

GOD IS ALWAYS FIRST AND WILL SURELY BE LAST

*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning
and the ending, saith the LORD.*

REVELATION 1:8

God is always first, and God will surely be last!
In the plan of God, man is never permitted to utter the first word nor the last. That is the prerogative of the Deity, and one which He will never surrender to His creatures.

Man has no say about the time or the place of his birth; God determines that without consulting the man himself. One day the little man finds himself in consciousness and accepts the fact that he is. There his volitional life begins.

Before that he had nothing to say about anything.

After that he struts and boasts, and encouraged by the sound of his own voice he may declare his independence of God.

Have your fun, little man; you are only chattering in the interim between first and last. You had no voice at the first and you will have none at the last!

God reserves the right to take up at the last where He began at the first, and you are in the hands of God whether you will or not.

Adam became a living soul but that becoming was not of his own volition. It was God who willed it and who executed His will in making Adam a living soul. God was there first!

And when Adam sinned and wrecked his whole life, God was there still. Adam's whole future peace lay in this—that God was still there after he had sinned.

It would be great wisdom for us to begin to live in the light of this wonderful and terrible truth: God is the first and the last!



JESUS CHRIST IS ALL THAT THE GODHEAD IS

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:30

I advise you not to listen to those who spend their time demeaning the person of Christ.

I advise you to look beyond the cloudiness of modern terms used by those who themselves are not sure who Jesus Christ was in reality.

You cannot trust the man who can only say, “I believe that God revealed Himself through Christ.” Find out what he really believes about the person of the incarnate Son of God!

You cannot trust the man who will only say that Christ reflected more of God than other men do. Neither can you trust those who teach that Jesus Christ was the supreme religious genius, having the ability to catch and reflect more of God than any other man.

All of these approaches are insults to the Person of Jesus Christ. He was and is and can never cease to be God, and when we find Him and know Him, we are back at the ancient fountain again.

Christ is all that the Godhead is!

This is the wonder, the great miracle—that by one swift, decisive, considered act of faith and prayer, our souls go back to the ancient fountain of our being, and we start over again!

It is in Jesus Christ Himself that we find our source, our satisfaction. I think this is what John Newton perceived in the miracle of the new birth, causing him to sing, “Now rest my long-divided heart, fixed on this blissful center—rest!”



HOLY SPIRIT: GOD IN CONTACT WITH HIS CREATURES

*... The Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from
the Father, he shall testify of me.*

JOHN 15:26

If I read aright the record of Christian experience through the years, those who most enjoyed the power of the Spirit of God have had the least to say about Him by way of attempted definition.

The Bible saints who walked in the Spirit never tried to explain Him. In postbiblical times many who were filled and possessed by the Spirit were by the limitations of their literary gifts prevented from telling us much about Him. They had no gift for self-analysis, but lived from within in uncritical simplicity.

To them the Spirit was One to be loved and fellowshipped the same as the Lord Jesus Himself. They would have been lost completely in any metaphysical discussion of the nature of the Spirit, but they had no trouble in claiming the power of the Spirit for holy living and fruitful service.

This is as it should be. Personal experience must always be first in real life. Knowledge by acquaintance is always better than knowledge by description, and the first does not presuppose the second nor require it.

What we have in the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is Deity present among us.

He is not God's messenger only—He is God!

He is God in contact with His creatures, doing in them and among them a saving and renewing work.



THE SPIRIT OF MAN MAKES HIM A HUMAN BEING

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:11

Deep inside every man there is a private sanctum where dwells the mysterious essence of his being. It is the man's "I am," a gift from the I AM who created him. The I AM which is God is underived and self-existent; the "I am" which is man is derived from God and dependent every moment upon His creative fiat for its continued existence. One is the Creator, high over all, ancient of days, dwelling in light unapproachable. The other is a creature and, though privileged beyond all others, is still but a creature, a pensioner on God's bounty and a suppliant before His throne!

The deep-in human entity of which we speak is called in the Scriptures "the spirit of man." Paul told the Corinthian church: "For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

As God's self-knowledge lies in the eternal Spirit, so man's self-knowledge is by his own spirit, and his knowledge of God is by the direct impression of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man. This reveals the essential spirituality of mankind.

It also denies that man is a creature having a spirit and boldly declares that he is a spirit having a body!

That which makes man a human being is not his body but his spirit, in which the image of God originally lay.



DO NOT MISTAKE THE TRUE MEANING OF THE CROSS

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross
of our LORD Jesus Christ, by whom the world is
crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

GALATIANS 6:14

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles.

It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial, the differences fundamental!

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life with encouragement for a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist tries to show that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. The modern view is that the new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him!

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere, but it is as false as it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross.

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. In Roman times, the man who took up his cross and started down the road was not coming back. He was not going out to have his life redirected: he was going out to have it ended! The cross did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more!

The race of Adam is under death sentence. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. Thus God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life!



THE BIBLE: MORE THAN A VOLUME OF FACTS

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

Charles G. Finney believed that Bible teaching without moral application could be worse than no teaching at all and could result in positive injury to the hearers. I used to feel that this might be an extreme position, but after years of observation have come around to it, or to a view almost identical with it.

There is scarcely anything so dull and meaningless as Bible doctrine taught for its own sake. Theology is a set of facts concerning God, man and the world. These facts may be and often are set forth as values in themselves; and there lies the snare both for the teacher and for the hearer.

The Bible is more than a volume of hitherto unknown facts about God, man and the universe. It is a book of exhortation based upon these facts. By far the greater portion of the book is devoted to an urgent effort to persuade people to alter their ways and bring their lives into harmony with the will of God as set forth in its pages. Actually, no man is better for knowing that God in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. The devil knows that, and so did Ahab and Judas Iscariot. No man is better for knowing that God so loved the world of men that He gave His only begotten Son to die for their redemption. In hell there are millions who know that.

Theological truth is useless until it is obeyed. The purpose behind all doctrine is to secure moral action!



THE FLOCK OF GOD: SAFE IN JESUS CHRIST

*Feed the flock of God which is among you. . .
And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall
receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

1 PETER 5:2, 4

The people who want to know God and walk with God, those who have learned to recognize the voice of the good Shepherd, will always be at home in a Spirit-filled congregation.

It is sad indeed that some have never heard the voice of the Shepherd. His voice is as tender as a lullaby and as strong as the wind and as mighty as the sound of many waters. The people who have learned to hear and recognize the voice of Jesus—that healing, musical, solemn, beautiful voice of Jesus in His church—are always at home where everything centers around Him. The true Christian church can be a conglomeration of everything under the sun. That is, we may have Calvinists and Arminians and Methodists and Baptists and all sorts of others, and yet we are all together on one thing—Jesus Christ is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption! He is All in all, and the people of the Lord who have learned to hear the voice of the Shepherd gravitate towards that kind of church!

They may not be so sure about who else is present, but they know the Lord is present and they are sensitive to that.

Do you find your own heart sensitive to the Lord's presence or are you among those who are “samplers” and “nibblers”? God help you if you are, for the child of the King is a sheep who loves his Shepherd and he stays close to Him! That's the only safe place for a sheep. Stay close to Jesus and all of the wolves in the world cannot get a tooth in you!



TRUE WORSHIP: FULLY SEEKING THE LORD WE ADORE

O come, let us worship and bow down. . . .

PSALM 95:6

An old creed says that we worship one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

If we could set forth all of God's attributes and tell all that He is, we would fall on our knees in adoring worship.

The Bible tells us that God dwells in light that is unapproachable, whom no man can see or has seen, and whom no man can see and live.

It says that God is holy and eternal and omnipotent and omniscient and sovereign, and that He has a thousand sovereign attributes. And all of these should humble us and bring us down!

I have come to believe that no worship is wholly pleasing to God until there is nothing in us displeasing to God. If there is anything within me that does not worship God, then there is nothing in me that worships God perfectly.

Note that I am not saying that God must have a perfection of worship or He will not accept any worship at all. I would not go so far; if I did, I would rule myself out. But, I do say that the ideal God sets before us is to worship as near to perfectly as we can. Faith and love and obedience and loyalty and high conduct of life—all of these must be taken as burnt offerings and offered to God!

True worship seeks union with its beloved, and an active effort to close the gap between the heart and the God it adores is worship at its best!



BELIEVE THE RIGHT THING ABOUT THE RIGHT PERSON

*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

ROMANS 15:13

There is a nebulous idea accepted by many in our day that faith is an almighty power flowing through the universe which anyone may plug into at will! It is conceived vaguely as a subrational creative pulsation streaming down from somewhere Up There, ready at any time to enter our hearts and change our whole mental and moral constitution as well as our total outlook on man, God and the cosmos.

When it comes in, supposedly out go pessimism, fear, defeat and failure; in come optimism, confidence, personal mastery and unflinching success in war, love, sports, business and politics.

All of this is, of course, a gossamer of self-deception woven of the unsubstantial threads of fancy spun out of minds often derelict persons who want to believe it! What is overlooked in all this is that faith is good only when it engages truth; when it is made to rest upon falsehood it can and often does lead to eternal tragedy.

For it is not enough that we believe; we must believe in the right thing about the right One!

To believe in God is more than to believe that He exists. To a right faith knowledge is necessary. We must know at least something of what God is like and what His will is for His human creatures. To know less than this is to be thrown back upon the necessity of accepting the affirmations of the soul and substituting "Thus saith my soul" for the biblical "Thus saith the Lord," and no man has any right to pick and choose among revealed truths.



EVERY ONE MUST PRAY AS IF HE ALONE COULD PRAY

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

LUKE 18:1

Thomas a' Kempis wrote that the man of God ought to be more at home in his prayer chamber than before the public. It is not too much to say that the preacher who loves to be before the public is hardly prepared spiritually to be before them. Right praying may easily make a man hesitant to appear before an audience.

The man who is really at home in the presence of God will find himself caught in a kind of inward contradiction. He is likely to feel his responsibility so keenly that he would rather do almost anything than face an audience; and yet the pressure upon his spirit may be so great that wild horses could not drag him away from his pulpit.

No man should stand before an audience who has not first stood before God. Many hours of communion should precede one hour in the pulpit. The prayer chamber should be more familiar than the public platform.

Schools teach everything about preaching except the important part, praying. The best any school can do is to recommend prayer and exhort to its practice. Praying itself must be the work of the individual. That it is the one religious work which gets done with the least enthusiasm cannot but be one of the tragedies of our times!

In true prayer, every man must be an original, for true prayer cannot be imitated nor can it be learned from someone else. Everyone must pray as if he alone could pray!



A CALAMITY: ACCEPTING THIS WORLD AS OUR HOME

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If
any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

1 JOHN 2:15

Of all the calamities that have been visited upon the world, the surrender of the human spirit to this present world and its ways is the worst—without doubt!

No oriental monarch ever ruled his cowering subjects with any more cruel tyranny than things—visible things, audible things, tangible things—rule mankind. That we who were made to communicate with angels and archangels and seraphim and with the God who made them all—that we should settle down here as a wild eagle of the air come down to scratch in the barnyard with the common hens—this I say is the worst of anything that has ever come to the world!

It seems incredible that we who were made for many worlds should accept this one world as our ultimate home.

Man was made in the image of God and is now a fallen being that has left its place in the celestial world and has plummeted down like a falling star. Now, in this world, he has all but forgotten the place from which he came. That is why the devil sees to it that we seldom get alone with time to think and meditate on the reality of the other world. For when a man really gets alone, he senses often that this life in this world is not the answer—it is not the end.

Actually and simply, a Christian is one who dedicates himself to God to inhabit another and better world!



SATAN WOULD BIND US IN OUR OWN GRAVE CLOTHES

*...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested,
that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

1 JOHN 3:8

It is part of the devil's business to keep the Christian's spirit imprisoned. He knows that the believing and justified Christian has been raised up out of the grave of his sins and trespasses. From that point on, Satan works that much harder to keep us bound and gagged, actually imprisoned in our own grave clothes!

He knows that if we continue in this kind of bondage we will never be able to claim our rightful spiritual heritage. He knows also that while we continue bound in this kind of enslavement we are not much better off than when we were spiritually dead.

This is one reason why the Christians in today's churches are behaving like a flock of frightened sheep so intimidated by the devil that we can't even say "Amen!"

I am sure that it is not glorifying to our God that Christians should be so intimidated and silenced in our day. It was Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, who came down and took our human body for Himself. He was a man, born of a woman, a man wearing our own nature—but He was also God!

He went out to the cross and they sacrificed Him there. The Father, God Almighty, accepted His sacrifice as the one, final fulfillment and consummation of all the sacrifices ever made on Jewish altars. After three days, He came out of the grave, then ascended as Victor over death and hell!

Believing this, we ought to be the most fearless, the happiest and most God-assured people in the whole world!



LEARN TO LOVE GOD FOR HIMSELF ALONE

We love him, because he first loved us.

1 JOHN 4:19

The phrase, “the love of God,” when used by Christians almost always refers to God’s love for us. We must remember that it can also mean our love for God!

The first and great commandment is that we should love God with all the power of our total personality. Though all love originates in God and is for that reason God’s own love, yet we are permitted to catch and reflect back that love in such manner that it becomes our love indeed!

The Christian’s love for God has by some religious thinkers been divided into two kinds, the love of gratitude and the love of excellence. But we must carry our love to God further than love of gratitude and love of excellence.

There is a place in the religious experience where we love God for Himself alone, with never a thought of His benefits. There is, in the higher type of love, a suprarational element that cannot and does not attempt to give reasons for its existence—it only whispers, “I love!” In the perfection of love, the heart does not reason from admiration to affection, but quickly rises to the height of blind adoration where reason is suspended and the heart worships in unreasoning blessedness. It can only exclaim, “Holy, holy, holy,” while scarcely knowing what it means.

If this should all seem too mystical, too unreal, we offer no proof. But some will read and recognize the description of the sunlit peaks where they have been for at least brief periods and to which they long often to return. And such will need no proof!



FEELING RIGHT: NOT THE SAME AS BEING RIGHT

The LORD of that servant shall come. . .and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. . .

MATTHEW 24:50, 51

It appears that too many Christians want to enjoy the thrill of feeling right but are not willing to endure the inconvenience of being right!

The glaring disparity between theology and practice among professing Christians is a more destructive evil in its effect upon the Christian religion than communism, Romanism and liberalism combined.

So wide is the gulf that separates theory from practice in the church that an inquiring stranger who chances upon both would scarcely dream that there was any relation between them.

An intelligent observer of our human scene who heard the Sunday morning sermon and later watched the Sunday afternoon conduct of those who had heard it would conclude that he had been examining two distinct and contrary religions!

Christians habitually weep and pray over beautiful truth, only to draw back from that same truth when it comes to the difficult job of putting it in practice.

The average church simply does not dare to check its practices against biblical precepts. It tolerates things that are diametrically opposed to the will of God. This can be explained only by assuming a lack of integration in the religious personality. The mind can approve and the emotions enjoy while the will drags its feet and refuses to go along!

And since Christ makes His appeal directly to the will, are we not justified in wondering whether or not these divided souls have ever made a true commitment to the Lord?



THE WORLD CHANGES— BUT NOT THE HUMAN RACE

*... That ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles
walk. in the vanity of their mind.*

EPHESIANS 4:17

To a Christian, conditioned as he is to observing life from above and judging all things in the light of eternal values, the modern feverish devotion to the newest invention and the latest happening seems more than a little ridiculous!

One thing seems to be quite forgotten: the world moves and times change but people remain the same always. Just as a pendulum remains fixed at the top while it swings back and forth from one extreme to another, so the human race remains basically unchanged while it moves through its limited arc.

No responsible person will deny that some changes made by the race over the years have been improvements and so may have represented progress and advance. However, just what we are supposed to be advancing toward has not been made very clear by our leaders!

It would seem humanly difficult, indeed, to show that we are moving toward an end when we do not know what or where that end is, or even if such an end exists at all.

The only parallel we can think of at the moment is that of a deadly-serious and fanatically determined dachshund chasing breathlessly after its tail—a tail, incidentally, which is not there because it has previously been removed. Add a large number of other dachshunds, bespectacled and solemn, writing books to prove that the frustrated puppy's activity is progress, and you have the picture!



THE GRACE OF GOD CANNOT BE EXTINGUISHED

*And the grace of our LORD was exceeding abundant
with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*

1 TIMOTHY 1:14

Brethren, we should be keenly aware that the living God can no more hide His grace than the sun can hide its brightness!

We must keep in mind also that the grace of God is infinite and eternal. Being an attribute of God, it is as boundless as infinitude!

The Old Testament is indeed a book of law, but not of law only. Before the great flood Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” and after the law was given God said to Moses, “Thou hast found grace in my sight.”

There never was a time when the law did not represent the will of God for mankind nor a time when the violation of it did not bring its own penalty, though God was patient and sometimes “winked” at wrongdoing because of the ignorance of the people.

The great source and spring of Christian morality is the love of Christ Himself, not the law of Moses; nevertheless there has been no abrogation of the principles of morality contained in the law. The grace of God made sainthood possible in Old Testament days just as it does today!

God has promised that He will always be Himself. Men may flee from the sunlight to dark and musty caves of the earth, but they cannot put out the sun. So men may in any dispensation despise the grace of God, but they cannot extinguish it!



MAN'S FALL CREATED A PERPETUAL MORAL CRISIS

*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners,
so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*

ROMANS 5:19

The fall of man has created a perpetual crisis. It will last until sin has been put down and Christ reigns over a redeemed and restored world.

Until that time the earth remains a disaster area and its inhabitants live in a state of extraordinary emergency.

Statesmen and economists talk hopefully of "a return to normal conditions," but conditions have not been normal since "the woman saw that the tree was good for food. . .and pleasant" and "to be desired to make one wise" and "took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." It is not enough to say that we live in a state of moral crisis. That is true, but it is not all, for the Fall has affected every part of man's nature, moral, intellectual, psychological, spiritual and physical.

Man's whole being has been deeply injured; the sin in his heart has overflowed into his total life, affecting his relation to God, to his fellow men and to everyone and everything that touches him.

To me, it has always been difficult to understand those evangelical Christians who insist upon living in the crisis as if no crisis existed. They say they serve the Lord, but they divide their days so as to leave plenty of time to play and loaf and enjoy the pleasures of the world as well. They are at ease while the world burns; and they can furnish many convincing reasons for their conduct, even quoting Scripture if you press them a bit.

I wonder whether such Christians actually believe in the Fall of man!



THE TRUE CHRISTIAN IS THE PRACTICING CHRISTIAN

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

2 PETER 1:3

The supreme purpose of the Christian religion is to make men like God in order that they may act like God. In Christ the verbs “to be” and “to do” follow each other in that order.

True religion leads to moral action. The only true Christian is the practicing Christian. Such a one is in very reality an incarnation of Christ as Christ is the incarnation of God; not in the same degree and fullness of perfection, for there is nothing in the moral universe equal to that awful mystery of godliness which joined God and man in eternal union in the person of the Man Christ Jesus; but as the fullness of the Godhead was and is in Christ, so Christ is in the nature of the one who believes in Him in the manner prescribed in the Scriptures.

Just as in eternity God acted like Himself and when incarnated in human flesh still continued in all His conduct to be true to His holiness, so does He when He enters the nature of a believing man. This is the method by which He makes the redeemed man holy.

The faith of Christ was never intended to be an end in itself nor to serve instead of something else. In the minds of some teachers faith stands in lieu of moral conduct and every inquirer after God must take his choice between the two. We are presented with the well-known either/or: either we have faith or we have works, and faith saves while works damn us. This error has lowered the moral standards of the church!



OBEDIENCE: THE FINAL TEST OF LOVE FOR CHRIST

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he if is that loveth me. . .and I wilt love him, and will manifest myself to him.

JOHN 14:21

The final test of love is obedience, not sweet emotions, not willingness to sacrifice, not zeal, but obedience to the commandments of Christ!

Our Lord drew a line plain and tight for everyone to see. On one side He placed those who keep His commandments and said, "These love Me." On the other side He put those who keep not His sayings, and said, "These love Me not."

The commandments of Christ occupy in the New Testament a place of importance that they do not have in current evangelical thought. The idea that our relation to Christ is revealed by our attitude to His commandments is now considered legalistic by many influential Bible teachers, and the plain words of our Lord are rejected outright or interpreted in a manner to make them conform to religious theories ostensibly based upon the epistles of Paul.

The Christian cannot be certain of the reality and depth of his love until he comes face-to-face with the commandments of Christ and is forced to decide what to do about them. Then he will know!

I think we should turn for a while from finespun theological speculations about grace and faith and humbly read the New Testament with a mind to obey what we see there. Love for Christ is a love of willing, as well as a love of feeling, and it is psychologically impossible to love Him adequately unless we will to obey His words!



WISDOM: KNOWING THE TRUE FEAR OF THE LORD

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. . . .

PROVERBS 1:7

A truth fully taught in the Scriptures and verified in personal experience by countless numbers of holy men and women throughout the centuries might be condensed thus into a religious axiom:

<6>“No one can know the true grace of God who has not first known the fear of God!”

The first announcement of God’s redemptive intention toward mankind was made to a man and a woman hiding in mortal fear from the presence of the Lord.

The Law of God was given to a man trembling in terror amid fire and smoke, quaking at the voice of thunder and sound of the divine trumpet.

Even the famous annunciation, “On earth peace, goodwill toward men,” was given to shepherds who were “sore afraid” by reason of the sudden overwhelming presence of the heavenly host.

The presence of the divine always brought fear to the hearts of sinful men, a terror having no relation to mere fear of bodily harm.

I do not believe that any lasting good can come from religious activities that do not root in this quality of creature-fear. The animal in us is very strong and altogether self-confident. Until it has been defeated God will not show Himself to the eyes of our faith.

It is sad but true that the love of God affects a carnal heart not at all; or if at all, then adversely, for the knowledge that God loves us may simply confirm us in our self-righteousness!

