Our Lord made that clear in John 15 in the parable of the vine and the branches. He said,

“I am the vine, and you are the branches,” {John 15:5a RSV}. The branch was in the vine by virtue of union, and the life of the vine (or some of it, at least) was being imparted to the branch so that it could bear leaves. But it could not bear fruit under that relationship. He pointed out that if a branch is to bear fruit, it must abide in the vine, i.e., the fullness of the vine must be in the branch. Not just enough life to sustain it, but all that the vine is, is to be imparted to the branch, and the result would be fruit, and more fruit, and much fruit, to the complete satisfying of the owner of the vineyard. This is what our Lord called abiding, i.e., all the life of the vine accepted by the branch.

This, you will notice is a reciprocal relationship. To the degree that you act in faith, obeying the Word, to that same degree the Father and the Son will be in you, performing the Word. This explains why there is sometimes so much difference between Christians. One Christian, even one relatively young in the faith, can seem to be so abundantly full of the character of Jesus Christ, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in such abundance, while another Christian who, perhaps, has been a Christian for years, is still crabbed and ugly in temper and disposition, and there is little of the fruit of the Spirit. What is the difference? One has allowed himself to be possessed by the Word, and thus he is possessed by the Father and the Son. If you obey little, you will experience little. If you obey much, you will experience much. To the degree that you give yourself to God in understanding and obeying his Word, to that same degree he gives himself to you. That is what John is teaching us.

That is why the Apostle Paul in that wonderful 3rd chapter in Philippians says, “I am not claiming absolute perfection, but I press on that I may apprehend that for which I have been apprehended, i.e., that I may lay hold of that for which he has laid hold of me, that I may possess him in order that he may fully possess me,” {cf, Phil 3:12 ff}. Now if this reciprocal relationship is true, this suggests certain conclusions that must inevitably follow. If it is true, as it surely is true, that God gives himself to us in the same degree that we give ourselves to him, then I see three things that result from this:

- First, you can have all that Christ is, if you are ready to take him. There is no limit to the

degree to which he will give himself to you, if there is no limit to the degree to which you are ready to believe and obey him. You can have all that he is, in any situation, at any given moment, if you are ready to take it by an act of obedient faith.

- Second, if that is true, then it is also true that you will only have as much as you are satisfied with. God will never give more to you beyond what you really want. God never forces blessing upon anyone. This is why Christians can live, sometimes for decades, in weakness, and folly, in barrenness, fruitlessness and despair, because they do not really want more from God. Nothing has awakened them to hunger and thirst after righteousness. They are content to live at that low level, and God will never force more upon them. Oh, he will try to wake them up, by one means or another, but he will never bless them, cannot bless them, beyond that which they are willing to take.
- The third conclusion is: You have now, therefore (if you understand this), all that you really want from God. Your present level of life is indication that is all you want. So do not blame God if your life is not filled with the blessing and fullness that the Scriptures seem to promise. It is not his fault. You now have all that you really want, because you can have from him all that you are ready to take. If your life is not satisfying to you, as a Christian, it is not God’s fault; it is that you are not yet willing, for one reason or another, to take from him all that he is ready to give, out of the fullness of his being.

Now, just what is that? This is where John ends. He summarizes, by describing to us what this is, in one phrase:

**And this is what he has promised us, eternal life. {1 Jn 2:25 RSV}**

I am quite aware that phrase is greatly obscured by the traditional view that has been poured into these words, eternal life, through centuries of Christian teaching and preaching. Most of us read the words as though they only meant heaven some day. “Everlasting life,” we call



it, life that never ends. Now that is not inaccurate. Eternal life *is* life that never ends, but the essential factor about eternal life is not quantity, but quality. What John is speaking of here is not merely something we are going to get in heaven someday, but it is something we can experience and enjoy now. It is fullness of life, the full quality of divine life lived out right in your situation, right now, and increasing in fullness of enjoyment forever. In other words, eternal life, as John is using it here, is the daily adventure of experiencing God's solution to every problem, instead of yours. It is the discovery of God's program for every opportunity, instead of yours.

Every time we are confronted with a problem, there are only two things we can do:

- We can either sit down, in the weakness of our own intellect, relying upon our own human resources (much as any wordling would do who never knew God at all, or even an atheist who denies the existence of a God), we can try to solve the problem and work it out. When we do, the result is inevitably the same. Sooner or later life dissipates into a drabness, a boredom, a routine that leaves us utterly uninterested and desiring to be uninvolved. That is our program.
- Or we can have God's program, we can have God's solution to any problem or any opportunity. If we are ready to follow this simple formula that John provides for us here, to be obedient and understanding, obeying the Word as God unfolds it to us, then, in any situation, we can say, "Lord, you are in me and you have come in me to live through me. This situation has been brought about by your planning and your programming. I wouldn't be in it, if it were not for you. Now, Lord, do through me what you want to do with it." Then we watch to see what God does, and we become instantly available to him to move in whatever direction it looks like the situation demands. As we do, we discover that his program begins to unfold in that situation. Every obstacle becomes a glorious opportunity. There is no more reason for despair and gloom because every situation, no matter how frightening it might be for the moment, is but an opportunity to display the fullness of glory, wisdom and power that is in the God who has come to live within us and make his home in us.

Now that is something different, is it not? What a life that is, what quiet excitement that involves. It is described in that well-known passage in Isaiah 40, where the prophet says, "But they that wait upon the Lord [i.e., those who are expecting God to be at work] shall exchange their strength [for what? – for his strength, for his power, for his wisdom, for his understanding – and then what?], they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint," {cf, Isa 40:31}. That is a description of the mind, the emotions, and the will of man:

- "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." They shall be intellectually stimulated, captivated by the great range of truth that God is working out through the humdrum, commonplace circumstances of life. Their minds shall be challenged, their mental vision opened so, like the eagle mounting up, they can see afar and understand what life is all about.
- "They shall run and not be weary." We speak of "running" the gamut of emotions. That is what life is made for. We are never intended to be placid, unmoved people journeying through life, never reacting to anything, dull, stolid, indifferent. We are intended to react; to show joy, to express sorrow, to experience gladness and relief, to run the gamut of emotions. That is perfectly proper, perfectly human. You see the Lord Jesus doing this through the three-and-a-half years of his ministry. Ah, but the trouble is, if we are not doing this in God's strength, it breaks us down. We get anxious, fearful and trembling. We get frightened and break down under the strain. We have a mental breakdown, an emotional breakdown, or a nervous breakdown. Why? Because we are trying to run out of inadequacy, without strength to lean upon.
- "But they that wait upon the Lord, [who are exchanging their strength for his] shall run and not be weary." There is never a breakdown, never any failure in this wonderful

experiencing of life – life that is always vibrant and vital, changing constantly, but always joyful.

- “And they shall walk and not faint.” Walking consists of the steps that we take by the choices of our will, moment by moment. All of life is filled with decisions. You know that, do you not? Sometimes you say, “Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! Nothing but decisions!” Yes, but that is the way life is intended to be, a constant program of decisions which you take step after step after step, walking through life.
- “But they that learn to wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength,” exchange your deadness for his life, exchange your weakness for his strength, exchange your emptiness for his fullness. They shall walk – and not faint. Life will be a constant series of experiencing the undergirding power and strength of God, so that every decision is a strengthening experience.

Now, is that not what you read of all through the New Testament? I look back across some thirty years of Christian experience and remember, as a young Christian, reading that great promise in Ephesians, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,” {Eph 3:20 KJV}. I remember looking at that verse, and saying to myself, “Is that really true? Does God really offer to do for me beyond that which I can ever ask or think at this moment? Why, that’s fantastic! I can ask a lot of life. I can dream and imagine a great many wonderful experiences that I would love to have, to bring satisfaction to my life and heart.” I even had the program outlined in my mind, just how God could do it. But as I look back across these thirty years, I can see that God did not take my program and do it my way, but he has abundantly fulfilled the

promise. My life is richer than I ever dreamed it would be when I was a young Christian. My life is fuller, more satisfying, moment by moment, than I ever thought was possible when I was young. God has fulfilled his promise, not because I have fully and always entered into the fulfillment of this formula, because I have not. Many times I have failed. But despite all the failure, despite the times of weakness, I can bear testimony that the times I have walked in the strength of God have been so superbly above all that I could ask or think, that, even with all the failure taken into account, my life is still an abundant fulfillment of this promise. “Now to him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think (in any given situation).”

If we are ready to give ourselves to the Word of God, to let it possess us, to understand it, and to obey it – if “that which you heard from the beginning abides in you,” you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. The experience of that is eternal life!

#### Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this clear word from the apostle’s heart, concerning the program you have for men. Grant to us now, Lord, through all the feeble searchings of our heart, the discovery of these things in experience. We know, Lord, that you have already given the Holy Spirit to those who know Jesus Christ to be our guide into this very discovery, and we pray now, as we begin this new year, 1967, that we will give ourselves to His program. We will begin to let the Word possess us as we understand it, read it, and grasp it; to let it grip us, that we might abide in you and experience the fullness of eternal life. We thank you in Christ’s name, Amen.

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## The Teaching Spirit

by Ray C. Stedman

Our last time together in this letter was to see what John had to say about the tremendous adequacy of the Word of God to bring us, if we submit to it, to the full experience of vital, fruitful living. It never fails to thrill me that Christianity is not trying to produce religious plaster saints, but thoroughly human individuals who operate as God intended them to operate. The whole thrust of the Christian message is to the end that we experience life as God intended life to be. And the instrument that will do this is the Word of God. It is designed to that end.

But someone says, "This is where I have problems. I know the Bible is important. I know it is designed to produce in me what God desires. But my problem is, I have such difficulty understanding the Bible. I find there are a great many different interpretations of various passages, and there are so many contingencies upon which Scripture seems to rest, and so few areas of universal agreement, that I have great difficulty with the Bible." Well, the only answer to that is to see the full position the apostle takes here, the full thought of John on this matter. He goes on in this passage to say that we have more than the Word of God. There is not only the outward testimony of the Word, but there is also an inner witness.

I am afraid very little is said in Christian churches today about the great theme of the witness, the anointing, the testimonium, of the Spirit of God. Yet it is one of the most vital themes of Scripture, for it explains what makes the difference between Bible study that is dull, dead, lifeless, and ineffective, and Bible study that is live, vital, compelling, and fruitful. Look at these verses with me now.

**I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. {1 Jn 2:26-27 RSV}**

Notice that he introduces this theme by announcing the presence and purpose of an inner witness. "I write this to you about those who would deceive you," he says, "for you have an anointing which you have received from him, which abides in you." In other words, this anointing is especially designed to meet the problem of uncertainty in the face of the many deceitful and deceptive concepts that are around us.

How do you know what is the truth? How do you know which interpretation is right about a passage in the Word?

"Well," John says, "you have an anointing which abides in you for that very purpose." This does not mean, of course, that Christians can never go astray, because they do. But it does mean that, when they go astray, they do so either because they have been ignorant of the anointing, or are resistant to the teaching of the Holy Spirit within. And if they do go astray, they can only go so far, for this anointing, John says, abides in you.

Now we have already seen that this anointing is the Holy Spirit himself, whom you received when you believed in Jesus Christ; both the Word of God and the Spirit of God are received at conversion. We receive the Word of God from those who brought it to us, and we receive the Spirit of God from the Lord Jesus when, in response to the Word of God, we receive Christ into our life.

All of you who are Christians have had this experience, and, therefore, you have both “the word which you heard from the beginning,” as John calls it, and “the anointing which abides in you.”

With regard to the Word, we are told to *let* the Word of God abide in us, i.e., let it possess you, let it take over in your life, dwell in your heart and grip you. This requires a continual coming to the Word. But with regard to the Spirit, John says, he abides; he is there already if you have received Christ. There is no need to ask him for more of him to come in, as many people are misled to believe today. He is all there! He is a person, and a person comes in as a unit.

When I came into this room, I did not send my legs in first, and then my head. I came in altogether. That is the way a person comes in. When the Holy Spirit comes into a Christian’s life he comes in altogether, as a unit. He is all there, and he abides there. But it is necessary, as we will see from this passage, to abide in him. That is the important aspect.

Now the apostle goes on to announce not only the presence of this inner witness, but also to suggest the function and the fullness of his witness to us:

**... you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie.**  
{1 Jn 2:26b RSV}

What strange words: “You have no need that any one teach you,” i.e., you have no need for human teachers. Well, then, what am I doing up here? This seems, at first glance, to contradict other passages of Scripture. We know there are teachers, provided by the Holy Spirit. There is a gift of teaching. There are pastor-teachers set forth by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, to teach men the truth. Even the apostles were teachers. John was a human teacher, Paul was a human teacher, Peter, James, and the other writers of Scripture were all human teachers. How then could John say, “you do not have any need of a human teacher?” The explanation lies in the level at which this kind of teaching takes place.

Let me try to explain: You know that, in literature, it is common to use the eye and the ear as metaphors for an inner comprehension of the

mind. There are actually three levels of seeing and hearing possible to a human being.

- First, the eyes and the ears are physical organs designed to see and to hear. Now as physical organs they sometimes malfunction and we have to provide help for them, as glasses (or if you are really up to date, contact lenses) for the eyes, or hearing aids for the ears. We all are familiar with these functions of the physical organs.

- But the soul has organs of sight and of hearing as well. Even in secular literature you find this referred to. We speak of seeing something, by which we mean that “we have understood it,” or grasped it, intellectually. Or we hear something, by which we mean that “we have heeded it, we have responded to it.” Thus we have heard with the mind and the emotions, the soul. We may sense something is wrong about a thing we hear. We don’t know quite what it is, but we know it is there, and we say, “It doesn’t sound right to me.” We do not mean that there is something wrong with the decibels reaching our ears, we mean there is something wrong with the logic of it. You experience this negatively when you hear or read a foreign language you have never learned. You hear the words or you can see the letters, but you do not know what they mean. You see them, but you do not see them.

Perhaps you have experienced this when, as a stranger, you have unwittingly come into a family crisis. You carry on a conversation, but you sense there is something else going on that you are not fully aware of. Certain words are said with hidden meanings, and you become aware you are involved in a situation that you do not understand. You hear but you do not hear.

- All this is on the level of the mind and the emotions, but there are also organs of the spirit, and this is what John refers to here. There are eyes and ears of the spirit by which we may gain certain flashes of insight and thus come to a full understanding of a truth in relationship to other truths. We see the whole thing clearly without the necessity of reasoning

it all out. These are the eyes and ears of the spirit.

If you want to see that in the Scriptures, turn to Matthew 13 where our Lord is giving the parables of the kingdom. In Verse 13, he says to the disciples, “This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand,” {Matt 13:13 RSV}. Do you see the three levels there? Seeing (with their physical eyes) they do not see (with their mental eyes), and hearing (with their physical ears) they do not hear (with their mental ears), nor do they understand (i.e., it does not reach the level of the spirit where they grasp the full meaning of the truth in relationship to themselves and the world around them). In Verse 16 he says to his disciples, “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear,” {Matt 13:16 RSV}. But he does not go on to say, “Blessed are you, for you understand,” for they did not understand. As they listened to these parables they did not know what he meant any more than many of you know what he meant by them. They did not grasp them. They had not yet received the Holy Spirit and they did not understand his full meaning although they knew, intellectually, what he was talking about. The crowd did not even get that far: They heard the words, but let them flow right on through, and that was all there was to it. The disciples had gone a step further but they did not fully understand.

In Paul’s great letter to the church at Ephesus, he prays for his readers concerning this very thing. In Chapter 1 he says,

**I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power ... {Eph 1:16-19a RSV}**

It requires the operation of the Holy Spirit, to understand, to grasp the immensity of these

tremendous things, to be thrilled and gripped with the excitement of what God has set before us. This then is why we do not have any need of human teachers. At this level, only God can do this. Only the Spirit of God can touch the human spirit and give insight to it. That is why at this level no human being can help you, although the Holy Spirit will often base his teaching upon the word which the human teacher brings.

You have a clear example of that in Matthew 16, when our Lord asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” {Matt 16:13b RSV}. They named various ones, and then he said, “But who do you say that I am?” {Matt 16:15b RSV}. Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” {Matt 16:16b RSV}. Now, Peter had been observing the Lord, but he was puzzled by him, as all these disciples were. They could never figure him out. They did not understand why he did what he did, and said what he said. They were drawn to him, but they were continually amazed at him, and puzzled by him, Peter along with all the rest. But when Jesus asked that question, “Who do you say that I am?” suddenly it all came clear to Peter. He saw it in a flash, in a sudden grasp of truth, and he said, “Why, you’re the Christ, the Son of the living God!” The Lord Jesus said to him, “Peter, blessed are you! [Because God had done something for him.] You didn’t learn that by flesh and blood. You didn’t reason that out, you didn’t amass all the evidence and come to a reasonable conclusion as to what I am – but my Father has revealed it to you,” {cf, Matt 16:17}. That is the anointing, the teaching of the Spirit.

There are three very clear instances of this in Luke 24:

1. After the resurrection, when our Lord joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he found them troubled and disturbed. He said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them [or he opened to them] in all the scriptures the things concerning himself,” {Luke 24:25-27 RSV}. They had not seen these truths before. They had read these Scriptures many times, but they had never seen

that they referred to the Messiah, to the Christ. They still did not know who this stranger was, but now they knew that the Scriptures described a suffering Messiah.

2. Then in Verse 32, after he had revealed himself to them, and disappeared, “They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?’” {Luke 24:32 RSV}. They had heard what he was saying, but they did not grasp it until he opened their eyes – the eyes of their hearts – and the minute he did, their hearts began to burn. They were captivated by what they saw, caught up by it, entranced by these magnificent truths. That is what the anointing does. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and opens it to us.
3. Look at it again in Verse 44 of this same chapter. Again our Lord appears to the disciples, and says to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled,” {Luke 24:44 RSV}. They had heard these many times, but “then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,” {Luke 24:45 RSV}.

Now, I think we can see what this is, this anointing of which John speaks. It is an illumination of the mind and the heart, and a deep persuasion from the Holy Spirit. It involves intense powers of persuasion, it is a compelling thing, but it is not an impartation of knowledge. It is not a case of the Holy Spirit giving information which is not recorded in the Bible; it is a taking of the Scriptures and confirming them. It is a witness, confirming a fact. An exterior fact, with an interior confirmation or witness.

In the book of Acts, as Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, he said to the people on his last journey, “The Holy Spirit everywhere witnesses that bonds and afflictions are awaiting me when I get to Jerusalem,” {cf, Acts 20:23}. Was this some special secret information that the Spirit of God was giving him? No, as they spoke of the possibility of this, the Spirit bore witness within him that what they said was true. It had the ring of

truth, there was an inner confirmation that this was what was awaiting him, as it surely proved to be.

Perhaps you have often had the experience of reading a passage of Scripture a hundred times, having studied it, and perhaps even taught it, but the 101st time it suddenly comes alive with a wealth of meaning that you never saw before, and it simply glows with significance. That is the teaching of the Spirit. This is why the Bible never becomes a dead book. You can finish one book, turn around and start back at the beginning and go through it again, and it is as though you have never read it before. I do not think I have ever preached a series of sermons on a book of the Bible but that, when I had finished it, I did not want to start back at the beginning and go through again. I had learned so much, and I knew I would learn that much more going through it again. That is the marvelous ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach us.

A young couple sat in my study a few days ago, telling me, with obvious joy and enthusiasm on their faces, how they had known for years the intellectual truth that Christians need not be discouraged in their work for God, because they were working with One who was adequate to meet every problem and supply every demand. But, they said, this last weekend this truth had suddenly broken upon them in a new way. They grasped it, it came alive to them, and they saw the implications of it, that they need never go on in the dullness of discouragement such as they had been doing, but the moment they relied upon the working of the Spirit of God the battle was already won. They were alight and aflame with the enthusiasm of that truth. That is the teaching of the Spirit.

Now it is not limited to Christians. All men can experience this, and, perhaps, have at times. I rather think all the great discoveries of science have come about through this. Men can hear a chance remark, and it may not seem significant in the context of the conversation they are holding, but a word from another person may strike a fire in an individual heart to give him a key to the clear grasp of a situation. That is the Spirit of God at work in men. But for the understanding of divine truth, especially that which concerns man’s relationship to God, only the believer can enter into this realm. This anointing abides in the believer, i.e., it is always ready to work.

Notice what John says about the scope of the teaching. “His anointing teaches you about

everything, and is true, and is no lie.” As I said in an earlier message, that does not mean that a Christian is a know-it-all. There is nothing more abrasive, more difficult, than a know-it-all. But it means that there is no subject of human knowledge that is excluded from this experience of the teaching of the Holy Spirit. But, because it is primarily centered in the believer, upon the most central subject of all – the relation of us, as men, to God, as God – it therefore touches everything in your life. Read what Paul has to say in the second chapter of First Corinthians about this. There is a wisdom, he says, which is imparted to you which concerns “the deep things of God,” {1 Cor 2:10 KJV}. Think on that phrase, “the deep things of God!” These amazing themes, these profundities of life, these mysteries of life hidden in Christ, are revealed as the Spirit teaches you from the Word, so that you grasp the basic issues of living and grow in grace. You learn that, at the heart of creation, of all human significance, is planted the cross, the resurrection, and the enthronement of Jesus Christ.

Now, he ends with this admonition to us that reveals both the narrowness and the necessity of this witness of the Spirit.

**... just as it has taught you, abide in him.  
{1 Jn 2:27b RSV}**

The emphasis here is on those words, “as he has taught you.” What the Spirit has taught you, not that he has taught the other fellow. Remember, after the resurrection, Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my sheep,” {John 21:15-17 KJV}. And Peter turned and looked at John and said, “Lord, what do you want this man to do?” {cf, John 21:21}. Do you remember what Jesus said? “That is none of your business. You follow me. What I teach this man to do is for him to know. What I have said for you to do, that is for you to do,” {cf, John 21:22}. This is what John is saying here – what it (the anointing) has taught you.

This is an intensely personal thing. It is to be the ground of your actions: what you have learned from the word of the Spirit, through the intermediacy of human teachers. But your activity must always be based on the conviction of what has come home to you. In other words, you walk by faith in the Word of God, as God has taught it to you. Not what you have learned by tradition.

Tradition has, traditionally, been one of the most deadly foes of the church and has held people back from advancement in their spiritual life. Or not what you have learned through some church hierarchy.

Anytime you condition men to take their truth secondhand through some other individual, some line of men standing in succession above them, you have conditioned them to respond immediately to falsehood as well if it starts from the top. That is why hierarchies go astray so quickly and so easily. No, in the Christian life, all truth is intensely personal and comes directly to you from the Holy Spirit.

Is that not wonderful?

That means you do not need to have a scholar interpreting the Word of God for you. You are not dependent on scholars. You can be grateful for them, you can read their very helpful comments, and the Lord will use them to teach you something, but you are not dependent upon them. You have no need that any man teach you at that level, for the Holy Spirit can instruct you.

We must be open, of course, to hear all that others have to say. Charles Spurgeon once said, “I do not understand those men who have such a high opinion of what the Holy Spirit says to them, and such a low opinion of what he says to anyone else.”

We must remember that the Spirit of God does speak through other men, as well as through us. But, finally, we must act only on what the Lord has said to us. That is what made it possible for Martin Luther to stand before the Roman Emperor, with all the assembled dignitaries of state and church arrayed in opposition to him, one lone man, and to say, “Here I stand! I can do no other, God help me.” He was listening to the voice of the Spirit to him.

Now this obedience is absolutely necessary because it is only on this basis that you can “abide in him,” and that is where fruitfulness comes from. You cannot go another’s route, you cannot live another’s spiritual life for him, or force him to go your route either. You are to open the Word, pour over it, listen to the Holy Spirit in it, listen to others as the Holy Spirit has taught them, and then, faced with this entire array of external testimony, obey that which the Spirit confirms to your heart is the truth.

John says when you do that, you will abide in him.

**Prayer:**

Our Father, thank you for this amazing phenomenon of a teaching Spirit within us. We cannot get over the joy and the thrill, the awe that grips our spirit, when we think of this mighty teacher, the Spirit of God

himself, the One who knows the mind of Christ, indwelling us and willing to teach us, step by step, as we go along. Make us willing to hear, having eyes to see and ears to hear. Let it penetrate to that depth of spirit by which we shall understand and grasp these amazing riches in Christ Jesus, for we ask in his name, Amen.

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## The Coming Day

by Ray C. Stedman

This is the last message in the section of John's epistle on Maintaining Truth. In this section, which began in Chapter 2, Verse 18, the whole problem John has been facing here is how to live as a Christian in the midst of a confused and confusing world – a world no different in his day than it is in ours; no different in ours than it was in his. In this section we learned many things:

We learned that error appears in cycles of deceit throughout history. That is why, proverbially, history repeats itself.

- We learned that error arises first within the church, through church leaders, and then moves out to infect the world. It is most interesting to trace this fact through history. Religious error never originates with worldly, secular thinkers, but within the church.
- Then we saw error always aims at one definitive point, made clear by John in this section. It is an attack, ultimately, upon the person of Jesus Christ; upon the deity of the Son of God. As Joe Blinco put it so forcefully, "The devil is no pimple-squeezer." He does not waste time with trivialities, he is always striking for the jugular vein. Trace this through history and you will see this is always true. The full impact of heresy always comes out at that point, an attempt to destroy the real fundamental teaching of the deity of Jesus Christ.
- We also learned in this section that no lie is of the truth, i.e., there is no such thing as gray

areas in moral or doctrinal truth. No lie is of the truth. Relativity in these areas does not exist.

- Finally, we saw that the believer's defense against the deceitfulness of the age in which we live lies in two special things:
  1. In his obedience to the word of truth, the apostolic word, the word which we have "heard from the beginning," and,
  2. That word as taught to the heart by an abiding Spirit.

The Word and the Spirit – these are always the defenses of the Christian. Not legislation; no forming action groups, not creating voting blocs, but by the Word and in the Spirit. These are our defenses, always have been, and always will be. But these must be held in balance. The Word without the Spirit is dead orthodoxy, lifeless, unappealing, completely repulsive to most people. The Spirit without the Word is wildfire, fanaticism, mysticism. But the two held in balance keeps us to the central truth of God as revealed in his Son.

These are the things John has set before us here.

We close this section with a verse that looks on to the end, when each Christian stands at last face to face with Jesus Christ.

**And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. {1 Jn 2:28 RSV}**

I should like to begin our examination of this verse by asking this question: “What is it that lies ahead for each believer?” The answer clearly is, a face-to-face encounter with the Lord Jesus. John uses two phrases to describe this, “when he appears,” and “at his coming.” “Appears” is the word for “manifestation,” when he is manifest, when he is openly evident. The word he uses for “coming” is the word, *parousia*, which is Greek for “presence,” the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps you have recognized in reading your Bible that this is the most frequently mentioned truth in all of the New Testament. This great hope of the appearing again of Jesus Christ underlies every other truth in the New Testament. It is found on almost every page of our New Testament. In the face of that, it is passingly strange that it is one of the neglected doctrines of our day. There are people who are totally unaware that the Bible teaches that Christ is to return to this earth for his church, and of the various aspects of this. Yet this has been the hope of believers in every age, and has sustained Christians in the darkest hours of the persecution of the church.

The truth appears in various ways in Scripture, and I cannot take time to go into it in any detail. I will give only the briefest survey of this because I want to move on to the point John is making. In certain passages, the coming of our Lord appears as an event yet to come, occurring in a moment of time, when Christ shall once again enter into open manifestation in the history of men. We read such a passage in First Thessalonians 4:16-18:

**For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. {1 Th 4:16-18 RSV}**

Wonderful comfort is here in these words, especially when you stand at the edge of a grave where you have laid away the body of a loved one. I have used these verses many times on such occasions, and found they speak wonderful comfort to the heart.

But there are other passages that view this encounter with Christ from the standpoint of the experience of the believer who steps out of time into eternity, at death. For instance, in Second Corinthians, Paul speaks of being “absent from the body, present with the Lord,” {cf, 2 Cor 5:8 KJV}. Compare that with the message in First Thessalonians, “so we shall always be with the Lord,” {1 Th 4:17 RSV}. Paul says this occurs in the experience of the believer at death, “absent from the body, present with the Lord.” In writing to Timothy, he speaks of his own death in this way, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day [“Day” here is not used in reference to a point of time but as a characterization of an event], and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing,” {2 Tim 4:8 RSV}. Here he uses the same term that John uses, “when he appears.”

If I may just summarize this: In the experience of the believer, this encounter with Jesus Christ occurs at death; in the calendars of men, in time, it is yet an unknown point in the future when the eternal One shall step again into time and reassert himself, manifest himself openly, in the affairs of men. That event may occur today, it may occur this week, it may be next year, it may be fifty or a hundred years from now, who knows? It may be while most of us are yet alive, it may be before this service is over. But at any rate, this meeting with Christ, from the standpoint of every believer in Jesus Christ, is no further away from any of us than the day of our death – and it may be even closer than that!

This is the Day in which, as John says, he will be “manifested.” In Chapter 3, John says, “When he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,” {1 Jn 3:2b RSV}. He will be no longer hidden behind the scenes, no longer invisible to our physical eyes, no longer forcing us to live, as Peter describes it, “whom having not seen, we love” {cf, 1 Pet 1:8}, but now openly evident, manifest, visible, face to face. We will stand in his presence, John says. As the disciples in the Upper Room after the resurrection found that suddenly the Lord Jesus was with them, so, suddenly we will be with him. As then, so with us, with the marks of crucifixion yet upon his body, perhaps he will invite us to touch him, as he did with Thomas, to feel and to see that this is the very one who once

was crucified upon a cross outside Jerusalem, and rose again from the dead. With the marks of crucifixion yet upon him he will be readily identifiable to us. Sometimes we sing in that hymn of Fanny Crosby's, "I shall know him, I shall know him, when redeemed by his side I shall stand. I shall know him, I shall know him, by the prints of the nails in his hand." What a day that will be, what a wonderful day.

But let us move on to ask another question about the verse John sets before us. What are the alternatives awaiting Christians on that day? Well, clearly there are two, and only two. It is possible for us to have "confidence before him," or "to shrink in shame from him," one or the other. There is a false teaching that has arisen within Christian circles that suggests that the day of our appearing before the Lord will be a day only of the giving of rewards. There are to be no regrets, no shame, no negative notes at all; it is all sweetness and light. It is hard to understand how such teaching arises in the face of a Scripture like this where John warns that it is all too possible to shrink in shame before him at his coming.

Paul says in Second Corinthians 5, speaking of the same event, "we must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body," {2 Cor 5:8 RSV}. Two possibilities – good or evil – one producing boldness and confidence and one producing a sense of shame. If you look at the Scriptures you will see the reason why it is necessary that there should be these two alternatives. We learn from the Scriptures that this is to be the day when reality is made evident, when things will be seen as they really are. We are aware that illusion blinds our understanding as we view things today. Even looking back in our lives we can see that events were not quite what we thought they were when we were living through them. But there is coming a day, the Lord Jesus says, when that which is hidden shall be revealed, where everything covered will be uncovered, and that which has been spoken in secret will be shouted from the housetops. It is the day of reality, the day when the secrets of men are judged by the Lord Jesus.

See how Paul describes this in First Corinthians, Chapter 3: Speaking of the foundation which is Jesus Christ himself, Paul says in Verse 12,

**Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones; wood, hay, stubble [two classifications of activity] – each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. {1 Cor 3:12-15 RSV}**

And then in Chapter 4 of that same book, he says in Verse 5,

**Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God. {1 Cor 4:5 RSV}**

As someone has well put it, "What we weave in time, we shall wear through eternity."

Every motive is to be revealed, every secret thought to be uncovered before all, every activity laid bare.

In the light of that fact, what will you be? Will you be bold and confident, or will you shrink in shame before him? That is the question John sets before us.

Perhaps some of you are saying, "I hope it will be some of both; there will be some boldness, and some shame." But think about that for a moment and you will see that it is impossible for it to be both. There is nothing in Scripture that suggests that there will be both; it is either one or the other, as John implies here. It is characteristic of us that one element of shame looms up before our eyes and overpowers all the areas of confidence.

Haven't you noticed that in your own experience? You have a gravy spot on your tie, and it does not make any difference how impeccable the rest of your dress is, you know that every eye is fastened on that gravy spot and you cannot be comfortable in society because you are so aware of that spot on your tie. Or, with you ladies, it is a run in your stocking. It does not make any difference how beautiful your hair styling

is, there is that ugly run that you know is drawing every eye, and you feel a sense of shame. You feel unfit to be with others because of one spot, regardless of the rest. Then, if we are going to be bold and confident before our Lord at his coming, it must be that we should be absolutely without shame. If there is one thing wrong, we will shrink in shame at his coming.

Now look at this matter of shame for a moment with me. What will make us ashamed? Well, what makes you ashamed now?

In thinking this through this week, I took a piece of paper and headed it, "Things Which Make Me Ashamed." Then I began to think through my own experience, my own life.

- The first thing I put down was, "Indecent Actions." Someone has said, "Everyone knows that of himself which he would not dare tell his dearest friend." Indecent things, shameful things, hidden things, cruel deeds, vengeful, spiteful actions. As we think back on them they make us ashamed.
- Then I wrote down, "Hurtful Attitudes." How many times have I been ashamed at the attitude I have had toward another. Even though I did not express it in words, I felt it. How many times have I been ashamed of my pride, of my jealous, hateful thoughts, of my loveless, callous unconcern for another who was obviously in need of help from me. How many times has my thankless ingratitude made my face flush with shame. I thought back upon how I have taken things from man and from God and never had a thought of gratitude for them.
- Then I wrote down, "Neglected Opportunities." Who of us does not feel this? Who has not had, at one time or another, a bad case of the *If Only's*. "If only I had done this." "If only I had said that." "If only ..." This week *Decision Magazine* printed the story of the world champion weight lifter, Paul Anderson, a Christian. He told of winning the world's heavy weight lifting championship, and in his testimony he said these words:

"We go through life looking back and thinking, boy what I could have done. This is the way I remember Russia. I

became one of the most popular men in the Soviet Union. I couldn't go out in public without being mobbed. Radio announcers trailed me when I appeared on the streets. I caught the empty stares of the young people and reflect now that I could have told them about the One who puts a sparkle in the eye, but I failed to lift up our Lord. Not once did I mention the name of Jesus Christ because at that time I was not living for him. A once-in-a-lifetime chance to witness behind the Iron Curtain was lost."

What is shame! Is it not a sense of unfitness, a sense of defilement, a sense of self-dislike, even contempt, because we feel we are not worthy?

Therefore, its manifestation is a desire to hide. John suggests this in the Greek word he uses, which is rightly translated "shrink in shame," to hide.

Do you remember the first manifestation of this in the Scriptures? In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, after the Fall, hid from the Lord God as he walked in the Garden in the coolness of the day. God called out "Adam, where are you?" {see, Gen 3:9 ff}. Adam at last acknowledged the call, and the Lord said, "Why did you hide?" And Adam said, "Because we found we were naked." That is symbolic, suggestive. They were naked, i.e., they had nothing besides themselves, nothing to show for being alive, just them, we they were, that's all. Unfruitful, unproductive, no purpose beyond themselves, waste. That's why they hid.

As I thought back through the things that make me ashamed, I realized that this is the common element in all of these factors, a sense of waste, no purpose in them, no good thing coming from them. That is why I am ashamed of my indecent actions. That is why I am ashamed of my hurtful attitudes. That is why I am ashamed of my neglected opportunities. Nothing fruitful, nothing productive ever comes from them. The thing that John makes us face up to in this passage is the terrible possibility that if we do not learn the right basis for living, it is horribly possible for us to fill every day with activity, to achieve what passes for success, but in the only accounting that has any value at all, that accounting before God, to come to the end of our lives and find it all fruitless, wasted, without purpose.

Is that not the charge the Lord makes against one of the churches in the letters to the seven

churches of Revelation? In Chapter 3, he says to the church at Laodicea, “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth,” {Rev 3:15-16 RSV}. What was the cause of this condition? “... you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see,” {Rev 3:17-18 RSV}.

It is nakedness that causes shame, and that possibility is set before each of us. The one thing that is absolutely certain about your existence and mine, as a believer, without any doubt whatsoever, is that one of these days we will stand before the presence of the Lord Jesus.

But I do not want to close on that note, for this verse is not intended to be negative. It is given to show us how to avoid this condition. Its whole purpose is to declare the clear possibility of standing in his presence unashamed, to have boldness, to have confidence before him. Well, then, what can make us bold? What gives boldness now in your life? To answer that for myself, I took another sheet and headed it, “Things That Make Me Bold.” What do you think I put down on that?

- First, I am bold or confident when I know what I am doing, when I have complete familiarity with a process:

When I first began to shave I was not very skilled with a razor (electric razors were not very much in vogue at that time) and I used to cut myself so frequently that I looked like a sieve. I leaked at half a dozen points after every shave. But the longer I shaved the more familiar I became with the process until, finally, I was bold and confident. I could shave quickly without cutting myself.

Watch a driver who is just learning to drive – how cautious they are. They grip the wheel tightly and do everything very deliberately. But watch a driver that has become accustomed to driving – how bold he is. We have a skyrocketing accident rate to prove how bold such drivers can get!

But there is a feeling of confidence that comes when you know the process. You are familiar with that.

- Then I discovered that I am bold and confident when I know that the results are guaranteed, some factor gives me confidence that it is going to work out all right. Such confidence in an end result makes anyone bold.

I was riding in a plane not long ago, and a mother and her five-year-old boy sat in the seat opposite me. She informed the stewardess this was their first flight, and this was very evident because she was very nervous. She kept looking out the window, adjusting her seat belt, biting her fingernails, and was very nervous the whole time. But not the little lad. He was relaxed and confident, utterly untroubled. Why? Because he trusted adults. His mother had brought him into his situation and he knew that she would not have done it if there had been any danger, so he was trustful and utterly bold. He knew it would all work out – and it did. They arrived safely, and the mother could have saved herself all the worry.

- Now I discovered that I am also bold when I have an undisclosed resource, what is called familiarity, an ace up the sleeve. When I have something I can count on that the other fellow does not know about, it makes me bold.

It does the same for you too, does it not?

Now look at what John proposes as the way to avoid shame and to give confidence in the day of the Lord Jesus, when we meet him face to face:

**And now, little children, abide in him** [there it is in three words] **so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.** {1 Jn 2:28 RSV}

It is all in those three words: “Abide in him.” That sums up all that he has previously said about hearing the word, believing it, obeying it, and trusting it; that word as taught to us by the anointing Spirit, etc. This is to “abide in him.” It is the same thing exactly as what is called in other places “the walk in the Spirit,” or “fellowship with Christ,” or “the fullness of the Holy Spirit,” or “the

victorious life.” Do not be confused by these various terms. This truth is so magnificent, so broad, so wide, it takes many terms to describe the full sweep of it, but they are all referring to the same thing.

“Abide in him,” he says. Basically that means to give up all confidence in yourself and step out each moment in full dependence on him who dwells within you for everything you do or say, anywhere, anytime. Abide in him, so that your actions are no longer a result of you, mobilizing all your resources to do something for him; but it is him, utilizing all his abundant resources to do everything through you. That is abiding in him, and it involves three specific things:

1. It means that you accept his evaluation of the past. You prepare to change the ideas that you learned from your childhood through tradition or secular education and have accepted as true, but are contradicted by what the Scriptures say. You are prepared to change those ideas, not cling to them. This is the problem with most of us. We take it for granted that what we were taught as we grew up is the truth, and we judge everything by what we learned, even the Word of God. We cling to these ideas. We refuse to set them aside. What we have picked up, when challenged by the Scriptures, we choose to believe rather than to believe what God has revealed to be the truth. As a result we go on clinging to the past and to these ideas from the past, and thus refuse the cleansing and forgiveness of Christ. This results in wide areas of weakness and ineffectiveness, and these we must someday face in all their waste and unproductiveness, in the presence of Jesus Christ. It is these that will make us shrink in shame before him at his coming. But if we face his evaluation of the past, and change our ideas, then the thing is over with now. There is a wonderful verse in First Corinthians 11, Verse 31, “But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged.” It can all be over, be settled now.
2. Then, abiding in him means we are to accept his provision for the present. In writing to the Philippians, Paul says “Work out your own salvation,” {Phil 2:12 RSV}. That means, work out the solutions to your problems. He is

not talking about redemption, but about the every-day problems of life. Work them out “with fear and trembling,” i.e., with a consciousness that the deceitfulness of the enemy is so subtle that it can slip up on you without notice, and you need to be very careful not to start relying upon yourself again. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, both to will [he is in the choosing, in the making of decisions, in the choices] and to work, for his good pleasure [to do what is pleasing to him],” {Phil 2:12-13 RSV}. That is the process, and it is said again and again in Scripture. Now, accept that. Operate in that manner, for God knows what he is doing. Well, Jesus Christ knows exactly what he is doing in you. He was never at a loss for what to do in any situation, and he never will be at a loss for what to do in any situation he puts you into. He does not always tell us in advance what he is going to do. We just have to say, “Lord, here you are. You put me into this, now you have some purpose in it – work it out. I’m confident that you know what you are doing.”

3. Also, you and I are bold when we know that the results are guaranteed. Have you not noticed that this is exactly what the Word of God promises? Paul says in Second Corinthians, “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph,” {2 Cor 2:14a RSV}. He never fails. He guarantees the results. You are fighting a battle that is already won when you rest upon the activity, the wisdom, the responsibility of an indwelling God. It is done – the battle is won. It still must be fought and you are to fight it, but the results are guaranteed, they will come out as God has said they will. He always leads us in triumph in Christ.

Furthermore, we are bold when we have an undisclosed resource, an ace up our sleeve. And is that not exactly what is provided for every Christian who understands the programming of God? We do not rely on our own human weakness, “we have no confidence in the flesh” {Phil 3:3b RSV}, Paul says, we do not think we have the intellectual acumen to figure out all the problems, we are not trying to mobilize all the resources of

our powerful personalities to put over something. But we step into every situation, no matter what it may be, at home, at work, or wherever, in the quiet realization that the Son of God indwells us to do this thing through us. Others, looking at us, say “what a self-assured individual; how well he gets things done, how poised, how calm he (she) is in a situation.” They do not know the secret we know, that it is not us, it is Christ. “I am crucified with Christ,” says Paul, “nevertheless I live (Oh how fully he lived); yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live I live by faith in that indwelling Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,” {cf, Gal 2:20}. That is to accept his provision for the present.

Then, abiding in him means to trust his assessment of the future. What is the result going to be? Perfectly acceptable to God! Well-pleasing in his sight! The record of the Gospels is that Jesus Christ never did a thing that displeased the Father. For thirty-three and a half years on earth, not once did he ever do anything that displeased God. How could it be, since it was the Father in him, who did everything? The miracles occupy only a tiny portion of those thirty-three and a half years; the rest of them were filled with the ordinary events of life, such as you and I have to go through – getting up in the morning, living with people, eating, preparing food, sweeping, cleaning, all the multitudinous details of life – but not once did he ever do one thing that was displeasing to the Father.

That is still true of what he does today – what he does in you. His activity in you is already acceptable to the Father. Not once will he ever do in you that which is displeasing to the Father, not once. Therefore, if you are facing those times in your life which are not lived out of his activity, and these are cleansed and put away, the only possible conclusion to this is that we can stand at last in his presence without shame. All the wastefulness of the past and present is judged and everything else is fulfilled by Christ; therefore, all is pleasing to God. There will be pains. He makes clear that his desire is to live a life that has no waste moments in it, no times when he is reckoning on himself, no seasons when he is acting out of the energy of his own brilliant personality, or from the background of his training as a Hebrew leader, not a single moment. He says, “I am constantly pressing on, pushing on,

for the prize – that wonderful prize – then I shall stand in his presence and shall realize that everything worthwhile that has been done in my life since I have come to know him has been done in the activity of his life in me, and everything else has already been settled before I get there.” That is what he is saying.

Have you ever noticed how Jude closes his letter? Look at his last verse:

**Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, {Jude 1:24 RSV}**

Is that not it? John says, “abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”

It may be that some of you need to settle certain things with the Lord right this moment. Think of the things that make you ashamed; the attitudes you harbor toward someone else, the habits you cling to that are unsightly, unseemly, unwholesome, the long-standing disagreements that you have had with another which makes you avoid them. These are the things that need to be settled now. Abide in him now, so that you will not have to shrink in shame before him at his coming.

### **Prayer:**

Our Father, we confess our lovelessness, we confess our unconcern, we confess our foulness before thee. We confess our failure to live together in peace and sweetness and harmony. We confess to you, Lord, any aspect of our life that has been displeasing, and receive from you now that wholesome cleansing of the blood of the Lord Jesus, that we might be what we are intended to be, men and women, so possessed by an indwelling Lord that all that we do or say is a reflection of his image, and not of ours. Thank you for this.

**Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our**

**Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time now and forever, Amen. {Jude 1:24-25 RSV}**

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