

Revelation or Idolatry

By George Davis and Michael Clark

How much hurt and deception could be avoided if the eyes of our understanding were enlightened by a great inwrought revelation of Jesus Christ. We can only dare to imagine how drastically such a revelation would change the current Christian landscape.

Try as he may, man cannot comprehend God by his wisdom. He has invented whole fields of study like theology and written volumes of books about God, but with his finite mind, man is limited in his comprehension of his infinite Creator. Paul, who spent a good part of his life studying about God finally wrote, "the world by wisdom knew not God..." (1 Corinthians 1:21). "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33 KJ2000).

The human faculties of sight, hearing and reason have never comprehended God and they never will, but He has chosen another way to communicate with man. Paul again wrote, "...as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9 KJ2000). If God has prepared certain things for man, how is he to receive them? Exceptional intelligence is no advantage. "Not many wise are chosen. . . ." Jesus said that God has hidden the deep things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes. (See Matthew 11:25). He continued to explain how "babes" find out about His Father saying, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, except the Son, *and he to whomever the Son will reveal him.* Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;* for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:27-30 KJ2000 - emphasis added).

God so loves the world that He sent His Son to lead us in the way to His Father. Jesus is the door to understanding God and His will for our lives. To be yoked together with Him is the key. In that yoke we share His life, we experience His knowledge and reasoning and with His love flowing through us, we experience His wisdom. Jesus also said that God is spirit and they who would approach Him must be born of the Spirit of God. Only those who are born of the Spirit and have become as little children can see

the kingdom of God and only they can enter it. (See John 3). These babes, children of God born of the Spirit, have a faculty of comprehension unknown to those who vainly labor to approach God through their intellect. It is in these child-like souls that revelation reaches its zenith. God resists the prying eyes and minds of the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

Paul wrote of those things that are unsearchable by human eyes, ears and intellects saying,

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-11 NKJV)

No one knows the things of God. No one knows the deep thing of God except the Spirit of God. However learned we think we have become, we know nothing as we ought to know if we cannot admit that we know nothing (1 Corinthians 8:2). However endowed with position, intelligence, beauty and charm one might be, he is limited to knowing only the things of himself. If we are to know the things of God as we should know them we must humble ourselves and admit in the ashes of human frailty that no man knows the things of God. No theologian, however bright, learned or respected, knows the things of God. No king, president, pope, cardinal, priest or pastor knows the things of God. Only the Spirit of God knows the things of God. God is revealed by Jesus and only as His Spirit abides within us can we begin to know our Father as He actually is.

Like discerns and worships like. How can two be in agreement unless they walk together? Spirit discerns Spirit and flesh discerns flesh. Each communes with their own kind. The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. He only receives the things of his self-nature. God is Spirit and they who worship Him must worship Him by a different faculty. They must worship Him in Spirit. We who are born from above have received that new faculty.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12 NKJV)

The Spirit searches the deep things of God. Truth resides in man only as the Spirit of Truth who is from God makes His abode in us. This Spirit of Truth changes us day by day until we walk in God's truth with His heart within us. He reveals Himself and manifests His life in us. Revelation must first occur in us. Truth must reside in our inward parts. Christ must be revealed in us or he will never be manifested by us. A mere Sunday-school, Bible college or seminary knowledge of him will not suffice. All this kind of knowledge does for us is make us puffed up and proud.

Paul who sat at the feet of the best Hebrew scholars of his day wrote,

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, *but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ...* But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, *to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles*, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood . . ." (see Galatians 1:8-17 NKJV - emphasis added)

Here we see revelation at work. There is no mere head-knowledge of God here. Jesus Christ was not only revealed to Paul on the Damascus road that day, but His presence was revealed in him. Revelation is essentially an in-wrought work-Chris revealed in. All that pertains to life, godliness, wisdom and knowledge, comes through an inwrought revelation of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God.

The gospel that Paul preached did not lead the hearer to a scholastic knowledge of Christ but to an experiential revelation of Christ in the center of his inner man. Paul's prayers for believers reveal that this was his primary concern. We find several such prayers in his epistle to the Ephesians.

"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion,

and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."
(Ephesians 1:15-21 NKJV - emphasis added)

Oh, that all of God's children would receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him! How much hurt and deception could be avoided if the eyes of our understanding were enlightened by a great inwrought revelation of Jesus Christ. We can only dare to imagine how drastically such a revelation would change the current Christian landscape. Oh how we need it!

Another such prayer for revelation is found in Ephesians 3:14-21.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, *to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21 NKJV - emphasis added)

Paul prayed that others would experience an ever deepening divine revelation. He prayed that it would happen to them exactly as it had happened to him. For this reason he bowed his knees to the Father. He asked the Father to grant these believers, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. This is the beginning of revelation, the seedbed of divine comprehension, leading to a greater indwelling of Christ through faith that leads to a cooperate-comprehension of the love of Christ that passes knowledge, which leads to the greatest revelation of all, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. This is how God reveals Himself and receives glory in the church by Christ Jesus. Anything other than this revelation is idolatrous by its very nature.

"Man's perpetual genius is a factory of idols," said Calvin. "Man is tempted to express outwardly in works the God he has inwardly conceived. Therefore the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth" (Institutes). Karl Barth concurs, "What is the purpose of the universal attempt of religions but to anticipate God, to foist a human product into the

place of His word, to make our own images of the One who is known only where He gives Himself to be known" (*On Religion*). When men try to search the unsearchable God by their flawed wisdom they inevitably contrive images that are unworthy of Him. They try to approach God with the same corrupted wisdom of the one who corrupted them in the beginning, Satan himself (See Ezekiel 28:14-18). Idolatry is what follows! Someone said, "God created man in His own image and man returned the favor."

Anne Lamott observed, "You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do," and we could add "and loves exclusively what and who you love." Beware when God comes to you as an upper middle class yuppie. Beware when your god and his representatives no longer hang with the poor but panders to the wealthy and powerful. Beware when your god is more concerned with the provision of comfort than with the production of character. Beware when your god loves to make you comfortable, wealthy and successful in this world system, a system that is opposed to Him by its very nature. Beware if your god never offends your values or your values never offend him. When your god starts looking and behaving like you, you have undoubtedly changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible man.

Though claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images that looked like mortal human beings, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.(Romans 1:22-23 ISV)

Idolatry is all about imagery and imaginations. The Encarta Dictionary defines imagination as "the ability to form images and ideas in the mind, especially of things never seen or experienced directly." On the other hand, revelation is God unveiling himself concisely and precisely to and in a person who would otherwise never be able to know Him. Revelation is the antithesis of imagination-as different as fantasy is from reality. "Revelation," says Karl Barth, "is God's self-offering and self-presentation. Revelation encounters man under the presupposition and in confirmation of the fact that man's attempts to know God from his own point of view are futile..." (*On Religion*)

Imaginary images of God fail to accurately represent Him in Spirit and in truth and are therefore idolatrous. In his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W Tozer wrote, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him." We see then that the opposite of revelation is imagination. Hear the words of the

prophet, Jeremiah, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD'" (Jeremiah 23:16 NASB). Whatever doesn't proceed from the mouth of the Lord comes from someone's imagination. Whatever is not revelation and truth is imaginary and untrue. It cannot be otherwise.

Imagination is good in many ways, but when it comes to the comprehension of God it is worse than worthless. God never asked man to imagine what He is like and then worship that image. He leaves nothing to our imaginations. He looks for those who will worship Him as He actually is. Because He is Spirit, He wants men and women to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. When it comes to approaching God human imagination is a lie.

Without revelation man cannot help but create an idol and totally miss this great redemptive work of God. We do not here refer to three dimensional images alone. God described idolatry of the elders of Israel in these terms, "...every man in the chambers of his imagery..." (Ezekiel 8:12 KJV). The Message version comes closer yet where God says to the prophet, "Son of man, do you see what the elders are doing here in the dark, each one before his favorite god-picture? They tell themselves, 'GOD doesn't see us. GOD has forsaken the country'" (Ezekiel 8:12 MSG).

Religion is man trying to discover and reveal God by his own imagination and after his own fallen image. When man tries to describe what he has not experienced firsthand, he can in no way be considered an expert witness. The true Life of God is divinely revealed, not theologically discovered. "...that life was revealed," wrote John, "and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us..." (see 1 John 1:1-3).

When men attempt to comprehend God by their mental prowess, they propagate a lesser image of God, limited to societal influences, fears, superstitions and ambitions. It is an image that is suitable to the winds of the times as they are carried about by every wind of teaching. When such men attempt to reveal God to others, the best they can do is reveal a God of their own making and after their own image. This is how 200,000 different Christian denominations and sects have come into being in our time instead of one body of Christ that is obedient to and that expresses Christ as its Head.

Paul spoke of the true nature of God regarding His dealings with fallen Israel in these terms:

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off... For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits... O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Romans 11:22-33 KJ2000)

God is both good to those who continue in His goodly ways with Him and severe to those who do not. Notice that not only are His wisdom and knowledge deep, but His judgments are so deep they are unsearchable. David wrote, "Surely his salvation is near those that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalms 85:9-10 KJ2000). God is not only a God of mercy and peace, but also One of righteousness, truth and judgment. Today's politically correct churches and Christian groups have chosen to amplify the softer, more friendly aspects of God and ignore the rest. Doing so, they have created a materialistic idol in their own image. The revelation of the true God in their hearts seems to be missing. Not content to wait for His life changing revelation of Himself from on high to shine into their hearts, they have created an image in their own likeness.

In his book *On Religion*, Karl Barth succinctly differentiates between God's revelation and human religion and the effect of the former on the later. "God's revelation in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the judging, but also reconciling, presence of God in the world of human religion - that is, in the realm of attempts by man to justify himself before a willfully and arbitrarily devised image of God."

The medieval churches were studded with gargoyles and depictions of demons on the outside and pictures and statues of deity and saints on the inside. Medieval art depicted souls being cast into hell with the demons waiting to welcome them with instruments of torment. In our day there is a concerted effort to offset the medieval image of God as an austere deity, eager to mete out retribution, with a warmer, friendlier image of Him, but the pendulum swing never stops at center. When we attempt to present a corrected image of God by our own strength and mental abilities, we

are doomed to over-correct. While we agree that history has rarely seen God represented as He truly is, manifested by a church that is in tune with Him, we cannot fix one exaggerated image of Him by presenting another one equally exaggerated. God is the perfect balance of justice and mercy-of love and truth. Only He can present Himself in a balanced way. We will always err on one side or the other if we present Him without His divine revelation.

Paul spoke of the "goodness and severity of God" warning all who refuse to "continue in his goodness" that they run the risk of being "cut off." These are harsh words today.

We desperately need an inwrought Spirit-revelation of the Father and the Son! Believers who don't possess this revelation are like romantically starved, emotionally-driven housewives who vicariously meet their need for intimate love by feeding on cheap romance novels. If these novels truly met their need, why do they read another and another and another, never getting enough until it becomes an addiction? We recently learned from a published Christian author that publishing houses are looking for new manuscripts that meet the emotional wants of a certain demographic that frequents Christian bookstores-women between the age of twenty-five and forty who are looking for romantic novels and self-help books. Anyone aspiring to sell his manuscript and get it published by a mainline publishing house must keep this in mind. No wonder true spiritually inspired meat in due season is so hard to find! God's promise to all is that He will be found by those who seek Him, and that He will meet all our needs (not wants and lusts) from His riches in glory. Seek and you shall find Him! Seek Him out and He will fill that void that keeps so many looking for love in all the wrong places. The books in today's Christian books stores rarely point seekers in the right direction because they appeal to their flesh.

God has chosen to reveal Himself through His Son who is the brightness of His glory and the express [exact] image of His person (see Hebrews 1:3). He has revealed himself in a tenderness and love through His Son that perfectly conveys the depth of His longing for a relationship with us. He loved the world so much that He gave His Son. The Son loved us so much that He gave himself a ransom for us. "Greater love has no man than this; that he lay down his life for his friends." This is the actual story and revelation of God's love that the early believers hoped to preserve in their writings that the readers might believe and be filled with the revelation and fullness of God. There is no greater revelation of God's love than what has already been revealed

through His Son. The Spirit works in us mightily to reveal the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of God's great sacrificial love that enables us to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. We cannot know what passes knowledge by knowledge. Divine revelation is required. We are established by revelation.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.(Romans 16:25-27 NKJV)