

TRUTH AFLAME

By Cornelius R. Stam

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THE SPIRIT OF FEAR and THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

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From his prison cell in Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote to his beloved Philippian co-workers about a desire that filled his heart and should fill ours:

“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20).

TRUTH ON ICE

Many theologians, Bible teachers and Christian workers have a great amount of truth stored away—“on ice,” as it were; everything neatly catalogued and in order in the files of their minds.

The spiritual leaders of our Lord’s day had much truth—on ice—but by contrast we read of our Lord that “He taught them as one having authority and *not as the scribes*” (Matt. 7:29).

There is great danger that, unaware of “Satan’s devices,” the second and third generation of “grace” believers will have the truth of the mighty revelation committed to Paul “on ice,” but that it will not be aflame in their hearts. To be technically correct in one’s viewpoint is quite different from speaking the truth with conviction in the power of the Spirit.

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It is all fine to have truth “on ice,” all accurately and systematically classified, but it will not produce really favorable results until it is translated into *conviction*, and is like a burning fire with us, a fire that compels us to speak out and urge its importance upon others.

Jeremiah learned a lesson about this. Discouraged in his God-given ministry, he said:

“...I am in derision daily; every one mocked me.

“...the Word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily.

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“Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. BUT HIS WORD WAS IN MINE HEART AS A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES. AND I WAS WEARY WITH FORBEARING, AND I COULD NOT STAY” (Jer. 20:7-9).

Jeremiah has been called “the weeping prophet.” The message God committed to him was anything but pleasant. If, therefore, that message was like a burning fire, shut up in his bones, and he became weary with forbearing and could not hold his peace, how much more should this be so with us, to whom our exalted Lord has committed the most glorious good news ever sent from God to man!

Later in his prophecy, Jeremiah wrote:

“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.

“IS NOT MY WORD LIKE AS A FIRE? SAITH THE LORD; AND LIKE A HAMMER THAT BREAKETH THE ROCK IN PIECES?” (Jer. 23:28, 29).

The crying need of our day is for “grace” believers who not only have the Pauline message “straight,” but who are *deeply convicted* of its truth and of the urgent need to make it known; whose *consciences* will not allow them to remain silent about it. We need men who will earnestly pray the prayer of the Apostle Paul:

“...that utterance may be given unto me, THAT I MAY OPEN MY MOUTH BOLDLY, to make known the mystery of the gospel...THAT THEREIN I MAY SPEAK BOLDLY, AS I OUGHT TO SPEAK” (Eph. 6:19, 20).

THE “COLD SHOULDER “

The grace that flows from Calvary, is a constant embarrassment to Satan and he hates the proclamation of the unadulterated “gospel of the grace of God” with a deep and bitter hatred. But Satan is a master strategist, and he knows that the “cold shoulder” and the “silent boycott” often have a devastating effect. They often do *more* to stop the mouths of sincere believers than will open opposition. And where the truth of the Pauline revelation is concerned, we have entered the era of the “cold shoulder” and the “silent boycott.”

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Our fundamentalist and evangelical brethren who are still striving in vain to carry out the so-called “great commission” do not openly oppose us; they cannot answer us Scripturally.¹ They rather give us the “cold shoulder,” and shut us out with the “silent boycott,” that devastating strategy which says: “Just don’t mention them. Act as if they did not exist.” Any man of God who dares to say openly: “I do not believe that water baptism is included in God’s program for today,” soon feels the effect of the “cold shoulder” and the “silent boycott.” Yet those who thus exclude such a man of God are themselves so divided on the subject that the confusion is appalling.

AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

But the “silent boycott” is not so devastating a weapon after all when met with faith. We who rejoice in “*the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery*” may accept the “silent boycott” as a spiritual challenge and win the battle.

When the twelve apostles were so bitterly persecuted by Israel’s spiritual leaders, it did not intimidate them. They were not silenced, but served notice on their rulers that they intended to serve God rather than men, saying: “*We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20).

But neither were they silenced when Satan changed his tactics and, through Gamaliel, one of Israel’s most respected leaders, advised the Jewish council to “leave them alone” (Acts 5:38). When the leaders did leave the disciples alone, acting for a time as though they did not exist, it gave the disciples a grand opportunity to spread their message far and wide. They had the floor unchallenged. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the apostles and disciples “*ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ*” (Acts 5:42).

This is exactly what our response should be to those who would silence us by ignoring the God-given message we proclaim. *They* are hopelessly confused and divided where baptism and the “great commission” are concerned. Yet, when we show them from Scripture how this commission, with its baptismal salvation, miraculous signs, etc., is not included in God’s program for the dispensation of grace, to many of them close their hearts and minds to the truth—and to us.

¹ We thank God for the hundreds of concerned believers who have been ordering our book *Our Great Commission* in quantity for distribution, but hundreds of others should be helping to send it to pastors and Bible teachers everywhere. Simply pointing out precisely what the “great commission” *says* and what it does *not say*, we believe this book is unanswerable.

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We should meet this situation as the early disciples did. We should face our spiritual leaders anew, and more energetically than ever, with the truth of the mystery revealed to Paul, with its “one Body” and its “one baptism.” We should face them with the inconsistency, not to say the fallacy, of trying to carry out those parts of the “great commission” which *they have chosen* to obey, while ignoring, or explaining away, the rest. We should press home to their consciences the utter confusion which has resulted from this procedure, and the division it has caused among sincere believers everywhere.

Rather than becoming discouraged because it seems difficult to get folks interested in the Word, rightly divided, we should accept the present “silent boycott” as a grand opportunity to make the truth known far and wide. As we sincerely seek to help men understand God’s message for the world today and His program for the Church today, He will surely not fail us, but will give us the power of the Spirit in our witness for Him.

But there are certain basic prerequisites to a Spirit-empowered testimony.

IMPORTANT PREREQUISITES

1. SINCERE BIBLE STUDY

If we expect others to care what God says in His Word, *we* must care—deeply and sincerely. It should be of paramount importance to us that “God hath spoken.”

Here a superficial and technical study of the Bible is not enough. We must study that Blessed Book with a sincere desire to rightly divide it, *so that* we may *understand* it and *obey* it.

Read the epistles of Paul and note how he prayed for the saints to whom he wrote, earnestly imploring God that they might be given spiritual insight to see the glory of the message he proclaimed.

Paul was not satisfied with so many “votes” for the “grace message.” He wanted men to be gripped by it, so that they might be convicted of the urgency of imparting it to others. And it is the same in all three of his recorded prayers. We quoted fragments from these prayers, as follows:

“...making mention of you in my prayers;

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him:

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know...what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe...” (Eph. 1:16-19).

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“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

“May be able to comprehend with all saints....

“...that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:16-19).

“For this cause we...do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

“Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power....” (Col. 1:9-11).

Note, in the above passages, how a Spirit-empowered ministry is predicated upon an intelligent understanding of the “will” of God—His purpose and program.

Many shallow Christians are satisfied with “the simple things” of the Bible and want nothing more, but God’s Word says:

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

“BUT GOD HATH REVEALED THEM UNTO US BY HIS SPIRIT: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:9-10).

It was not to the credit of the carnal Corinthian believers that a clear understanding of the Word of God meant so little to them. It rather went to show that they did not sincerely wish to *obey* the Scriptures.

Let us then study the Word of God with a sincere desire to understand, and *then live up to the light received*, for it is only thus that we may expect the power of the Spirit in our witness for Christ.

2. FERVENT PRAYER

If we have placed the Word of God before prayer in this article, it is because God’s Word to us is always more important than anything we might have to say to Him.

Even the study of the Word, however, must be done prayerfully, never neglecting the plea that we ourselves and “all saints” may be able to “comprehend” the blessed truths of “the mystery” revealed in Pauline epistles.

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The time has come for many of us to stop playing at prayer, merely asking God for secondary blessings, when we should be more deeply concerned about the condition of the Church, kneeling before the throne of grace in fervent supplication for ourselves and others, that we may see the glory and power of the message God has committed to us, so that in turn we may be *fruitful* in our ministry as we make known to a sin-cursed world “the exceeding riches of His grace.”

3. GODLY LIVING

We should be “dead in earnest” about our conduct as Christians too.

It is not without significance that when Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus, those young pastors who meant so much to him, his chief subject was *godliness*. He wanted these brethren to live close to God, seeking sincerely to enjoy His fellowship and obey His will.

True godliness exerts enormous power, while the permissiveness so prevalent in Christian circles today neutralizes all the good teaching and all the good deeds in which believers may engage.

Too few believers realize this. Too many have “a form of godliness” but experience little of “*the power thereof*.” They want to be in the mainstream of “Christian” activity. They are conformed to this world, often trying to win the lost to Christ by joining *them* and becoming involved in *their* interests. This is the *wrong* approach.²

It is said of John Wesley that when he merely appeared among unsaved people many would tremble. This was surely not because Wesley sought to be one of them. It was rather because he was *different*, a truly godly man whose life and preaching were a rebuke to their unregenerate condition.

4. FAITHFUL WITNESS

If Jeremiah’s God-given message burned like a fire within him, so that he *could not* remain silent about it, how much more should we be constrained by the love of God to bear witness to the good news of His grace! How it should touch our hearts every day that we can say to any sinner what Paul said to the unsaved Corinthians: “*Christ died for our sins*”!

How we should strive to study the Word, earnestly pray, and live godly lives, *so as to bear effective witness* to God’s grace in Christ! How we should pray that we might speak *boldly*, without reserve!

² See the editor’s book, *The Present Peril, The New Evangelicalism*.

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The Apostle Paul, by divine inspiration, places great emphasis on boldness where witness to the message of grace is concerned. Urging his readers to “*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might,*” and to “*put on the whole armor of God,*” he asks unceasing and fervent prayer for “all saints, *and,*” as we have seen, for *himself*.

“...and for me, THAT UTTERANCE MAY BE GIVEN UNTO ME, THAT I MAY OPEN MY MOUTH BOLDLY, TO MAKE KNOWN THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL,

“For which I am an ambassador in bonds; THAT THEREIN I MAY SPEAK BOLDLY, AS I OUGHT TO SPEAK” (Eph. 6:19, 20).

Note the words “*and for me,*” in this passage. Would anyone suspect that *Paul* would need prayer for boldness? Yet here he singles out himself as *particularly* in need of such prayer. Evidently he was *not* bold by nature, but needed special grace to speak out confidently. To the Corinthians he wrote:

“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (I Cor. 2:3).

Indeed, the sacred record relates how, while at Corinth, he needed special encouragement from God to speak boldly:

“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision. BE NOT AFRAID, BUT SPEAK, AND HOLD NOT THY PEACE:

“For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9, 10).

Satan would shut our mouths. He would use every trick and device to neutralize our testimony and make us “unprofitable servants.” But we should be aware of “the wiles of the devil,” and “not ignorant of his devices.” And by God’s grace we should obey his fourfold exhortation to “*stand,*” (Eph. 6:10-18), wielding “the Sword of the Spirit” as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting, in this connection, to compare the earlier passages in the Ephesians epistle with the Apostle’s closing exhortation in Ephesians 6. In Ephesians 1:9 he declares that God has “*made known* unto us the mystery of His will.” In Verses 15-21 he prays that “*all the saints*” may be given the spirit of “wisdom and revelation” to understand it. In Ephesians 3:14-19 he prays again most earnestly, that *all* the saints “may be able to *comprehend*” it.

But now in Ephesians 6:18-20, he prays—again for “*all saints,*” that they may be given “*utterance,*” and may open their mouths *boldly*, to proclaim this same precious truth.

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We are well aware that some sincere believers simply do not have the gift of speech. It is difficult for them to say much about anything. Such can, however, carry out the *spirit* of Paul's appeal, for faithful witness is not confined to oral testimony alone. Such can proclaim the truth through "grace" literature, prayerfully distributed, or by sponsoring—or helping to sponsor—radio broadcasts over which "the gospel of the grace of God" and the mystery are clearly presented. Some of God's choicest saints "never say much," but such saints will not use this as an excuse for failing to make known *aggressively*, in one way or another, the most wonderful good news to be found in all the Word of God.

We appeal, then, to all of our readers who have come to rejoice with us in riches of grace contained in the precious "*mystery*," or *secret*, revealed to Paul: Let us make our one great desire that which filled the heart of our beloved Apostle—expressed in the passage with which we opened this article:

"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." (Phil. 1:20).

Let us not be satisfied to have God's truth "on ice." Let us ask Him, rather, to set it aflame in our hearts.

THE SPIRIT OF FEAR AND THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

THE SPIRIT OF FEAR
**"God hath not given us the spirit of fear...."
—II Timothy 1:7**

We believe that to Paul first was committed "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" and "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Eph. 3:1-3; Acts 20:24).

We believe that to Paul first was committed "*the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery*" (Rom. 16:25).

We believe that the great message committed to Paul and proclaimed by him *superseded* that committed to the eleven and proclaimed by them at Pentecost.

We believe that in the "*one faith*" proclaimed by Paul there is but "*one body*" and "*one baptism*" (Eph. 4:4, 5).

"FOR BY ONE SPIRIT ARE WE ALL BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY..." (I Cor. 12:13).

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We believe that this “one baptism” into Christ and His Body supersedes the two Baptisms of Pentecost: both the baptism with water for the remission of sins and that within, or in, the spirit for miraculous powers (Acts 2:38; 1:5, 8).

One would think that the Scriptures are so unmistakably plain and emphatic on these subjects that no one could possibly misunderstand, and that every teacher of the Word would do his part to make them known, but not so. Why?

The answer is not a pleasant one. To be sure, *some* have not yet seen these precious truths, but the number of these is decreasing steadily. Most of our spiritual leaders have come into contact with these truths again and again, but they avoid honestly facing up to them. Why? To this writer their conduct appears to add up to but one answer: *fear*.

Some Christian leaders profess to feel so badly that we have fallen into some kind of heresy, but who of them has ever sought us out with the Word to try to set us straight? Almost none. They prefer, it seems, to let us drift away while they just feel sorry and pray! And when *we* seek to discuss the matter with *them* they find endless excuses.

We believe that matters so manifestly important should be eagerly and lovingly debated all over the land. The Church has made its greatest progress, spiritually, when vital subjects have been thus discussed. But this is the last thing our leading Bible teachers would consent to where the “great commission” and water baptism are concerned. They don’t want to touch this question with “a ten-foot pole.” It seems more than evident that they are *afraid* to face up to it.

There are also many who, in their hearts—and we have reason to *know* this—are already convinced that we speak the truth, but out of sheer, craven cowardice maintain a discreet silence or speak only confidentially to those whom they can trust not to cause them any embarrassment. The number of these, we are sure, is greater than most of our readers would imagine. Secretly they believe and rejoice in these truths, but what if they publicly owned up to this and began to proclaim them openly? In such cases the pastor sees the truth, but instead of exercising “*the spirit of faith*” and say with Paul: “*We believe and therefore speak,*” he lets “*the spirit of fear*” grip him with such questions as: “What would happen to my pastorate, my salary, that soon-earned pension or those three children I must put through college?” Actually something wonderful would happen about all these problems but somehow fear can never see what is so plain to faith.

It is not God who instills this spirit into His people; it is Satan. He would keep the Church from understanding those truths especially meant for her and would thus deprive her of theological unity and spiritual power in her ministry for Christ.

Thus Satan has succeeded in holding the Church in the grip of confusion and division simply by instilling the spirit of fear into the hearts of her spiritual leaders. The leaders fear for their own temporal welfare and the people, sheep-like, follow them and shun the most blessed truths of Scripture as they would a plague.

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But “*GOD hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and of a sound mind*” (II Tim. 1:7). May God graciously convict especially our Bible-believing leaders and show them that they have nothing really worthwhile to lose and all this is worthwhile to gain by honestly facing up to the truth and then *standing boldly and faithfully for it*. And may He further stir up His people in general to cast aside craven fear and be true Bereans, giving these teachings an open-minded hearing and then searching the Scriptures for themselves—daily—to see whether these things are so.

Only by following this course will we be able to close our lives on earth as Paul closed his life, and this epistle, with the words:

“I HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH:

“HENCEFORTH THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME A CROWN...” (II Tim. 4:7, 8).

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

“We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.” —II Corinthians 4:13

It is inspiring to hear the Psalmist, though “greatly afflicted,” say: “*I believed; therefore have I spoken*” (Psa. 116:10).

It is inspiring, too, to see the Apostle Paul, “troubled...perplexed...persecuted...cast down... always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake”—it is inspiring to see him take his stand with David and to hear him declare that he has “*the same spirit of faith,*” adding: “*We also believe and therefore speak*” (II Cor. 4:8-13).

If only all who believed the glorious message of grace: that believers in Christ are “accepted” *in Him* and “complete” in Him, baptized into “one body” by “one baptism” which the Spirit effects: if only all who in their heart of hearts believe the distinctive truths of the Pauline Epistles would speak out today, there would be a sweeping revival tomorrow in the Body of Christ.

If, putting aside all other considerations, they would take their stand with David and Paul and say: “*We also believe and therefore speak,*” the results would be as refreshing as amazing. And those who believe the heaven-sent message which Paul proclaimed *should* speak out, for this is “*the spirit of faith.*”

By God’s grace let us not drift with the crowd, with the multitude of those who no longer feel it matters that God’s Church is confused and divided; with those who say: “The mystery revealed to Paul certainly unlocks the Scriptures, but this message seems unpopular so we won’t say much about it.”

Rather, where the Word of God is concerned, let us stand with David and Paul and say: “*We also believe and therefore speak.*” This is “*the spirit of faith.*”