



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 John 2:22-25

"Christ Loyal to His Word"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is 1 John chapter 2, verse 22 through verse 25.

As we continue our study of John's first letter, he has just been speaking of individuals who went out from them, who were not of them. If they had been of them they would have "continued with us," he says. But they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us. So you might wonder what these individuals really did teach and believe, and John gives us a hint in this section, and also more than a hint of what he thinks about them. Verse 22,

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."

Now some of you may have a version that does not have that last clause, "he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." The reason for that is that some of the manuscripts, in fact the majority of manuscripts do not have those words, but they probably are genuine, and so we are going to read them as if they were genuine.

"He that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life."

You may remember that in the first chapter, in the 2nd verse, the apostle wrote, "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." He speaks here about dwelling in the Son, abiding in the Son, continuing in the Son, and then it's natural that he should say, "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks for the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that we can, by Thy grace, enter into something of the feeling of John's readers who remembered that which they heard from the beginning. And as we look back, Lord, to the day in which the gospel came home to us and reflect upon the truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ that were unfolded to us by the Holy Spirit, we rejoice and give Thee thanks for the work that Thou hast done in our hearts. And we pray that as the days unfold, that we may by Thy grace, be enabled to grow in the grace that Thou hast shown to us, and that our lives may be pleasing and fruitful, acceptable to Thee.

We thank Thee for the privilege that is ours today to listen to the word of God, to meet with our fellow believers to enjoy the Christian fellowship that we have in the atmosphere of the hope that is ours through Christ. We thank Thee for the eternal life residing in our Lord Jesus Christ and residing in us, by virtue of the ministry to us. We are thankful and grateful. We pray Lord, that by Thy grace we may be used to be an instrumentality in the spreading of that word, so that others also may know the joy and hope that we experience.

We pray for the sick. We ask Thy blessing upon them, especially those who have requested our prayers. We pray for them. We ask Lord, that the earnest desires of their hearts may be answered within Thy sovereign will.

We pray for our country and for the President. We thank Thee for Thy mercy upon this nation, and for the freedoms we have, the liberties that we enjoy. We pray Lord that we may continue to have them. We acknowledge that they are gifts from Thee in common grace. We thank Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ and for all that has been done for us through those who have gone on before us as believers in Christ. May, by Thy grace, the church of Jesus Christ be fruitful today in its ministries of teaching and preaching. We ask for the outreach of the chapel, and Lord, if it should please Thee, may we see fruit from the teaching of the word of God over the radio, through the printed page, by the tapes, and by other means. Bless the personal testimonies of those who are here. May the things that we discuss and that we come to know, be things that we share with others who do not have the blessing that we have in Christ.

We pray especially for Believers Chapel, its elders, its deacons, its members, its friends. We pray Thy blessing upon the visitors who are here with us today. May our time together be spiritually prosperous for each one of us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] There are many statements by biblical authors of the danger and peril of departing from the truth, but some of the Bible's strongest words on the price of denying the faith are here. One of the commentators trying to make this point has said, "It may sometimes be hard to go on believing in an intellectual climate whose currents run counter to faith, but the price of denying is more than any heart can ever want to pay." We've been saying, over and over again, and I know that by now the point has been made, but there are always some newcomers here, that the apostle has been called the Apostle of Love, but one of the things that stands out is the fact that the theology of the first Epistle of John stands out in a very tremendous way. He speaks in firm, black and white, contrasting, but clear-sighted words, someone has said, on denying the Lord Jesus Christ. The early

church called John the Apostle the theologian. We think of this epistle as being a devotional epistle, many of us do at least, but I think the more that you study this epistle, the more you realize that it is an epistle that contains some of the strongest doctrine of the New Testament. And I'm not surprised that John should be called the theologian.

Now I don't want you to think that I just learned that this week. I don't try to bring you everything every week, you know. It might be like setting down to a meal, as I do, having a good cook at my house, and no one likes to sit down at a meal with everything brought out and piled on the table. You like for the meal to proceed with appetizers, a lovely entrée, let's just say for example, what I eat occasionally, lamb and rice and gravy and fresh corn and some other vegetable with a beautiful salad, fruit salad. And then following the meal, Martha will come out and say, "Would you like dessert." And I try to say, "No," until she says the word, "Häagen Dazs." [Laughter] And then my resistance is gone, and then she brings that out, and after that she comes in with coffee and mints, and my own personalized Alka-Seltzer tablets [Laughter], which I may need after that.

But at any rate, the point is that when we eat, we don't want everything at once, so I've been holding off telling you that John was called the theologian in the early church. But I think you can understand if you have followed through with me, through these almost two chapters that some of the strongest theological statements in the New Testament have been made in this simple little epistle that the Apostle of Love or the theologian has written.

And here he talks about heresy and how Jesus Christ, in the phase of heresy, is loyal to his promises made in the beginning when John and others heard the message of the gospel and confirmed as time has gone on. The nature of the heresy that he faced is described in the 22nd verse where the apostle writes, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." He had just said that there were those who "went out from us, who were not of us; if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." And you might have wondered, what was their doctrine? What did they think? What was the kind of teaching to which they ascribed obedience? Well, the apostle lets us know something about it here, for he says,

"Who is a liar but he that denieth the Jesus is the Christ?" And he says it in a strikingly rhetorical way, for he says it by asking a question. "Who is a liar but he that denieth the Jesus is the Christ?"

Now it is evident that these individuals had accepted the Lord Jesus in some sense. Most New Testament scholars believe that the heresy that John had particularly in mind was Cyrenthian Gnosticism, in which it was generally thought that the Lord Jesus was simply a man such as you and I are, although an exceptional man, exceptional in his holiness and in his dedication to God. But at the baptism there came upon him an efflux from God, something like the Holy Spirit, and in the power of that efflux he ministered for most of his ministry as recorded in the gospels, but near the end of his life upon the earth, the Spirit departed from him, he was only a man. He was crucified as simply a man, and he was buried and did not rise from the dead in bodily form. This kind of teaching is perhaps the kind of teaching that John has in mind. And at the heart of it is the fact that if that is so, then Jesus Christ was not truly a man or truly the God-man. He was not truly a man in the sense that he possessed a human nature such as you and I have apart from sin, and he was not truly the God-man, the divine person who also possessed a divine nature.

Now when he says, "Who is a liar but he the denieth that Jesus is the Christ," we probably can spell this out a little and say to deny that Jesus is the Christ means what he says in chapter 4, verse 2 to deny that Jesus is the Messiah who came in the flesh. In other words, denying his Messianic office and denying his true incarnation. Ignatius who wrote shortly after the time that John wrote, wrote an Epistle to the Smyrnians and in that he stresses that Jesus Christ was truly, and these are his words, "truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by the divine will and power, truly born of a virgin and baptized by John, truly nailed up in the flesh. He suffered truly, as also, he raised himself truly, not as certain unbelievers say that he suffered in semblance." So you can see that the keyword that he uses is that word "truly," which he uses over and over again. He was a true man, not simply one upon whom Spirit and power came at a particular time, and then departed. And further, he did not suffer in semblance. Now these things have to do with not simply

that doctrine, but other false doctrines that may have been involved as well, but one can see that this is perhaps, very close to the false doctrine that John is seeking to combat.

Now, when you reflect upon this a moment, what this ultimately comes down to is the fact that there were people in John's day, who were in the churches, the ones who "went out from us who were not of us," who in some sense did believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There were certain things about him that they acknowledged, and the fact that they did have some sense of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet can be spoken of so sharply by the Apostle John shows us that it is possible for men to have a view of Christ that seems to be a very pious view, but which at the same time is really an anti-Christian doctrine. And in fact, the individuals who hold it and propound it in the Christian church may be called by the apostle, antichrists. So in some sense they accepted our Lord, in another sense they denied him as the Messiah come in the flesh, and John says, it's not simply a denial of Christ as come in the flesh, that their denial amounts to. It amounts to a denial of the Son and the Father.

Now those are very strong words. Those are very striking words. To have a view of Christ that is incomplete, that does not comprehend his sonship and his Messiahship, and to affirm some admiration for our Lord, in our society today, one would be thought to be very unkind and very unloving to say, "That individual not only holds un-Christian doctrine, but he is of the spirit of antichrist." So the apostle was not a man who did not face the problem of truth and error. I can just imagine in this day in which we are living, that John would be called dogmatic, unkind, unloving. For we live in the day of equivocation, in the day in which it is very, very much out of fashion to say anything really definite and particularly in a negative way.

Those are very, very strong words. "Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus has come as the Messianic king in the flesh." What we do when we do that, John would say, is we have uprooted Christianity. We don't have any Christianity. To talk about the Lord Jesus as a great teacher, as a marvelous man, as a holy individual who lived centuries ago, to speak of him in only that sense is to not have a Christianity at all. It's to cut the heart out of Christianity, and even if one holds a refined view of him, as many of our New Testament scholars today hold, a refined view of him that

eliminates his true Messiahship and his true incarnation, his true propitiatory sacrifice, John says frankly, forthrightly, "He is antichrist."

I must confess I stand with John. He's right. He's absolutely right. If we don't see that, it's because we haven't seen the implications of the statement that Jesus is the Messiah who has come in the flesh. So that raises the question, why is denial of the Messiahship equivalent to the denial of sonship? One of these is a proposition. Jesus is the Messiah, who has come in the flesh. The other, denying the Son is denying a person. Now to deny a person, in this instance, is much more significant. But both of these express the denial of Christianity.

I might conceivably say something about Prince Charles that was wrong. I might say about Prince Charles for example, that he's an old man, that he's short and fat, and has bushy eyebrows. And you would say to me, "Wait a minute. You've been looking at the wrong pictures or else you need some glasses," and you would prove me wrong on those incidentals, but on the position of the Prince you have not proved me wrong. I've said he was the Prince; I just have false ideas of the incidentals. In the case of the Lord Jesus, when we are talking about the denial of sonship, we put it in a proposition. Of course, we must think about the reality, but what lies back of it is the sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ, what does that mean, the Messiah? Well that means he's the anointed one. Well, what does the anointed one mean? Well it marks out a special relation that he has to the Father, who has anointed him with the Holy Spirit to perform a task. He has come in order to perform the task of the propitiatory sacrifice, and so he is come in a real incarnation. He is truly the Son of God, divine person who has taken to himself an additional nature, a human nature. So he has two natures. He carries out the ministry of obedience to the Father in his incarnation and in the work associated with it, and then on Calvary's cross at the climax of the earthly side of his ministry, he has offered himself as an atoning sacrifice; and because he's a divine person and he dies for men, his atoning work has infinite value, measured by who he is and what he has accomplished.

And so he has offered the propitiatory sacrifice by which the holiness and justness of God is satisfied. That was his task as Messiah, he was to come, be incarnate, make the sacrifice, rise again from the dead, and live at the right hand of the throne of God to see that everything which he has won in the shedding of his blood, become the possession of those for whom he has died. That's why he is at the very present moment; at this very second, engaged in his unfinished work of bringing the saints into the full possession of what is meant by eternal life. He is the Son of God who is separate from sinners, different from us in that sense, and made higher than the heavens, both of these aspects of his person important.

Now, when you think of an individual who views the Lord Jesus Christ as simply a man, even though a great man, you may even exalt the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but you stop short of his deity. You are not simply a friend, a close friend of Christianity, you've denied Christianity. You've cut the heart out of Christianity. For, listen, what did Jesus say of himself? He said he was the Son of God. He said that he was the divine Son of God. He affirmed that he had accomplished the atoning work. He said he was the one of whom the Scriptures speak, and that he successfully carried out his work. He even spoke, after his resurrection, to the apostles and taught them about the consummation of all things. He has given us, in the New Testament, an unfolding of how he will assume authority over all of this universe. Read the book of the Revelation, the revelation from Jesus Christ.

So what do we do when we stop short of acknowledging what he called himself? We say of him, though we may not intend to say this of him that doesn't make any difference as far as John is concerned, the implications of what we say are the important things. We, in effect, say Jesus is a liar. We say he was a charlatan. We say he deluded us, or deceived us, or is deluded himself. And who can worship a deceiver? Who can worship someone who is so deluded as to think that he was Son of God? "Very God of very God," as the great creeds have stated it; God, from God. So you can see that when John says, "Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Messiah."

Lying back of that statement is what the Scriptures say, and what John knew of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we stop short of his deity, then we may exalt his humanity as we may exalt it, but we still have cut the heart out of Christianity. We do not really have any atoning sacrifice, no sacrifice that really covers our sin. You might say he died for himself, and by his life managed to be excused from judgment himself, but he cannot stand for me, and he cannot stand for you, and there's no point in you singing about, "Dear, dying Lamb of God who has redeemed me by his blood." You cannot speak about that at all.

What makes this also so significant are some of the other implications. Let's suppose for just a moment, that we don't have the revelation of the word of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's just assume for a moment that we are forced to abstractly imagine who and what God is. Can you imagine anyone without the divine revelation abstractly, by his imagination, coming to the doctrine of the divine trinity? Why, even individuals who have the Bible before them do not study the Bible enough to really allow the truth of the word of God to grip them concerning the nature and being of God. Why, if you tried to imagine the trinity apart from divine revelation, in the first place, you couldn't even imagine a trinity. You would never think of one God who subsists in three persons.

In fact, the trinity is only penetrable to us who have the Bible before us, by positing an eternal counsel of the persons of the trinity, who in ages past, according to the purpose of God, have set forth in Holy Scripture the divine plan which ultimately comprises our redemption; a Father, the Son, the Spirit in the divine counsel, each purposing to do a particular task. The Father, to elect; the Son to execute the elective purpose; the Spirit to apply the elective purpose to the redeemed, and the whole work working together in concert to accomplish what Paul calls, the purpose of the ages. It's only penetrable by the divine revelation and the truths of Scripture concerning the eternal counsel of the persons of the trinity.

Now, there are people who stumble over this, because they tend to think that when you talk about an eternal counsel of the trinity, that you are talking about something that the Bible doesn't

specifically say. Well, there are many things that the Bible does not specifically say which are ours by convincing inference. If the Bible says, as I've sometimes said to you, if the Bible says that David was a king of Israel, and if we say of Solomon, who was his son, that Solomon was the son of a king of Israel, we are talking about truth. That is just as true as if it were stated in the Bible. But it's not stated in the Bible, it's stated by reasonable inference. If Solomon is the son of David, who is the king of Israel, we can say Solomon was a son of the king of Israel. So when we talk about the eternal counsel, let me read you a verse or two. The Lord Jesus said in his earthly ministry, "This is the Father's will, which hath sent me that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

And he repeats it. "This is the will of him that sent me that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth in him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." In the 10th chapter, in the 18th verse we read, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received from my Father." So we are told by the Lord that he is carrying out a purpose of the Father. There is a counsel of the two at least. He tells us later, in other places, he does things by the Holy Spirit. So the three persons of the trinity carry out a particular redemptive task. There's no reason for us to fear this; the kind of mentality that says that something must be stated in the Bible itself in order for us to believe it, is naïve, very naïve. In that case, we wouldn't have a trinity. We wouldn't have an old nature. We wouldn't have many other of the great doctrines of the word of God which are plainly there, but may not be expressed in the way which comes home to us most easily today. Well, Paul says the individual who says that the Lord Jesus is not the Messiah who came in the flesh, is the living embodiment of the spirit of antichrist. That's what he means.

Now then, what about the effect of the heresy? He says in verse 23, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." If you read through these verses, you will notice there are no connecting particles between them, and in Greek literature when there were no connecting particles, the Greeks loved particles, they liked

logical thought. I have a lot of friends who are not Greeks. [Laughter] Their sentences flow with no particular relation to one another, and occasionally I have to say, "Repeat that, I've lost a line or two there." Some of you, in college or university, have had your professors say, "Your theme is okay, but there are so many missing sentences that link your thoughts together. What you need to do is to write and link your thoughts together in an intelligible way." John just throws these things out, and when that happens in Greek literature, it's because the authors are thinking with great intensity, with great feeling. So not only does he say these stark, abrupt, sharp kinds of things, but he says them with great feeling. And you can feel it, if you read it carefully. He's very intense about these things.

And the question that comes immediately after verse 22 is, "Why can we not have God without Jesus? If we are going to have God, do we have Jesus? Can't we have God without Jesus?" If any man were to say that out in the world today, why, the great mass of the world would shout back in unison, "Of course we can have God without Jesus." Over here in the corner is the Apostle John shouting out, "No, we cannot have God, as God the Father, without Jesus." "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." Those are very unpleasant words to the modern mind. In effect, it says to the Unitarian, you're not a Christian, there's no need for you to claim to be within the Christian family, you do not belong. It says also, to the Jewish man who holds to Judaism and denies the Son, you're doctrine is not Christianity. You cannot have Christianity and deny the Son. "Whosoever denies the Son, the same hath not the Father." We don't say they're not some nice things about religions. Almost all religions have a few nice things about them, and when they're nice, you'll find those things in Christianity, and when they're not, you won't find them in Christianity.

Now, John says plainly, "to deny the Son is to deny the Father." Why? The Lord Jesus engaged in an official task. His official task was the executing of the Father's purpose. He was sent, he was sealed, so he says, he was anointed, that's why he's called the Messiah, to save. He was separate from us; he is exalted higher than the heavens now. But as he carries out his ministry, he

carries it out as the divine Son of God, and hanging upon the cross, he hangs there as the bleeding Son of God who makes the propitiatory sacrifice for us. To reject him is to reject the Father.

Now, let me say a further word or two about this to clarify. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not a Father." I could just simply say, "Look, if you say Jesus is not the Son, you cannot talk about a father, because if you say he's a son, he has a father. You cannot be a son without a father." I couldn't look at any individual in this audience, and I couldn't say of you, and you couldn't say, "I'm a son, but I don't have a father." Oh, you may not know your father, but you have a father. The very fact that you're a son means that you have a father. And incidentally, the very fact that an individual is a father means that he has a son or a daughter. So when John says, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father," why, the very first thing you can see is that if there is a son, there is a father.

Now, the world likes to think of God as a fatherly God. They like to think of God as a good God. They like to think of him as a loving father. In fact, he's such a father; he overlooks a lot of the mean-spirited things that characterize humanity. But look, where did they ever get any idea of a fatherly God? You won't find any idea of a fatherly God outside of Christianity in origin. If they have it, it came from Christianity. In the Old Testament, even in Judaism, God is spoken of in a few places, not too many, as Father. And after all, the true Judaism of the Old Testament is the promise of the Christianity of the New. For that we are thankful and grateful for Moses and the prophets, for the spoke of Christ, so Jesus said. But if you do not have a Son, you do not have a Father; and if you do not have a Father, there goes the Christian doctrine of God. So don't talk about the Christian doctrine of God as a heavenly Father without a Son, that's first thing you could say.

Next, you can say this; only by the Son is there access to the Father. Listen to what our Lord says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me," only access to the Father, by the Son. Further, only by the Son do we know the Father. There is no way for any individual to know the Father except through the Son. I think that's one reason why John is so disturbed by this whole question, why he thinks so

sharply about it. After all, the knowledge of the Father is fundamental for life. Our Lord came in order to give man the knowledge of the Father, to bring men to the knowledge of his Father, as he knew him. Read his great high priestly prayer, and you will see that. But Jesus said this in Matthew 11:27, "all things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father." In other words, the knowledge of the Son is exclusively the Father's. "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son." The knowledge of the Father is exclusively in the hands of the Son, only he can know the Father in the fullness of his being; very God of very God. And the final clause is not insignificant either, "And he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Sovereign in the communication of the knowledge of the Father is the Lord Jesus Christ. To deny him is to deny the Father.

The circle of the understanding of Christianity is centered in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, for us, for it's through him, and his incarnation, and in his death, that we come to any understanding whatsoever of God in heaven. That's why Unitarianism is so often the parent of agnosticism. If you do not have a God who is a triune God with the Father, Son, and Spirit unfolded in the revelation that Jesus Christ has given of God in heaven, you do not have any sure knowledge of God; Unitarian almost inevitably, not always but almost inevitably, lapses into agnosticism. In fact, just as I sometimes rather jokingly have said that Arminianism is the banana peel on the cliff of Universalism, so you can say that Unitarianism is the banana peel on the cliff of Socinianism and agnosticism. Not absolutely necessary, but logically so, and usually it follows.

If we do not have what John is talking about here, then we are like the ancients. The God is Zeus, or Mars, or Venus, or Bacchus, or Dionysus, that whole disreputable tribe of un-worshipful deities that were the things that they had to think about. If we do not have the fatherhood of God, as found in Jesus' teaching, we have the fatherhood of God idea as a nebulous, sentimental idea, unsupported in nature, history, or much of non-Christian personal experience. If we retain God in our thought at all, logically, what we have is a god who may be described as fate, or destiny, malicious destiny, or the irrational blind force that defeats our ideals. That's why we read and hear in our

entertainment industry today, about the force; that's all you have if you do not have the revelation of God as found in Holy Scripture.

Well, John says the opposite is true. "He that acknowledges the Son has the Father also." So Jesus and the Father, then illustrate the Father and us, now and then. The Lord Jesus, when he was here, spoke about what we would have with reference to the Father, in the upper room discourse in chapter 14 and verse 23 of his words to the apostles. As he was getting ready to leave this earthly scene he said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and we will make our abode with him."

In his high priestly prayer, in the very last words that he spoke in that prayer he said, "I have declared, Father, unto them Thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." And in the proceeding verses, in verse 24 he had said, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou also hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me; for Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world." "I will that they be also where I am," and so he promises to be with them as we are here, and he promises further, that we will be with him in the future. Magnificent promises that the Son has given us truly, and they are truly the word of God. There are only two courses that are left for us, confession of him or denial.

One might ask, "What's the insurance then against heresy?" It's very simple; it's the word of God. Listen to what he says in verse 24 and 25, "As for you," that's the way verse 24 begins in the original text, "As for you, let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning," the gospel message that first came to us. "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." It's very simple, if his words abide in us, which he defines as "I abiding in you," then these promises are ours. He shall continue in the Son and in the Father. "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." For eternal, remember, is the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

I don't have time to talk further about that, I only say this; John Stott has said something very true. He has said, "The Christian, the genuine Christian, is always a conservative Christian." That is, he's a person who is by nature conservative in the sense; I'm not speaking politically, in the sense that he is anxious to conserve the doctrine that has been given over to him. To be always looking for something new in Christianity, whatever the fad may be, and I think John Wimber and his signs and wonders movement has some aspects of that, not all, but some.

The various other kinds of things that hover on the fringes of Christianity come like a little star that finally moves off into nowhere, all of these things are as Mr. Stott says so clearly I think, "Athenian," Athenian, not Christian. May God deliver us from that kind of thing, to be interested in the fads, to be interested in the things that are new. We ought to be interested in the things that are old that have stood the test of nineteen hundred plus years. As a matter of fact, have stood the test through the ages of Moses and prophets as well, for thousands of years, they've stood the test. They are things with which we are to concern ourselves, the things that really matter. He says it all, that what is provided is eternal life, and Jesus Christ pledges himself to the securing of that promise.

I've been reading, I'm almost through with this book by John Leith, it's entitled *The Informed Imperative: What the Church Has To Say That No One Else Can Say*. That's what I've been trying to do this morning, incidentally, *What the Church Has To Say That No One Else Can Say*. Gorbachev cannot say it, poor soul, Reagan cannot say it, tired man, who wouldn't be tired after a week over there and what he's been engaged in; no social philosopher, no philosopher, no psychologist can say the things that the church can say. We deal with the ultimate realities. John Leith is Pemberton Professor of Theology at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. It's a very interesting little book, I wouldn't ascribe to everything in it, but most of the things in it he says, not only says truly, but says very well.

One of the things he comments upon is the fact that in contemporary theology today there is a silence about either eternal life, or the consummation of all things. He says it's even pervasive in our contemporary society that we, in our contemporary theology and society that we have a continuing silence about eternal life. Think of it, why, "it's one of the oldest and most pervasive of

all human ideas," he said. And then he comments on some things rather interesting. I have read things that George Kennan has written, because I have taken *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, and occasionally read his articles, because he's one of the foremost experts on Soviet Russia. Mr. Kennan is a very dedicated Christian, so John Leith says, and Mr. Leith is a Christian man, and he says, "In our own day, an impressive witness has been given by George Kennan." For many years he was the representative of the United States in the Soviet Union, our ambassador.

He was deeply impressed with the dreariness of a Soviet Funeral, and he wrote Mr. Leith a personal letter, in it he said this, "As an adequate and enduring personal philosophy, Marxism has many deficiencies, but the greatest of them is that it has, in contrast to Christianity, no answer to the phenomenon of death. This is why there is nothing more pathetic than a Marxist funeral, for to the Marxist, this formality celebrates nothing more than an inexplicable, unpreventable, and profoundly discouraging event in the human experience. Unable to give meaning to death, Marxism is unable to give meaning to life, for death's part of life my friend. This helplessness is the guarantee of its impermanence, and ultimate failure as a personal and political ideology."

Look, the Christian hope in the presence of death is not simply for survival. The Bible teaches us that when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we have eternal life from that time. We're not talking about simply survival; everybody is going to survive in one or two conditions of life. But the Christian survives in the knowledge of God. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Mr. Leith says very truly that "the death of a Christian is not a fate which overwhelms him. It's an act in which the believer participates as well as the church, in the committal, handing over to the keeping of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, one's life work and the fate of conscious personality itself." That's what we are saying when we say with the Nicene Creed, I "look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Without this hope, the Christian faith makes no sense at all.

He concludes by saying, "If George Kennan is right, that a social movement such as Communism cannot finally succeed because it has not answer for the problem of death. This is even

more true of a religion, and especially a faith that proclaims a way of life that cannot be justified on the plane of history. If you talk about a Christian faith, and say it has these hopes, and you cannot show in history the fundamental grounds of that faith, such as in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the real historical incarnation, and his real historical death, and his real resurrection in bodily form," I added those words, "then it cannot be justified. As the old proverb put it, 'a live dog is always better than a dead lion.'" That's the impression that I get of modern theology, and modern political theory, and modern sociological theory, "a live dog is better than a dead lion," anything to stay alive. A Christian cannot buy that philosophy. The Christian does not say, "Anything to stay alive." We have life, we know that our life shall come to an end; it is part of our life. It's an act, it's an event in the future, but we know he shall preserve us through it. We have hope that the eternal life which we possess, given us by the one said, "I am the resurrection and the life," we shall be preserved through death. Look, we are not dead dogs, we're not dead lions; we're living, ever living lions, by virtue of the lion of the tribe of Judah. That's what we are.

So we look into the future with hope and anticipation. Not that we don't fear death, I don't look forward to that at all. I'm sure that it can be a most unpleasant experience. I've sat at the bedside of too many people, to know that, but I know it, for a Christian, is an act by which we are entered into the presence of the Lord. If you are here, and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, that hope is not yours. You do not have it. You only have it by the confession of the Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ. May God in his marvelous grace cause you to see your lost condition, and may you flee to the Son for the gift of eternal life. He's loyal to his word, and will preserve you throughout the ages to come in the knowledge of the true God. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord, for the gift of the Apostle John to the Christian church. How we have been strengthened as we have given attention to the words that Thou didst give to him. O Father, by Thy grace enable us to...

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“Christ Loyal to His Word” by S. Lewis Johnson
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