

TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF ANTICHRIST

In varying degrees traditional Christian theology applies the principle of antichrist, and the vast majority of Christians, including ministers and theologians, adhere to the principle of antichrist, albeit for the most part unconsciously and unintentionally. It is no exaggeration to say that today's Christianity is saturated with preaching and teaching that follows the principle of antichrist and that influences the believers, especially those who are earnestly seeking the Lord, to order their lives according to the principle of antichrist. Such a claim may seem startling, even shocking, but my intention is neither to shock nor to engage in hyperbole or sensationalism. In fact, a reaction of shock in many respects may underscore the pervasive tendency within Christianity to associate the term *antichrist* only with the objective, prophetic appearance of the man of sin, rather than with the subjective principle that the apostle John clearly associates with this term. And in so doing, most believers may feel that they are appropriately prepared for the antichrist even though the very principle of antichrist is operative in their understanding of truth and pursuing of the Lord. Given this, my pressing burden is twofold: first, to call attention to a matter of utmost urgency and seriousness—the damaging effect of embracing a theology or of living a Christian life that is according to the principle of antichrist; second, in light of the divine revelation concerning the cross of Christ and the centrality of Christ in God's economy, to testify of God's way to be delivered from the principle of antichrist and to experience and enjoy the all-inclusive Christ.

Many Antichrists and the Principle of Antichrist

There are four verses in his Epistles where the apostle John speaks of antichrist, verses that imply a principle: in 1 John 2:18 he says that “many antichrists have come”; in verse 22 he declares that the antichrist is “the one who denies the Father and the Son”; in 4:3 he asserts that “every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God” but is “the spirit of the antichrist”; and in 2 John 7 he tells us that the antichrists, deceivers who have gone

by Ron Kangas

out into the world, “do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.” These words make it emphatically clear that an antichrist is one who denies that Jesus is the eternal, uncreated, only begotten Son of God, one who denies that Jesus Christ is God, the great I Am (John 8:58), come in the flesh. However, John says that “many antichrists have come,” and this fact implies a principle—the principle of antichrist. Anyone who adheres to, follows, or practices the principle of antichrist is in the category of antichrist to some extent.

“Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). Here the word *denies* is used twice, first of the liar who denies that Jesus is the Christ and then of the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. This indicates that the principle of antichrist is to deny what Christ is:

What principle must one follow in order to be an antichrist? He must follow the principle of denying what Christ is. Jesus is the Christ, Christ is the Son of God, and

the Son of God is the embodiment of the Father. To deny any aspect of this truth is to deny something of what Christ is and thereby to follow the principle of antichrist....What makes a person an antichrist, at least in principle, is that he denies some aspect of what Christ is. (Lee, *First John* 272)

We will receive a further understanding of the principle of antichrist if we pay attention to the dual meaning of the Greek prefix *anti*. First, this prefix means “against”; second, it means “in place of” or “instead of.” On the one hand, the principle of antichrist involves something that is anti Christ, something that is against Christ, something that denies what Christ is. On the other hand, the principle of antichrist involves something that is in place of or instead of Christ, something that replaces Christ. One who practices the principle of antichrist is therefore one who is both against Christ and who replaces Christ with something other than Christ. Regarding this, Witness Lee issues a serious warning:

We must be careful never to deny anything of what Christ is. We should never deny any part, any aspect, or any item of Christ’s Person. To deny any aspect of Christ’s Person is to practice the principle of antichrist. Some who hear this may say, “I certainly am not an antichrist, for I am not against Christ.” One may not be against Christ or deny Christ consciously. But unconsciously we may deny some aspect of Christ’s Person and then replace this aspect with something else. (273)

Certain liberal, modernist theologians and ministers practice the principle of antichrist when they deny that Christ died on the cross as the Redeemer, the One who made propitiation for our sins (Heb. 2:17) and who Himself is the sacrifice of propitiation (1 John 2:2). In their view, Christ died not as the Redeemer but as a martyr or an example of love. In a public lecture one of these theologians audaciously declared that it is immoral to claim that the Lord Jesus died a substitutionary, vicarious death for our sins and that He shed His blood for our redemption. To deny that Christ died as our Redeemer is to deny a crucial aspect of His person and work, and to replace the Redeemer with a martyr is to replace the truth concerning Christ with an idolatrous notion of the unrenewed mind. Theologians who deny that Christ is the Redeemer are antichrists in both senses of the word: They deny an aspect of Christ’s person, and they replace Christ with something that is not Christ.

Denying Any Aspect of What Christ Is

One need not be a heretic in order to follow the principle of antichrist. Anyone who denies any aspect of Christ’s person, any aspect of what Christ is as the unique God-man, is practicing the principle of antichrist. In a previous

article (“Christ Is Everything,” Vol. II, No. 2) we bore witness to the biblical revelation that Christ is everything, that Christ is the reality of God, of humanity, and of every positive thing in the universe. If we embrace the totality of the divine revelation in the Scriptures, we will testify that Christ is all-inclusive. As the One who is everything, Christ is the complete God, a perfect man, the mystery of God, the embodiment of the Triune God, the only begotten Son, the effulgence of God’s glory and the impress of His substance, the Word, the centrality and universality of God’s economy, the Creator and the Firstborn of all creation, the reality of every positive thing, the Son of Man, the God-man, the Christ—God’s anointed and appointed One, the reality of all divine attributes and human virtues, the firstborn Son of God, the Redeemer, the Savior, salvation, the Lord, the Bridegroom, the great Shepherd of the sheep, the Judge, the High Priest, everything in the new covenant, the portion of the saints, the life of the believers, the One who is everything to the believers and everything in the church, and the marvelous, wonderful One who is preeminent in all things. A great many earnest believers, lacking the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, neither know nor experience such an all-inclusive Christ. Sadly, some even deny the all-inclusiveness of Christ or at least deny certain aspects of what Christ is as the all-inclusive One.

Denying That Christ Is Everything

Some deny the revelation, presented particularly in the book of Colossians, that Christ is the reality of every positive thing in the universe. Not infrequently this denial of the all-inclusiveness of Christ is concealed under the cloak of a false accusation—the claim that those who testify from the Scriptures that Christ is everything are pantheists. Pantheism, derived from the Greek *pan*, “all,” and *theos*, “God,” is the belief that nature and God are identical; it is the error of equating God with nature and worshipping it. Van A. Harvey gives a more sophisticated definition when he says that pantheism is “the doctrine that all things and beings are modes, attributes, or appearances of one single reality or being” (173). A fuller definition is offered by Terry L. Miethe:

The world view that denies God’s transcendence and teaches that the substance of God and the substance of the physical universe are in some sense identical; reality is composed of a single being of which all things are modes, moments, members, appearances or projections. (152)

By any definition pantheism is contrary to the Word of God, which clearly and emphatically upholds the transcendence of God and the distinction between Creator and creature. One is not a pantheist simply because he takes seriously the Lord’s testimony concerning Himself: “I am the bread” (John 6:35), “I am the light” (8:12), “I am the

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door” (10:9), “I am the true vine” (15:1). Only those who are grossly foolish and erring in heart would equate Christ with the physical, material substance of bread, light, a door, and a vine. Any literal identification of Christ with material things would involve the pantheistic identification of Christ and nature, a notion that we repudiate utterly and absolutely.

Far from asserting that Christ is literally every positive thing in the universe, we declare that all positive things, although actual and real substances, are signs of Christ as the reality. Andrew Murray is surely correct when he says, “All earthly things are the shadows of heavenly realities—the expression, in created, visible forms, of the invisible glory of God....He [Christ] is the divine reality, of which they are the created expression” (9). Witness Lee concurs:

God’s intention in His creation is to use the things of creation to illustrate the all-inclusive Christ. The entire universe came into existence for the purpose of describing Him....Because the universe with the billions of things and persons in it was created for the purpose of describing Christ, He, in revealing Himself to His disciples, could easily find in any environment something or someone to serve as an illustration of Himself. The whole universe is a picture of Christ. If we see this, we shall realize how rich, profound, unlimited, and unsearchable Christ is. Truly He is everything to us! (*Conclusion* 522)

The universe, instead of being identical with Christ, is a vast system of signs which, in Murray’s words, “point to Him, and preach Him, and reveal Him” (9). To believe this is not to embrace pantheism—it is to acknowledge the divine revelation in the Scriptures. To deny this truth is to deny Christ in His all-inclusiveness and in so doing to follow the principle of antichrist.

One may not deny the biblical revelation that Christ is everything but may deny a particular aspect of what Christ is. “No matter what a person’s intention may be, whether it is good or evil, as long as he denies any aspect of Christ’s Person, he is following the principle of antichrist, although

he may be doing so unconsciously” (Lee, *First John* 276). Those who follow traditional theology often deny six particular aspects of what Christ is—that Christ is the first among the creatures, that He is the Father, that He is the life-giving Spirit, that He is the indwelling One, that, as the bread of life, He is the edible One, and that He is our life.

Denying That Christ Is a Creature

Some theologians deny that Christ, who is the Creator, is also a creature, the first among all creatures. According to Colossians 1:15 Christ is the Firstborn of all creation, and according to verse 1:18 He is the Firstborn from the dead. As the Firstborn from the dead, Christ is the first One in resurrection. In the same principle, as the Firstborn of all creation, Christ is the first among God’s creatures. Certain theologians believe that Christ is the first One in resurrection but deny that He is the first among the creatures. This denial is in keeping with the principle of antichrist. Although such a denial may be made with the excellent intention of upholding the deity of Christ, it is nonetheless an application of the principle of antichrist.

With respect to His deity, Christ is the eternal God, and there “was not when He was not.” Contrary to Arius and his heretical descendants, Christ is the very God from eternity to eternity, not a semi-divine being created by the true God prior to the existence of the universe. Although Christ is God, with respect to His humanity He is a creature. He as the Word became flesh (1:1, 14), a created substance, and thereby became a human being, a creature with the created elements of blood and flesh (Heb. 2:14). As a creature and as the Firstborn of all creation, Christ occupies the first place, the position of preeminence. Regarding His deity He is the Creator; regarding His humanity, which is something created, He is a creature. To deny that Christ is the first among the creatures is to deny an aspect of Christ’s all-inclusive person. It is sadly ironic that theologians may uphold the deity of Christ in pursuit of orthodoxy yet simultaneously deny that Christ is a creature and therefore practice the principle of antichrist.

Denying That Christ Is the Father

Isaiah 9:6 says clearly concerning Christ that as the child born He is called the Mighty God and as the son given He is called the Eternal Father. Some have argued that the Father in this verse refers not to the Father in the Godhead but to another Father, the Father of eternity. This interpretation of Isaiah 9:6 implies a belief in two divine Fathers—the Father in the Godhead and the Father of eternity. What a heresy! The Father of eternity is the Father in the Godhead. Apart from the Father in the Godhead there is not another divine Father called *the Father of eternity*. Christ, the Son, is called the eternal Father,

the Father in the Godhead, and therefore in a very real sense He *is* the Father.

Because the Gospel of John affords us a marvelous revelation both of the eternal sonship of Christ and of the divine Fatherhood, this Gospel helps us to understand how the Son can be the Father. The Son, we are told in John 5:43, came in the Father's name. This means that He came as the Father. The Son also worked in the Father's name (10:25), lived because of the Father (6:57), did the Father's will (5:30; 6:38), spoke the Father's word (14:24; 7:16-17), did the Father's work (5:17, 19), sought the Father's glory (7:18), was one with the Father (10:30), and expressed the Father (14:7-9). Because Christ the Son did all this in the Father, with the Father, by the Father, and even as the Father, He may rightly be called the Father.

Such an assertion does not confuse the Son and the Father; neither does it obscure the distinction of the Father and the Son in the Godhead. For a proper understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son, we again appeal to the Gospel of John. This Gospel indicates that the Son may be called the Father because the Son and the Father eternally coexist in the way of coinherence. For the Father and the Son to coexist means that in the Godhead the two coexist at the same time; for the Father and the Son to coinhere means that in the Godhead the two dwell in each other and thereby exist in each other. This may be called a coinhering coexistence, that is, a coexistence in a relationship of eternal coinherence. This coinherence is revealed by the Lord Jesus Himself: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me" (John 14:10-11a). Here we see the mutual indwelling—the coinherence—of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father. Because of this coinherence, to see the Son is to see the Father. To behold the Son, who dwells in the Father and who is indwelt by the Father, is to see the Father who dwells in the Son. Because the Son came as the Father, with the Father, and in the Father, because the Son lived by the Father, spoke the Father's word, and accomplished the Father's word, and because the Son, coinhering with the Father, always expressed the Father, the Son, in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6, may be called the Father. To affirm this is to be faithful to the divine revelation in its purity and totality; to deny it is to follow the principle of antichrist.

Denying That Christ Is the Life-giving Spirit

Another example of the application of the principle of antichrist is the denial of the truth that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. First Corinthians 15:45b emphatically says that the last Adam, Christ in the flesh, became a life-giving Spirit in resurrection. Some try to avoid the

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implications of the verse by saying that it speaks of "a life-giving Spirit," not "the life-giving Spirit." Are there two life-giving Spirits? In addition to the Holy Spirit who gives life, is there another Spirit who gives life? To claim that there are two Spirits who give life is to teach a great heresy. Through His resurrection and in His resurrection, Christ became a life-giving Spirit. Surely, this life-giving Spirit, the Spirit who gives life, is the Holy Spirit.

The Christ who is the life-giving Spirit in 1 Corinthians 15:45b is the Lord who is the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:17 and the Lord Spirit in verse 18. "The Lord is the Spirit" (v. 17). As the context makes evident, *the Lord* here refers not to the Lord God but to the Lord Jesus Christ. *The Lord* in this verse, as in verses 16 and 18, surely refers to the Lord Jesus. The strong word in verse 17 that Christ the Lord is the Spirit is confirmed by the particular title of Christ in verse 18—*the Lord Spirit*. The Christ who is the life-giving Spirit is the Lord Spirit, the Lord who is the Spirit. To deny this is to be anti, against, a precious aspect of Christ's person.

Denying That Christ Is the Indwelling One

The New Testament emphatically and repeatedly reveals that Christ dwells in the believers. "Christ is in you" (Rom. 8:10). "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). "Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Cor. 13:5). "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). "Christ...lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Despite this clear revelation regarding the indwelling Christ, certain theologians and Bible teachers are anti the indwelling Christ and deny the divine fact that He actually lives in the believers. In their denial some insist that the biblical statements concerning Christ's dwelling in the believers should be taken not literally but metaphorically. According to their opinion the verses quoted above do not mean what they say but are nothing more than symbolic utterances that refer to the intimate relationship between Christ and the believers. One prominent apologist, who regards himself as a defender of the faith and a discernor of heresy, has gone so far as to say that it is meaningless to speak of Christ being in us. Those who

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speakers in such a presumptuous manner need to ponder Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Test yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?"

Others have a more subtle approach in denying the New Testament teaching concerning Christ's dwelling in the believers. They argue that since the resurrected Christ has a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39) and since it is impossible for one with such a body to dwell in us, Christ does not really live in us but is represented in us by the Holy Spirit. Using common and traditional jargon, they may claim that Christ dwells in us "in the Holy Spirit." There is a clever attempt to avoid the truth. The Bible does not say that Christ is represented in us by the Holy Spirit or that Christ comes into us *in* the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Word of God reveals that Christ, who became pneumatic in and through resurrection, lives in us *as* the Spirit. On the one hand, the resurrected Christ has a body of flesh and bones; on the other hand, through resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit in order to dwell in us (John 14:16-20; 20:22; 1 Cor. 6:17). Since both statements are true, both should be believed, and neither should be denied.

Denying That Christ Is Edible

As God, Christ is great and is worthy to be worshipped by us; as our food, Christ is small and able to be eaten by us. God's desire is not only that we worship Christ as the Lord of all but also that we eat Him. A Christ who can be eaten by us is obviously an edible Christ—the Christ who is the bread of life (John 6:35, 48), the bread of God (v. 33), the true bread (v. 32), the living bread (v. 51), and the bread out of heaven (v. 32). He is "the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die" (v. 50). In verses 53 through 58 the Lord Jesus spoke strongly of our need to eat Him:

Jesus therefore said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within yourselves. He who

eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven, not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread shall live forever.

We may differ in how we interpret this matter of eating Christ, but one thing is clear: Christ, the bread of God, is edible.

Some, however, refuse to accept Christ in this aspect of His person and respond in a way reminiscent of those in John 6:60-61: "Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This word is hard; who can hear it? But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were murmuring about this, said to them, Does this stumble you?" Does it "stumble you" to hear that Christ is edible? Some believers cannot hear the hard word about eating Christ and try their best to avoid it, yet this is part of the divine revelation. God has provided Christ as the bread of life, and He desires not only that we eat Him but also that we digest Him, assimilate Him, be constituted with Him, live by Him, and express Him. All this may be horrifying to the religious mind, but it is a faithful witness to God's desire that His people appropriate Christ as food and then live by this edible Christ. To deny this aspect of Christ is to be an antichrist.

Denying That Christ Is Our Life

In the words of the apostle Paul, the Christ who is edible, the Christ who is the bread of life, is "our life" (Col. 3:4). In Himself Christ is the eternal, divine, uncreated, indestructible life (John 14:6), and He came that we may have Him as this life (10:10). The only way to have the life that Christ is, the life that is called *the life*, is to have Christ, the Son of God: "God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:11b-12). Since we have believed into Christ as the One who is life and since we have received Him as the Son of God in whom is the life, Christ is now our life. To say that Christ is our life is actually to say that Christ has become subjective to us to the uttermost, that He has been wrought into our being organically and intrinsically to such an extent that in life He and we are inseparable. He truly is our life.

It is regrettable that many theologians deny this aspect of Christ. Some dismiss it as pietism or mysticism. Others deny the reality of Christ being the believers' life by explaining away Paul's word in Colossians as mere metaphor. Still others, confident in their dogmatism, have

stated that it is impossible for human beings to have the life of God. In their view, instead of being actual children of God, born of Him to have His life and nature, the believers are nothing more than adopted children, having a close relationship with God but not having an organic relationship with Him in life. Once again, the principle of antichrist is at work, and a vital aspect of Christ's person is denied.

Christ is all-inclusive: He is the reality of every positive thing, the first among the creatures, the Father, the life-giving Spirit, the indwelling One, the edible One, and the believers' life. To be against or to deny any aspect of this all-inclusive Christ is to practice the principle of antichrist.

Replacements of Christ

As we have indicated, the principle of antichrist involves not only denying some aspect of what Christ is but also replacing Christ with something else. In order to be impressed with the seriousness of this, we need to be reminded that God's intention in His economy is that Christ would be everything to us. God wants Christ and Christ alone. The will of God is that we would know, experience, and enjoy Christ in His all-inclusiveness. This is the revelation of the book of Colossians, a book which is focused on Christ as our everything and which reveals that our need is to be infused, saturated, and permeated with Christ until in our experience He is everything to us. God's desire is to work such a Christ into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people to produce the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem.

Watchman Nee was one who realized that, in the sight of God, Christ is everything. In a marvelous message entitled "Christ Is God's Matters and Things," he testifies concerning God's goal:

Colossians shows us that God's goal is Christ, and His means is also Christ. God's goal is for Christ to be Head over all things. In order to arrive at this, God must make Christ to be all....In God's eyes, there is only Christ....In God's eyes, Christ is everything. There is no matter, and there is no thing. Christ is all the matters, and Christ is all the things. When the day comes that Christ is in all matters and in all things, God's eternal purpose will be fulfilled....We have to realize that in our experience there are not many matters and things. In our experience, there is only Christ....All that God has given us is Christ Himself....God's Christ is God's matters....God's Christ is all things....A Christian does not have many matters; a Christian only has Christ. (129-132)

The problem today is that Christians have many things and matters, but they have very little of Christ. These things and matters are in the principle of antichrist because they are

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replacements of Christ, substitutes for Christ. God wants Christ to be all things, but the prevailing tendency among believers is to replace Christ with things. In a very real sense, today's Christianity is a system of substitutes for Christ. Because the principle of antichrist is so prevailing among God's people, Christ is being replaced in every way.

Christ is replaced by religion. Religion and Christ are incompatible. If we study the New Testament carefully, we will see that religion is against Christ and that Christ is versus religion, a theme that occupies special prominence in the book of Galatians. Religion is a vast, intricate substitute for Christ, and in the lives of countless people religion replaces Christ. Religion is dangerous, for it may cause one to be dominated by the principle of antichrist.

Christ is replaced by Bible knowledge. Some believers care more for the Bible than they care for Christ; they love the Bible more than they love Christ; and they know the Bible better than they know Christ. They are more interested in the letter of the Word than in the Christ revealed in the Word. The Lord's comments in John 5:39-40 are applicable here: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." To come to the Word without coming to Christ is to use the Word to replace Christ, and this is according to the principle of antichrist.

Christ is replaced by theology, especially by systematic theology with its attempt (inherently flawed) to convey the truths of the Bible through, or even to reduce the divine revelation to, a theological system. How easy it is to have a greater regard for one's theology than for Christ Himself! For example, one may have a correct doctrine of justification but not have Christ Himself as righteousness. Someone else may have a sound teaching concerning grace but not enjoy Christ Himself as grace. Those who replace Christ with doctrines and theology about Christ are in the category of antichrist. Even if their theology is not against Christ, it may become a replacement of Christ.

Christ is replaced by the law. God's intention in His New

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Testament economy is that Christ would replace the law in our lives for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. "Before faith came we were guarded under law, being shut up unto the faith which was to be revealed. So then the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ that we might be justified out of faith" (Gal. 3:23-24). As those who have been crucified with Christ, through law we have died to law that we might live to God (2:19). Instead of exerting ourselves to keep the law, we should allow Christ to live in us (v. 20) and be formed in us (4:19). Tragically, certain Bible teachers care not for Christ but for the law and, following the principle of antichrist, make the law a substitute for Christ and then influence others to do the same.

Christ is replaced by philosophy. Paul realized this and warned us about it: "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ; for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:8-9). Philosophy may be intriguing and alluring, but it can also be deceiving. One can be according to Christ or according to philosophy but not according to both. Christ is the One in whom "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (v. 3). Either our philosophy will replace Christ or Christ will replace our philosophy.

Christ is replaced by spiritual gifts. The New Testament speaks of various spiritual gifts, and the exercise of these gifts is certainly legitimate. The problem (and it is a serious one) is that we may pay more attention to gifts than to Christ. Believers may care for speaking in tongues but not for Christ; they may seek a "word of knowledge" but not Christ; they may pursue healing but neglect Christ.

Christ is replaced by signs, wonders, and miracles. When considering the principle of antichrist, whether or not today's so-called signs, wonders, and miracles are genuine is not the crucial question. Many earnest believers have been lured into a fascination with miracles, with each one seeking his or her miracle, but, in sharp contrast

to Paul in Philippians 3, they may have no interest in gaining Christ.

Christ is replaced by spirituality. In organized Christianity there is a substitute for Christ to match every temperament and proclivity. Some believers are interested neither in theology nor in the miraculous, but they are enamored with spirituality and are engaged in a constant quest for what they consider a deeper spiritual experience. They desperately desire to be spiritual, almost as if spirituality were an end in itself. However, instead of having Christ as their spirituality, their so-called spirituality becomes a replacement of Christ. Hence, it is a spirituality that is according to the principle of antichrist.

Christ is replaced by culture. This is a central theme in the book of Colossians, a book which reveals that either we have the all-inclusive Christ as a replacement of our culture or we have a culture that is a replacement of Christ. No matter what kind of culture we may have, if we live according to our culture and not according to Christ, our culture is antichrist. It is against Christ, and it replaces Christ. "Whatever our race or culture may be, we may replace Christ with our culture or with our way of having our daily life according to our culture. To replace Christ in this way is to practice the principle of antichrist" (Lee, *First John* 296).

Christ is replaced by tradition. Culture is closely related to tradition. When the ancient religionists criticized the Lord's disciples for transgressing "the tradition of the elders," He responded with a question: "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:2-3). Then He went on to say, "You have deprived the word of God of its authority because of your tradition" (v. 6). Today's religionists use tradition not only to deprive the word of God of its authority but also as a substitute for Christ. Before Christ was revealed in him by God the Father, Paul was a zealot for the traditions of his fathers (Gal. 1:14). Eventually, however, he received the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:8), and he counted these traditions as loss and even regarded them as refuse. As he labored to carry out his ministry to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ into others, he warned them of "the tradition of men" and encouraged them to walk in the all-inclusive Christ (Col. 2:8, 6) and to enjoy Him as their God-allotted portion (1:12). To replace such a wonderful One with human tradition is to live according to the principle of antichrist.

Christ is replaced by natural, human virtues. Few believers realize that there are such things as antichrist love, antichrist patience, and antichrist humility. God's intention is that Christ would be everything to us. This implies that Christ must be our virtues, including the virtues of love,

patience, and humility. However, instead of having Christ as our love, we may have a natural, human love as a substitute for Christ. Likewise, in place of Christ as our patience and humility, we may have our natural, human patience and humility. This love, patience, and humility replace Christ Himself and thus are in keeping with the principle of antichrist.

Christ is replaced by the self. In Galatians 2:20 Paul testified, “I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” For Paul it was “not I but Christ.” For the vast majority of believers today, it is “not Christ but I.” How many ministers stand in their pulpits as antichrists, expressing the self instead of Christ! It is common for television preachers to exhibit the self, often in a flamboyant, ostentatious manner, in place of Christ. In our daily living it is so easy for all of us to live by the self and magnify the self instead of Christ. Rarely can we find ministers, preachers, evangelists, and professors of theology who glorify Christ and not the self.

What a tragedy that in today’s Christianity Christ is being replaced in every way! God wants Christ to be everything to us, but we seem to have everything and anything instead of Christ. The principle of antichrist is spreading everywhere, and virtually every believer has been affected by it. Nevertheless, God will not be defeated, and His purpose will not be frustrated. He will head up all things in Christ, and He will have the new man, where “Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:10-11). In order for this to take place, a good number of His people must be willing to be delivered from the principle of antichrist and to be recovered to the experience and enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ. This deliverance and recovery require a thorough repentance. We need to repent “for replacing Christ with other things. We need to repent for having a daily living that is in the principle of antichrist, that allows culture, religion, ethics, and natural concepts to replace Christ” (Lee, *1 John* 297).

Delivered from the Principle of Antichrist

If we would be delivered from the principle of antichrist, we need to have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. In Philippians 3:8 Paul, writing with intimate, tender feelings concerning Christ, speaks of “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Before Christ was revealed to him by the Father (Gal. 1:15-16), he appreciated the law and had an excellent knowledge of the law. But one day, while he was on the road to Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly shined upon him, and he was knocked to the ground. At that time he had a vision of Someone more excellent than the law—the Son of the living God. From that time onward Paul knew that Christ was infinitely superior to the law and

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all other things. Gradually, through his experience with the Lord, Paul began to receive an excellent knowledge of the supreme preciousness and surpassing worth of the all-inclusive Christ, eventually coming to know Him as the mystery of God, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, and the reality of every positive thing in the universe. On account of the excellency of the knowledge of the incomparable Christ, Paul was willing, even desirous, of counting all things to be loss, especially the things of religion and culture. Not only did he count all things to be loss; he suffered the loss of all things and then counted them as refuse, as rubbish thrown to dogs. This is the attitude of one who has been emancipated from the principle of antichrist.

In order to receive the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, we need to receive a revelation of the all-inclusiveness of Christ. The word *knowledge* in Philippians 3:8 actually refers to a revelation, a vision, concerning Christ and His excellence. In using the word *revelation*, I am not suggesting that we need a revelation in addition to that which is recorded in the Scriptures; rather, we need a revelation, an unveiling, of the wonderful Christ presented in the Scriptures. Only by revelation, only by the Father’s gracious and merciful removal of the veils that hinder us from knowing Christ, can we have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Because “no one fully knows the Son except the Father” (Matt. 11:27), knowing the Son requires that the Father reveal Him to us (16:17). Acutely aware of our desperate need of revelation, Paul prayed that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” would give us “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him” and that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened (Eph. 1:17-18). If we have revelation, light, and sight, we will see a vision of the supreme preciousness of Christ in His all-inclusiveness.

The light that enables us to appreciate Christ is the same light that exposes everything that replaces Christ. At the conclusion of a message entitled “Christ Only—Not Matters or Things,” Watchman Nee prayed, “May a little light enter us, and may it shine through all falsehood and all

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performance so that we would see the replacements and everything that is not You" (161). Without the light that exposes the "antichrists" within us, there can be no deliverance from the principle of antichrist.

God is light (1 John 1:5), and this light exposes our real condition and makes manifest the hidden things, especially the concealed substitutes for Christ (Eph. 5:13). "Light functions by making the hidden things manifest. Light is that which exposes the hidden things. Being enlightened is having the hidden things exposed" (Nee, "God Is Light" 697). It is only through the shining of the divine light that we can discern the true nature of things. "In Thy light we see light" (Psa. 36:9b). Regarding the two occurrences of *light* in this verse, Watchman Nee remarks:

This tells us that a man can only see real light and realize the true nature of things through God's light. The first occurrence of the word "light" in this verse means the enlightening light, and the second occurrence of "light" means the true nature of things. The first "light" refers to the light that comes from God's enlightening, and the second "light" is the facts that one sees, that is, the facts that are revealed under God's enlightening." ("Obsession and Light" 899)

Under God's enlightening we can discern the true nature of those things that are anti Christ and instead of Christ. The more we are in the light, the more we will realize that in our actual and practical Christian life, Christ has been replaced by many things, such as our antichrist religion, our antichrist culture, and our antichrist virtues.

The more we are enlightened in this way, the more we will agree with God's verdict on everything that is according to the principle of antichrist—termination through crucifixion. If the divine light exposes us, shattering our self-confidence and disclosing our real situation, we will be humbled and subdued, willing to receive the application of the cross of Christ to everything that is anti Christ. Light exposes and the cross terminates. By this divine means of deliverance God strips us of everything that is a substitute for Christ.

This stripping prepares the way for something marvelous—the blessing of being constituted with the all-inclusive Christ and the joy of allowing Him to replace all the replacements with Himself until He becomes all and in all (Col. 3:11). God's intention is that Christ would be everything to us. In order to fulfill this intention (which must eventually be carried out with every genuine believer in Christ), God exposes us, strips us, dispenses Himself into us in Christ as the life-giving Spirit, and constitutes us with Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ as the corporate expression of Christ. The more we experience this process, the more we will forsake the principle of antichrist and be gained by God for His purpose. This is what God desires, and this is what we need.

Regarding the principle of antichrist there can be no neutrality. We are either constituted with Christ or we are filled with replacements of Christ. May the Lord give us the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and may He grant us the grace to receive His shining and accept His stripping so that, in reality, the all-inclusive Christ, the Christ who is everything, may be wrought into us and expressed through us to the glory of God the Father.

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