

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? This is the antichrist, he who 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 stratagem, 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.

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