

Safeguards for the Soul

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The great majority of us are simple. A large proportion, converted within recent years, cannot in the nature of things be anything else; whilst there are many more who, though believers for long, have not made much headway in the Christian life, and in the matter of spiritual growth remain but babes.

In the second chapter of his first epistle the Apostle John divides up the family of God into three classes, which he names respectively "fathers," "young men" and "little children" or "babes," indicating in this way three stages of growth; and from 1 John 2: 14 to 28 of that chapter we get his special messages to each of the three classes.

To the fathers he speaks in the first part of the 14th verse; to the young men from the middle of the 14th down to the end of the 17th verse; to the babes from verse 18 to 28. It is quite likely that the space devoted to each class is directly proportioned to the *numerical* importance of each, then, as well as now.

Many dangers beset the path of the "babe" or simple Christian, but of them all the *worst* is that connected with false or anti-Christian teaching. A moment's reflection will show why this is so. Such teaching has nearly always an inoffensive appearance, it is merely a question of imbibing certain ideas, there is nothing about it repulsive or immoral, yet its effect is to subvert the soul and place it practically under the domination of Satan, the god of this world.

The breakdown of a young Christian — let us say in a matter of morality, serious as that would be — is to a breakdown of this character only comparable to the difference between a "battle-cruiser" being struck by a shell, and its being captured entire by the enemy without a scratch upon its paint! The merest tyro in naval matters knows well which of the two events is the greater disaster.

At the present moment the activity of Satan in the matter of anti-Christian doctrines is very great. The various propagandists work with feverish energy which puts us Christians to shame. They thrust their literature beneath your door or into your letter-box. They hawk their books from door to door extolling their virtues and securing many a purchase from the unwary. They worm their way into houses, if by any means they may capture souls for their cause.

Their name is really becoming Legion. At first sight it may seem strange that there should be so much disagreement amongst different portions of the great army of the evil one, since in so many cases their conflicting doctrines are mutually destructive. Yet after all the differences are of a surface nature. The devil is like a fisherman who throws out a long line covered with many different kinds of bait, so as to entice as many different kinds of fish as possible. Take notice, however, that beneath each morsel, whether to you tempting or the reverse, there is an identical hook.

The Satanic origin of these many and conflicting evil systems is clearly seen in the fact that, one and all, they agree in overturning the grand foundations of Christianity — such as the Deity of Christ; the reality of His expiatory and vicarious sacrifice; the true nature of sin and its gravity, involving

eternal punishment.

It is no small task to take up these systems in detail and expose their evil so that the simple may be saved. Such a work would demand a number of separate pamphlets each of respectable size, and this paper does not attempt it. Moreover, this work has already been done by others with considerable effect.

We do aspire, however, to point out certain great safeguards, suitable for defence against *all* such evils, and available for the feeblest and most unlettered believer. They are all indicated in the epistle to which we referred at the outset; only to 1 John 2: 18 to 28 we must add 1 John 4: 1-6.

Of these, the first is the fact that even the babe in the divine family has received

AN UNCTION FROM THE HOLY ONE.

The effect of this is that he knows "all things" (v. 20), or as verse 21 puts it, he knows "the truth . . . and that no lie is of the truth."

The "unction" or "anointing" is of course an allusion to the Holy Spirit of God, who indwells all who believe the gospel of their salvation (see Eph. 1: 13); but we shall understand these statements better if we see that the Apostle John is not here considering Him exactly as a distinct Person indwelling us, but rather as the source of a new life which produces in us new faculties and new powers.

"What!" exclaims some horny-handed son of toil, hardly able to read his own name, "I know *all* things!"

"Yes," we should reply, "in this sense you do, if you are a Christian." The very word "know" used here has in the original language the force of "be conscious of," "know intuitively" rather than "be acquainted with" or "know in detail."

The human infant opens its blue eyes and surveys things, from its mother's smiling face to a twinkling star, with a consciousness which no puppy or kitten could ever possess. All its knowledge is truly embryonic as yet, still the human spirit with its faculties and powers is there.

O babe in Christ, just born of God into His family, this Unction you possess! The faculties formed by the Spirit of life are yours.

Are you aware of this? Do you realize that the little you now know practically of God, together with the much which we trust you may yet know, is only yours because you have the Unction? To acquire all human learning from the kindergarten to the Rectorship of a great University only human reason together with the possession of ordinary faculties is needed. To touch the veriest fringe of *Divine* things you must have a faculty which the one not born of God does not possess — the anointing of the Spirit of God.

From this let us learn two important practical lessons.

1. Never trust *your own reason* in the things of God. As a Child of God you can place much more reliance in your spiritual conscience or intuitive perception, though even that is not given to us as a guide.

2. Never trust *anybody else's reason*. Never be in the least disturbed by the sayings or writings of the most learned men if not believers. Their human learning may be colossal, their *real* knowledge of

divine things, if they are not converted, is absolutely nil.

In verse 27 we again have the Unction referred to, and in a way which is more suggestive of the Spirit of God as a Person. It is said to teach us of all things and to be truth. It is evident therefore that we not only have by the Spirit of God the new faculties capable of knowing the things of God, but we have in Him a thoroughly efficient Teacher.

There is no thought in this verse of belittling the importance of human teachers, gifts raised up by Christ for the blessing of His people (see Eph. 4: 11). The point is that after all they are not the *essential* thing. Apart from the action of the Spirit the best of teachers does not really teach anything, and on the other hand many a humble saint in isolation has been very deeply taught of God.

If then we simple Christians utilize our first safeguard we shall be delivered from dependence upon all human reason, our own or other people's, and cast for instruction essentially upon the Spirit of God.

A very good beginning!

In the second place, we are safeguarded by that which we have heard from the beginning abiding in us according to verse 27. That is to say,

DIVINE PRINCIPLES OF TRUTH NEVER VARY.

They are always the same, equally valid under all circumstances, so that what we really learn of God when we receive the simplest elements of the gospel, we never have to unlearn; and nothing that we have to learn in our subsequent Christian career ever denies or is inconsistent with the simple truth with which we started.

Let us not pass this over lightly, for it is more important as a safeguard than may be at once perceived.

For instance, when in very early childhood we gazed at alphabet picture books, and placed our fingers upon big A's and little a's, we did not think that we were tracing the foundation on which is reared the superstructure of both language and literature; but so it was. When a little later we struggled with the rules of addition, subtraction and division, and almost wept over the multiplication tables, we little realized the vast scope of mathematical science, but of this we may be sure, that the genius who in later life finds himself a foremost authority, such as an Astronomer Royal, has never had to learn one fact in mathematics at variance with the four simple rules of arithmetic with which he started.

Nor have any of us, though far from being great students of arithmetic. If a plausible individual approached you offering for your adoption a new and up-to-date method of book-keeping, but on a cursory examination you found it assumed that twice twopence are fivepence, what would you do? Promptly reject it? Of course you would!

Even so is it in the things of God. "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning." The gospel of God which brings salvation presents a divine Saviour who died for our sins, was buried and rose again (1 Cor. 15: 1-10), and upon *that*, which, *if saved*, you have indeed heard from the beginning, everything rests. God's Spirit will never teach you anything that is inconsistent with that.

Therefore if any plausible individual presses upon you, by literature or by word of mouth, any teachings which undermine or are inconsistent with these great foundation truths on which you have

rested your soul, *he is a deceiver*. Fall back upon your safeguard and, without the least hesitation, *reject his teachings*.

Consistently with this we find in the early verses of chapter 4 that the truth of Christ's Person, the confession of His true Deity and real humanity is made the touchstone of everything. If that be not owned the spirit can at once be set down as "not of God."

In the same chapter, verses 5 and 6, we find the third test which will safeguard us. The test of APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY.

Nothing could be sharper than the contrast between the anti-Christian teachers and the apostles. "They are of the world." "We are of God." *Their* teachings were of the world, appealing to worldly principles and sentiments, and the world listens to them. The *apostolic* teachings were of God.

Further he says, "He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." That is to say, a person's own secret attitude towards God was revealed by his attitude towards the apostles and their testimony, since they were the duly authorized witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If any are tempted to think that this particular test has become obsolete as the apostles have long since disappeared, let them remember that in a very practical sense we have them today in *their writings*. The whole of the New Testament has come to us through the pens of the apostles and a few of their associates. The principle enunciated above therefore stands good in this twentieth century with this slight modification: *A person's own secret attitude towards God is revealed by his attitude towards the apostolic writings, the New Testament scriptures.*

The third test then resolves itself into this: Does this would-be teacher bow absolutely to the authority of the New Testament scriptures, or does he reject them in whole or in part; or does he while professing to accept and found his teaching upon them, yet handle them deceitfully, twisting them when inconvenient for his theories rather than reverentially allowing them to speak for themselves? And, further, are his teachings "of the world," according to worldly principles and maxims, confirming people who imbibe them in the world rather than delivering them out of it? If so, no hesitation need be felt. He himself and his teachings are *not of God*.

"If that be true, sir," says a young and inexperienced Christian, to one of these, "how do you explain this verse in the Bible?" And he quotes a text from one of the epistles.

"Oh!" is the jaunty reply, "that is merely what Paul says. He was of course a wonderful man, but then don't forget he lived in the first century, and we live in the twentieth. It is no good setting his rather obscure words against our modern light and knowledge."

Do you need anything further to tell you whether or no you should lend an ear to that speaker? You *do not*. You may safely label him "NOT OF GOD"; and then leave him severely alone.

This use, however, of God's Word through the apostles is, if we may so call it, a *negative* one. God's Word, by its very existence, compels the would-be teacher to declare himself as either absolutely subject to it, or as against it. More valuable still is its *positive* use to the believer. No safeguard can exceed in importance that of having the mind and heart well saturated with God's thoughts as set forth in Scripture.

In proportion as we become acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, and the truth they contain, so also do we become proof against the wiles of anti-Christian teachings. These systems of error gain their

successes as the direct fruit of ignorance of Scripture on the part of professing Christians.

Let us all therefore more earnestly read and study its pages in true dependence upon the teaching of the "Anointing" of the Spirit of God.

In order that we may see how amply we are safeguarded from the evil by God's gracious provision, we will close by a summary, recapitulating the points outlined above.

1. We have in the Unction a new source of spiritual understanding with its new faculties and powers.

2. We have in the same Unction, or Anointing, a Teacher of truth, who is Himself the Truth; the Holy Spirit of God.

3. The gospel which we have believed from the beginning has already given us the grand outline of truth, or to use another figure, is like a seed containing within itself the germs of all that is to be presently developed. Nothing that we subsequently have to learn demands that we unlearn the gospel either as a whole or in part: no item of the most advanced truth but is perfectly in harmony with the most elementary.

4. Absolute loyalty to the New Testament scriptures marks the true teacher in contrast to the non-recognition, or only partial recognition of the apostolic authority on the part of the false.

5. Divine teachings bear their character upon them. They are divine and heavenly and emphatically not of the world. False teachings are always of the world with the world for their end.

God has thus provided us with what we may call the "Holy Spirit" safeguard (1, 2); the "Gospel" safeguard (3); the "Holy Scriptures" safeguard (4); and the "World-test" safeguard (5)

Happy shall we be if we carefully and prayerfully use them. Thus shall we be preserved.