

Christ and God's Existence

Building a Christian Mind

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I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to the gospel of John 1. I just want to read a text that we'll deal with briefly a little later in the message, but just something to set our minds in focus on the revelation of God and how we know that God exists. In the gospel of John 1:1 we read,

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Then down in verse 14 we read,

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

So we gather this evening to continue our series how to know that God exists. How do we know that God exists? And in the most simple way, the way that I encourage you to more and more think about this, is that we know that God exists by looking to the places where he has made himself known, where he has revealed himself. If you wanted to know who I am, you wouldn't go and interview people in Wyoming. No one in Wyoming knows who I am. You go and you talk to me or listen to some sermons that I've preached or something like that. You go to where I have spoken or where I can be made known. Well, in like manner, in a far greater, more infinite, more holy, more infinite way, God has spoken in certain ways, in certain areas, and those are the places that we go in order to know that he exists. We go to where he has manifested himself and this series of messages that we're going to be doing over the next few months, is just far more important than I can begin to state, and I trust that over time the Lord will vindicate the importance of what we are doing even as we speak. We need, beloved, we need

convictions to anchor our lives. We need convictions to animate our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we need convictions to assist us when times of persecution and difficulty come to us, and I'll say more about that at the very end of the message. We have an opportunity right now, we have an opportunity in a time of comparative peace and tranquility in our land where things are relatively stable, we have a time and an opportunity to consider deeply what Scripture says about the most foundational things, and if we apply ourselves to these things now, they will serve us well in the future, to say nothing about the young people who are coming up and having their minds formed under biblical truth. And so it's just very, very critical.

We believe in God we've said over our past three messages, because he has made himself known in certain areas. We said, first of all, that God has made himself known in creation. You observe the heavens and conclude that there is a powerful God who established them by his wisdom. We looked at Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God." If you want to hear, as it were, God speaking, you go and observe him in creation. And we looked at other passages, Genesis 1, Psalm 19, Acts 14, Acts 17, Romans 1, and I just encouraged you at the time to just have a mental list of those texts and when the subject of creation comes up, that you have those texts to go to readily and they're just readily available right at your fingertips, so to speak.

There's a second place where God has spoken also laid out for us in Psalm 19, and that is the Canon of Scripture. God has spoken in creation, he has also spoken in the Canon of Scripture, the 66 books of the Bible, in other words. Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." God has spoken. God has made himself known in his law, in the testimony of his word, and in addition to that text in Psalm 19 when it comes to the Canon and the fact that God has spoken there, you would want to make note of texts like 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, "All Scripture is inspired by God," God breathed it out. He has spoken there. 2 Peter 1:20 and 21, "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." And what I want you to see, beloved, and I don't apologize for repeating myself so often on these matters, there are realms in which God has spoken and this is where we know and come to our convictions about the reality of our existence. He has graciously imprinted himself and placed his hand upon different aspects of the realm in which we live so that we can know the reality of God even though we cannot sense him, feel him, touch him with our physical senses.

So God has revealed himself in creation, God has revealed himself in the Canon. On Sunday, this past Sunday, we considered the fact that God has revealed himself in conscience. In conscience. God has imprinted upon humanity an inner sense of right and wrong that points to a righteous God. Psalm 19:14 says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." David is saying, "I know God, I recognize him in my inner man." And an aspect of our inner man is the conscience which speaks to us and tells us and guides us in those things which are right and those things which are wrong. And we looked also at Romans 2:15 that says, "The work of the law is written on their hearts." God wrote his

law, he wrote his moral law on the inner man of humanity in a way that testifies to his existence.

Now, what's so important to grasp and to start to put together in your mind, is to not look at these things individually like they're different silos on a farm someplace that have no connection to one another, rather to see that what we are finding and what we are establishing as we look to God's word, is that there are these interlocking testimonies that God has made that speak in different ways, in different aspects of human experience, and yet consistently point to the conclusive evidence that he is there and that he is not silent, in the words of Francis Schaeffer. God has spoken in creation. God has spoken in a completely different realm in his word. In a completely different realm, he has spoken in conscience, and what you start to see and what starts to weigh on you and to impress you and to deepen the sense of the whole reality of it all, is the cumulative witness, the combination of these things is so very, very powerful into our heart and to our conviction.

One last piece of review before we get into new material for tonight. One of the things that we said, looking at Matthew 16, is that it does not matter that there are people who disagree and who contest these things. That doesn't matter. That is not a barrier to you to having confident conviction about the existence of God. Jesus said to his disciples when they said that there are a variety of opinions about who Jesus was during his earthly ministry, Jesus, as it were, said, "Put all of that aside. Who do you say that I am?" And as we consider these things together from the word of God over the course of time, there's a sense in which the Spirit of God addresses you directly in your inner man, not the person you're sitting next to, not the, you know, the philosophy professor who challenged you in college or anything like that, the Spirit of God comes to you directly and says, "What do you say about these things? Do you affirm? Do you agree? Do you submit to the revelation of God and acknowledge that he has made himself clearly known? If so, rejoice, for God has made himself known in that way." But there will be no one standing beside you on judgment day if you deny God, if you deny Christ, there won't be anyone standing beside you that said, "I taught him to think that way." There's not going to be anyone there. It's going to be you before God and you're going to have to answer for what you have done with the testimony that he has made to himself and whether you have affirmed and believed what he has said, what the God of truth has said truthfully about himself, or whether in resistance or indifference and rebellion, you rejected it at all. No, don't be like that. The consequences and the eternal reality of these things is far too great to deal with them in a flippant manner.

Well, tonight we come to a fourth way that God has made himself known, a fourth manner of self-revelation that is even more compelling. You know, you don't want to set these things against one another, but there's a sense in which the climax of God's self-revelation is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Christ. So we go creation, Canon, conscience and now Christ. God has made himself known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I want to kind of lead up to this with you, in a manner of speaking here, and just kind of think through the ways that God revealed himself in the Old Testament. In Exodus 3, God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. In 1 Kings 19, he spoke to Elijah in a still small voice. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw his glory in the temple.

And all of those are familiar stories to those who read their Bibles, and yet these were shadows, these were preparatory to a greater revelation that was still to come, and what we find when we come to the New Testament is that in Jesus Christ, the person of Jesus Christ, there is a finality of revelation where God has spoken and made himself known in the Incarnation that goes beyond anything that the Old Testament saints knew in their day and in their experience. And let me just say by way of preface, that I'm going to treat this very lightly and superficially really here this evening, because we have a whole other series coming up on Christ as Lord in a few weeks down the road, and so I'm going to save a lot of the material for that time but I want to inject it here now and then draw out some manner of application at the end of the message.

In the Gospel of John, you should still be in John 1, I believe. Look at verse 14. John 1:14 as we look at it again. The Word who verse 1 told us was God, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word was preexistent, existing before time, before creation; the second person of the Godhead was in full union, sharing the full essence of God. And the way that God revealed himself and made himself known is that the second person of the Godhead took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, and in that way, in a tangible, visible way that was testified to and witnessed by all of those who lived in the area at the time, they saw what God was like. They saw God move. They saw God speak. They saw God heal. They heard his words and said, "Never has any man spoken like this man has spoken." Christ stood out so much so that they said, "Where did he get this knowledge?" They thought that he was the son of Joseph and Mary. He was just a carpenter. Where did he become this powerful in the knowledge of God? They recognized that there was something distinct about him.

Now what we have, we do not have the physical presence of Christ with us, but we have the inerrant, reliable word of God that records his words and works for us and interprets them to us, all of it being, beloved, all of it being a revelation of God, a manifestation of himself to humanity, and then recorded for us by his authorized representatives, the apostles and their close associates so that in verse 18 we see again, our overriding question is how to know God exists. In verse 18 we read this, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." Jesus Christ has made God known so that as we read about Christ in the Scripture, God is making himself known in a way that goes beyond and yet is consistent with what we read in creation, what we read elsewhere in the Canon, what the testimony is in our inner man in our conscience. God made himself known by becoming one of us, by taking on humanity. This is incomprehensibly great, and the fact that this may be familiar to you should not cause you to despise it because of its familiarity, but with the help of the Spirit of God, we want to have these things impressed upon our mind with a new freshness, a new vitality in the full context of the overwhelming way in which God has made himself known.

Turn over to John 5:39 and you see how the Canon supports the revelation in Christ. In John 5:39 Jesus said,

39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive glory from people. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. 43 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Christ manifesting the glory of God by putting on display in humanity the perfect attributes of God, the revelation of God is made full and complete in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Scriptures speak of Christ in these revelatory terms. When I say revelatory, what I mean is they tell us, the Scriptures tell us that Christ is making God known to those who consider him so that in 2 Corinthians 4:4 we read Christ is the image of God. In Colossians 1:15 we read he is the image of the invisible God. He is the exact imprint of his nature. He makes known, he makes manifest who God is.

Jesus Christ manifests exactly who God is because he himself is God. Jesus is not, as other religions would try to mislead you into believing, Jesus is not a created being. God did not make Jesus as something distinct from his own essence. Christ comes from the very essence and shares the full essence of God, not a created being. There was never a time, there was never a moment where Christ was not, in the language of Athanasius. Jesus has always existed because he is God and God is eternal from before time began.

Jesus said in John 8:19, he said, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." There is such a one-to-one correspondence without absence, without remainder, without any carryover, such a perfect sharing of the essence of God that to know Christ is to know who God is. To read about Christ is to read about God. To see him live and work and move and speak is to see God himself in action. God has made himself known uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ so that, beloved, so that when you pick up a Bible and you read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you're reading about that, you're reading about Christ. God is making himself known through the pages of Scripture that you read and isolating, setting apart the Lord Jesus Christ and saying, "Here is the unique final revelation of God found in the person of Jesus Christ."

Look over at chapter 14, verse 9. John 14:9 where we read in verse 8 Philip said to Christ, he said, "'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?'" In other words, "Philip, how could you ask such a clueless question, to ask me, Christ, to ask Christ to show him the Father when you've been with Christ all this time? Philip, you are completely missing the point. You have missed everything about the Lord." As Jesus goes on to say, Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" Jesus said to Philip, "Philip, I'm right here. When you see me, you are seeing what the Father is like. There is no distinction between us, not in the nature of our essence." A personal distinction within the Godhead, yes. A distinction in essence where there would be different characteristics in the Father that are not found, different

attributes in the Father that are found in Christ, no. One-to-one correspondence. To read about Christ is to learn what God is like. So God appeared in the person of Jesus Christ and what you and I do is, we believe in response to that revelation.

Look over at the book of Hebrews 1. As you're turning there to Hebrews 1, we would do a flyover in Colossians where it says, "in Christ all the fullness of deity dwells in him in bodily form." All the fullness of deity. When we see Christ, we see God himself. And here in Hebrews, Hebrews opens on this subject. Hebrews, a book that is dedicated to showing the superiority of Christ to Moses, to angels, to the Old Testament sacrifices, to the Old Testament priesthood, Christ superior to all of these things. Those shadows that were known in the Old Testament, Christ surpasses them all. Why? Because he is God himself. Not a shadow. The reality was with us in humanity when Jesus walked on the face of this earth.

In Hebrews 1, the first three verses we read, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days," notice the contrast, "but in these last days," in the old days, God spoke this way. He spoke in many ways at many times. Spoke to Moses. Spoke to Elijah. Spoke to Isaiah. But now in these last days something different has happened, something unique has happened, something transcendent has happened. "In these last days," verse 2, "he has spoken to us by his Son," you could read that also as "in his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." And look at these words about Christ that could be said about nothing else in all of creation since the beginning of time and never ever could be at any time in the future. This is alone, this is unique, this is exclusive to Jesus Christ. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."

The name of God belongs to him. He is the exact imprint of the nature of God. He is the radiance of his glory. Beloved, all of that simply to say in as many ways as we can reasonably say in such a short period of time here this evening, God has made himself known in the Lord Jesus Christ in a unique, non-repeatable way that is not true of anything else or anyone else. God appeared in the person of Christ so that the written word of God, written revelation, points to the personal revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Or you could say, we believe in the word, the word written in Scripture and the Word Incarnate, the person of Christ, God in human flesh. And as I said, we'll consider all these things more in the future so we just summarize for this evening.

To come back and to circle back to our question and what I hope is becoming increasingly easy for you to recite in your own heart and to say to your children, and to repeat to one another, how do we know that God exists? How can we know that? Beloved, understand this, understand we believe in response to something. We believe because of what God has first done. God has spoken. God has made himself known. We see that and we believe in response to it. It's not at all something that we made-up inside ourselves. This is not a fable fit only for old people to discuss in times gone by. No, no,

no. Whatever anybody else says about it, what you and I believe and understand is that we believe in response to a multifaceted self-disclosure from God. He has given us objective reasons outside of ourselves, outside of our inner man, outside and beyond our opinions. He has given us objective reasons to believe in creation, in the Canon, in the principle of conscience, and in Jesus Christ. And beloved, what you need to know and to settle in your mind so that you're not intimidated by arrogant unbelievers, so that you're not deluded and persuaded by arguments made on a college campus or by persuasive speakers that you may unwisely expose yourself to, that you're not intimidated by people that try to dismiss it all and say, "Well, that's your opinion." Well, yes, in one sense, it is my opinion, but these things are true regardless of what my opinion is. We did not make this up. We believe in response to things that are outside of ourselves that I can point you to. Look up at the sun while you hide your eyes because you can't take in the glory of the sun, and realize it's speaking to an even greater glory of the one who put it there. Read the word of God for yourself and see God manifested there. Consider the principle of conscience that is within you and within humanity, and pay particular attention in the four gospels and the epistles, to the person of Jesus Christ. The truth of the matter is, beloved, is that a man or a woman could give their lives to studying any one of these aspects, particularly creation, particularly the Canon, particularly Christ, you could give over a lifetime of study to any one of those areas and not exhaust it. These things were in place before you were born. These things will continue after you die. They are independent of you. And so we believe, not because it feels good. We believe not because it seems right to me as the primary reason. We believe because God has spoken in these different areas. It's true even if we had not been born and it will be true after we are gone, and that shows us that it is independent of our own opinions.

Now, on Sunday, I'm not done yet so don't say, "Man, he can't possibly be done yet. He speaks 75 minutes since he came back from his study leave." That's true, but I'm not done yet. On Sunday, we'll have a fifth and final reason to know that God exists. I hope that you can be with us. It will be a Communion service and a wonderful time of remembering the death and resurrection of our Lord, the atonement he made for sinners like you and me at the cost of his own life, and mindful of what John said 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." We love in response to an initiating love from God. We believe in response to an initiating self-disclosure from God. That is really, really critical. I can't emphasize that or repeat that often enough.

Now for now, for the rest of this evening, what I want to do is draw out some practical application of the things that we've considered so far in these four principles of creation, Canon, conscience, and Christ. Beloved, this is part of the reason that I'm doing this whole series, is that I want to get down to these matters and to help you with the help of the Holy Spirit to help you see why these things are so profoundly important and how they affect every aspect of life in a way that goes far beyond anything that you might have previously considered. These aren't academic matters. To know these things and to believe them, is to find your life radically transformed and the purpose of your life completely redefined for you as you come to grips with these things. And so what we're trying to do here in the course of these series, we want to understand, first of all, we want to understand the biblical text for what it says. From there we want to derive solid

doctrine, correct theology from it, that we would see the system of doctrine that the text is expressing to us, and then to bring it to its climax to the fullness of the work of God in our hearts, not simply to have mental knowledge, mental knowledge is not enough, but to apply this and to understand the implications of it in a way that forms deep-rooted convictions in your heart that shapes the way that you live. Whether you have a short time left because so many of your years are in the past, or whether you have the fullness of your life still ahead, these convictions are critical, and the existence of God and the redemption that we have in Christ, they have consequences for the way that you relate to every aspect of life in this world, at every moment for all time. This is not like reading a novel and putting it down and moving to something else. When you encounter the revelation of God and it sinks into your understanding, you start to realize that it changes everything about life.

You cannot overestimate the impact of it, and what I want to do is I want to outline five different implications, and this is not the kind of application that, you know, we're kind of used to from sermons, something that, you know, that you take this and it makes tomorrow better, you know, or it's something cute and pithy that, you know, that you kind of remember, you know, because of a clever turn of phrase. No, that's not what we're doing here tonight. What we're doing tonight is we're laying out these implications for your long-term reflection, for your long-term meditation, that as you think about these different areas where God has made himself known, you think through what these implications are and you help your children or you help your grandchildren understand what the implications are of the existence of God. You see, you consider these different realms and you come to the conclusion God exists, now the question becomes, "Well, so what? What does that mean? Why is that significant? What does that matter?" Well, beloved, it matters for everything. It matters for everything, as we're going to see here, and what happens is, as these things start to take root in your convictions, they change your priorities, they change the choices that you make in life, they change who you choose as friends and what it is that you give your time to, how you view yourself, how you view your family, how you view everything else, things revolve around these convictions that we come to from God's self-disclosure.

So five applications here that are of long-term consequence. 1. The existence of God means that you decisively reject self as your motivating principle in life. You decisively reject self as your motivating principle in life. Now with that said, turn to the gospel of Mark 8. The revelation of God in these different areas, the revelation of God in Christ, is not a matter of take it or leave it. It's not a matter that you consider and say, "Oh, I've got other things to do." No, Jesus Christ calls men to deny self and to follow him. He is Lord.

In Mark 8, let's begin in verse 31.

31 ... he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing

his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Obviously, you'd be setting your mind on the things of God, not on the things of man. Peter was doing the exact opposite. Christ is going to expand on the significance of what that means and just the following verses here beginning in verse 34. "You're setting your mind not on the things of God, but on the things of man," Jesus says as he rebukes Peter. Now he gives the positive instruction of what setting your mind on the things of God has to do. We see the revelation of God in all of these areas, now we make an inward application whereby we set the principle by which we live. Verse 34,

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

God has made himself known conclusively in these areas, particularly in the person of Christ. God has made himself known and one of the aspects of the being of God is that he has absolute complete authority over all things. That's what it means to be God. It's one of the consequences of the existence of God. He has authority over all of his creation, which means he has authority over you and me, beloved, and in that position of authority from which Christ speaks as Lord over all, he says, "If you want to be my disciple, you have to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me." There is none of this moralistic therapeutic deism stuff found in the words of Christ. He calls men out. He comes not to help you with your little daily problem so that you can move on and live a happy life in disregard to him, he comes and claims absolute authority over your soul and says, "You must deny yourself and follow me." Jesus comes to a lost person, Jesus comes to an unsaved person and demands an unconditional transfer of heart loyalty from self to Christ. That means you turn from sin and self to him. You love Christ more than life itself. You place no prior limits on your obedience to him. This is a natural consequence of the revelation of God in the person of Christ. God, who has all authority, God who is the Creator, God who is the Sustainer, the Redeemer and the Judge, comes and lays out the terms by which you may come to Christ. He says deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow him.

One of the applications of the existence of God is you decisively reject self as the principle by which you live. Have a couple of different things bouncing around in my mind and I'm just going to let them bounce there and like a basketball just kind of dribbles out and dies on its own accord. That's what I'm going to leave with those thoughts there. Second principle: you decisively reject the world. You decisively reject the world. Look at the book of Acts 2. The book of Acts 2, beginning in verse 38. Acts

2:38. The reality of a self-revealing God against whom the world has rebelled means that you face a choice to make. You have a choice to make, either you go with the world or you reject that to follow Christ as he is the revelation of God. There is no third alternative. This goes to the very principle of loyalty and affections that govern your heart.

Peter had preached the gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and in verse 37, "Now when they heard this," actually let's just go back to verse 36 because it ties in with what we've been saying here. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain." "Let them know for certain. We are to know that God exists for certain, without doubt, without equivocation, without compromise. We are to know this as established truth from the throne of God itself. "Know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." God has made himself known and you crucified the Lord of glory. That's a pretty weighty thing to realize that you've done. We had the Messiah in our hands and we killed him. What's going to happen to us now? What are we to do? Verse 37, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'" Now look at verse 40, remember, we're saying one of the applications is that you decisively reject the world, "And with many other words he bore witness," this is verse 40, "with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'" In other words, in light of what God has revealed in Christ, in light of the gospel that Peter preached in Acts 2, come out from the world, come out from that system that is condemned and under the judgment of God, repent of your sins, come out from that and come to Christ and be saved.

It's a direct implication of the reality of the things that we've been saying. If God has created the world and the world has rebelled and rejected him, as it has so obviously, so evidently, and now you're living in the realm of the world, you have a choice to make, you have a responsibility to fulfill, to recognize that the truth of the revelation of God has a claim on your heart, has a claim on your loyalties and your priorities and your purpose for existence. And to say, "I cannot stay in this realm of a God-rejecting, God-defying world, I have to come out to Christ. I have to repent of my sins and come to him."

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die."

This is a matter of life and death and I think I'm probably going to have a couple of messages to help us think through what it means to reject the world, to come out from the

world, but for now just simply to recognize that this revelation from God presents you with the call of eternity. Eternal consequences are attached to how one responds to these things. The world will be condemned and all those who love it. In light of that, it is a gracious merciful call from God, an invitation from God, for you to come out from that, to come to Christ and to find shelter, deliverance, salvation in him alone, and to belong to him and not to this wicked world.

So you decisively reject the world. We won't take the time to look at 1 John 2:15 to 17, but you can jot that down in your notes. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not within him." You cannot have it both ways. You cannot have it both ways so you turn from the ways of the world for the sake of this God who has made himself known. Now thirdly, you decisively reject false religion. You decisively reject false religion. The true God has made himself known, that means that any false religion is an abomination, an unthinkable assault on what you know to be true, and so you decisively reject it. It's the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," Exodus 20. But for now we can just turn to Matthew 5:17 and see in the words of Christ this need to come out from the world, to come out from false religion and to embrace the truth of the God who has made himself known, the God who is there and the God who is not silent.

Matthew 5:17. Jesus says,

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus was saying this to a first century Jewish audience, a Jewish society that was conditioned to take the word of the Pharisees as the word of God. So full and complete was their trust in them but it was a false religion that they were receiving from the Pharisees. Jesus says, "You have to come out from that. You have to reject that and receive my words if you are to be saved. If you stay in that system, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Well, beloved, the names of the actors have changed, the names of the religions have changed over the past 2,000 years, but there is still this fundamental distinction between true and false religion and you need to know what the true is and decisively reject the false. And I praise God for those of you that were in a system of works-based religion and have come out from it and have even made public testimony to the effect. Those of you that say in private and have said publicly, "I now know that what I was taught was false," that's a decisive rejection of false religion. That's what Jesus calls for and notice,

notice there in verse 18 when we talk about the world, when we talk about the world, we're talking about world systems of thought and philosophies and approaches to life. But Jesus here in a physical sense alludes to the fact that even the physical creation that we know is one day going to pass away. Heaven and earth will pass away but not a stroke of the word of God, not a letter, not a crossed T, not a dot on the i will fail from his word until everything has been fulfilled.

And so, along with that, along with that look at Matthew 7 with me for just a moment. We are not making these things up. We are not adding things, putting, imposing interpretations on the text that do not belong there. This is the clear, simple, direct teaching of Christ in the word of God. You must decisively reject false religion. He says in Matthew 7:13, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many." He said there are many that are going there, in other words, to say it differently, Jesus tells us so explicitly there's no safety in numbers. You can't just go along with the crowd and what the crowd believes as they're on a conveyor belt to perdition that they refused to get off of. It will not plead with God at the day of judgment that, "I believed what everybody else believed." You were warned in advance by Christ, "Don't do that. Go through the narrow gate where few people are going."

Verse 14, "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." You say, "Well, could the majority be wrong? Could 1 1/4 billion Catholics be wrong? Could a system that's been in place for 1,500 years and always adapting and adding more lies to its system, could it be wrong? Could it really be that it's a false religion, a front for Satan?" Yeah. Not only could it be, it is. My point for tonight is that you have a responsibility in response to the revelation of God to process these things, to deal earnestly with his word for yourself, and to come to your own conclusions. And Christ warns you, and Christ pleads with you, even as I plead with you in the flesh here tonight, heed these things for the benefit of your eternal soul. Heed while there is time.

True Christians are people, are not people, let's put it this way, true people are not those who are lovingly tolerant of all kinds of religion. That's the straight jacket that the world would like to put on us in order to silence the distinct, exclusive testimony of Christ who said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." True Christians love the truth more than the approval of the world. True Christians are content to stand alone, even if the world rejects them. True Christians testify to the world that you must come out, that there is truth, you must believe in Christ to be saved. Having applied that truth first to their own heart, it's not unloving, beloved, it is not unloving to warn people about false religion and to call them out of it and to call them to the truth. It is not unloving for them to feel uncomfortable in response to such things. Far better to feel uncomfortable now and for the Lord to use that to lead someone to repentance and eternal life, than to be comfortable all the way up to the day of their death and then wake up and say, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool the flame on my tongue." What kind of love is it that is content to let people go in self-deception all the way to the destruction of their eternal soul? There's no love in that. We love them enough to tell them the truth even if they hate us for it.

Now we've said that you decisively reject self, you decisively reject the world, you decisively reject false religion in response to the revelation of God. Fourthly, you follow Christ even over your own family. You follow Christ even over your own family. And again, this is what Jesus said. Look at Matthew 10:34. Matthew 10:34. Jesus said,

34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Now in the grace of God to us, maybe these matters of family relationships don't conflict even if our loved ones are not believers, maybe they're content to have a relationship even though they reject what you believe. For many of us, in the grace of God we share life with a Christian spouse, Christian children, Christian grandchildren, and we delight in that and we thank God for it. But beloved, this revelation of God leads us to recognize that the surpassing priority and loyalty of our heart belongs to him. Not to earth. Not to earthly relationships, not even the closest of earthly relationships. And if, probably better stated, when a family relationship comes into conflict over the person of Christ, we cling to Christ, we obey Christ, we're loyal to Christ, even if the family member walks away, mocks us, rejects us, cuts us off. If that's the price of following Christ, if that's the price of the truth of the revelation and self-disclosure of God in all of these areas, the true Christian, as he wipes the tears from his eyes at the loss of the human relationship, as he grieves over being rejected by someone he loves or that she loves, deep in that Christian's heart is the recognition, "I can't reject Christ even for him, even for her." Deep in that Christian's heart is a sense, an abiding sense of loyalty and joy and commitment to Christ that cannot be displaced by anyone on earth, even our closest, our dearest, our best. They may say we have religious mania, they may hate us for our testimony to Christ, they may go decades without talking to us, that's okay because Christ is supreme. He is superior. He is more important. Christ alone is the one who shed his blood for your soul. No one could possibly be more important than him. We don't go out looking for the conflict. We don't go out looking for the disrupted relationships. But when it comes, we accept it and we look to the Christ who promised us, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." This comes with the territory, beloved. Lost relationships come with the Christian territory, especially for those who grew up in unsaved environments and you come to Christ and you have to reject the friendships and the behaviors and the activities that you used to engage in blind sin with them. They say, "I don't want to be around you if you're like that." I'm sorry to hear that. I love you, but I'm not leaving Christ. No, mom.

No, dad. Jesus Christ has saved my soul. I'll never stop following him. That's the implication. That's how far this goes these things of which we speak.

Well, one final point. I gave some thought to the order of these. You could probably rearrange them but they're all important. Fifthly, finally, for this evening, and by way of application: you follow Christ over government. You follow Christ over government. And we're all, you know, we were all well reminded of Romans 13 during the COVID area, the COVID era, I should say, and there were plenty of voices saying, you know, you've got to do whatever the government tells you to do in these matters, regardless of how it affects worship and gathering together which God has commanded. Well, beloved, I'm only going to touch on this for now; down the road we'll come back to this, I trust. But there are limits to our Roman 13 response to government. John Knox spoke of it brilliantly in the days of the Catholic Queen over England.

In Acts 5, verse 29, Peter and the apostles were confronted by the Sanhedrin, the high priest, and in verse 28 they said to them, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." We told you to stop speaking and here you are doing it. "Peter and the apostles answered," you almost see him shrugging, "We must obey God rather than men." When government seeks to intrude on Christian testimony, when government seeks to regulate Christian worship as so many governments did during the COVID area, the church has the right and the responsibility to disobey because we must obey God rather than men. And when God has ordained certain patterns of worship, it's not for government to tell us not to do it, and in the wisdom of local church elders, each church can decide what its, you know, what its best response is, but the mere fact that Caesar, the mere fact that a magistrate says you must not do this, does not settle the matter. God's word and obedience to him settles the matter and that is a critical point that we'll leave for further discussion at another time.

But what does all of this self-disclosure of God mean? Well, it means that it's undeniable, we recognize it and we say this is inescapable truth. God has spoken in so many complementary areas, such a multifaceted way, that I am surrounded by his truth in the heavens, in the atmosphere, in the word I hold in my hands, in the testimony of my own heart, everything is speaking to this truth. Well that truth, beloved, has a claim on your life and the way that you respond to self, respond to the world, respond to false religion, respond to family, respond to government, in all of those areas, a principle of surpassing loyalty is established in the believing heart. Now you know, look, we all stumble in many ways. We don't always live out our convictions the way we should. But the principle is there.

Let me say these final words by way of encouragement, exhortation, and in closing, and I'm repeating what I said at the beginning of my message. Beloved, it is essential for us to develop these convictions now, to understand these things, to think on them in a deep, profound way, to have in our minds the Scriptures that support them. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it, and to be able to go effectively to the word of God to establish it when it comes up in any conversation at any time. Why am I

emphasizing these things right now? Beloved, in times past those of us that are old enough to remember days gone by, there was a time when biblical faith was accepted, it was respected, if not even popular. You know, you can go back and read in the times leading up to the Civil War days, in Congress there was open debate on both sides from the North and South, they both argued from the providence of God to support their position. It's really remarkable to see. It would never happen in the halls of Congress today. But there was a common shared philosophy, and even if these people weren't Christians, there was an underlying biblical worldview and a respect for biblical Christianity. Those days are long gone and times have changed, and I think we still have a little bit of the afterglow of that that's going on, but it's changing rapidly. People would gladly attach themselves to a Christian church, would gladly claim the name of Christian when it advanced their career, when it was politically expedient and helped accumulate power for personal gain and for a particular imposition of cultural morality, people were happy to claim Christianity if they perceived that it advanced their prosperity, made good business contacts and all the like, and even in our day, people are happy to have a version of Christianity that does not impact their personal life, that provides no personal accountability for the way that they live, content to have a form of religion that gives them a dollop of self-righteousness as they pursue their own goals in disregard to Christ.

Now beloved, those days are over and it's going to have a purifying effect on the church, which, while it will be difficult, I give thanks for it as God purifies his church from all of those false motives for being attached to some outward form of Christianity. Beloved, the prospect increasingly for us, and I say this not with a martyr's tone, not in a sense with no victim mentality whatsoever, we're not victims. If we're in Christ, the last thing we are are victims. We are blessed to be in him, but beloved, going forward, the prospect increasingly for true believers will be isolation, marginalization in society, suffering, mocking, and to the extent that it's not already here, it's not very far away. We live in a culture, we live amongst people that are frightened by the LGBTQ movement. They're frightened by being called a homophobe, a transphobe or any other kind of phobe. When Christians are left as the only ones who uphold the biblical standard, we're going to be marginalized even further as that worldview comes to define the realm in which we live. As that is happening and as it comes more in the future, the convictions of which we speak now are the things that will sustain the true Christian. They are the convictions that will cause him to live courageously, to be strong and courageous, to, "Fear not for I am with you," as God said to Joshua before they entered in to take possession of the Promised Land.

And so we have to meditate on these things. We have to make them our own, so much so that there is this inner resolution, this confidence, this conviction that says, "I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able to keep what I've entrusted to him until that day." Soon enough, beloved, soon enough we're going to face the question either in our personal life or in the social manner in which we live as we're choosing between our jobs and our faith, choosing between our children and their sexual perversion, and in those times, that's when the meaningful question will come to our mind, "Do you believe enough to suffer for it?" And those who have formed their convictions in these things in God's self-disclosure perhaps with fear and trembling, say,

"Yes, I do. I will." And beloved, you can but we must know what we believe and why we believe it. That's why we're doing this and my prayer is that God would bring great fruit from our humble efforts to honor his word.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father, thank you for the way that you've made yourself known. We'll see the most intimate and personal aspect of it on Sunday but for now, Father, we acknowledge that you have more than sufficiently revealed yourself in creation, in the Canon, in conscience, and certainly in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for that and pray that you would help us each one appropriate what we should learn from these things and develop in us the convictions that will sustain us as Affliction comes. Develop in us the convictions that we will be able to pass on to another generation yet to come, a generation even yet to be born, Father. Take the humble seed that we plant here, take the humble acorns that are planted in the ground in nights like these, and, Father, over time in that imperceptible but powerful way in which you do such things, raise up oaks under which others will be able to sit in the safety of the shade. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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