***False Concepts of the Return of Jesus Christ

RV36-02***

Please open the Word of God once more to the study of the letter written to the church in the city of Sardis. This is found in Revelation 3:1-6. We have seen that the Sardis church members were exhorted by Jesus Christ to emulate the example of some among them who preserved their temporal fellowship with God the Father. These have been described as having been made worthy of eternal life by the grace of God, and who are living uncontaminated lives in their experience. This does not mean that they are sinless people, but it does mean that when sin has entered, they have taken the steps necessary to preserve their experiential sanctification. Confession has been made, and their garments have been kept unspotted. Sanctification in position, in experience, and in character (or in ultimate expression) is symbolized by these white garments. Ultimate sanctification awaits the return of Jesus Christ for His saints. Satan hates and distorts the doctrine of the return of Jesus Christ from heaven to the earth.

**Distortions of the Return of Jesus Christ**

We have been looking at some of the distortions of that doctrine. The first one that we looked at was a spiritual return. Such people are seeking to say that the return of Jesus Christ is simply a spiritual return. We've shown why the Word of God does not fit that idea. Then secondly, there is idea that Jesus Christ has returned in the form of judgment which He has executed upon the temple and the city of Jerusalem, and the expression of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. We have also shown that this does not fit the requirements of Scripture of an actual, literal, physical return.

**The Conversion Return**

There is a third misconception of the concept of the return of Christ. This is called the conversion return. This is one of the all-time favorites. Here, the return of Jesus Christ that the Bible speaks of is equated with the union that a believer has with Jesus Christ at the point of salvation. In John 14:21, we read, "He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me. And he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." Then verse 23: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If a man loves Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him.'"

These two verses are taken as the basis of indicating that the return of Jesus Christ that the Bible promises is referring to the union between a believer and the Son of God at the point of that person's salvation. The people who hold this belief say that when a person believes, Christ comes to him, and that is the return of which the Scripture speaks. However, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, we do indeed have the promise that there is a union which is brought about by the baptism of God the Holy Spirit. It says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." So, indeed, there is a spiritual coming of Jesus Christ, and there is a spiritual union of Jesus Christ, and this does take place when a person is born again – at the point of conversion.

However, union spiritually with Jesus Christ is not the same as the physical arrival (the physical presence) on earth of the Son of God. Christ in the believers is indeed the hope of that believer – that day he will experience glory. In Colossians 1:27, we have this taught. Paul says, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among you (the gentiles), which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The fact that we have been united at conversion to Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, puts us in the position of having a hope which will be realized, and that is to experience the glory such as was displayed on the Mount of Transfiguration. When Jesus Christ does appear on the earth, the believers will accompany Him in this glory. Colossians 3:4 tells us that: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory."

That is a totally different kind of experience than our being united with Him in the new birth. That's a glorious thing, but here is a glory which is going to be externally demonstrated in all of us, when Jesus Christ Himself actually physically returns, in the same physical expression of glory as Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. When He does return to the earth, the believer's body is going to be transformed into an immortal body such as that of the Lord Jesus Himself. That is promised to us in Philippians 3:21, where it says, "Who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

So, conversion does not fit the picture of the return of Christ which is promised in the Bible. There is a union with Christ in glory, but the glory that we are going to experience at the return of Christ is something totally different.

**The Death Return**

Then there is a fourth idea concerning the return of Christ. We'll call this the death return. This is the idea that Christ returns to a person at the point of that believer's physical death. We all know Psalm 23:4 that says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." On the basis of a Scripture such as that, the idea is that Christ returns to a person when that person experiences death.

John 14:1-3, that we've already read, indicates that there is a place that Jesus Christ has in His Father's house which He is preparing for the believers. When do you go to that place that He is preparing? When do you find yourself in the Lord's presence in that place? Well, obviously, it is at death, as of now. For some, it will eventually be the rapture that takes them into that place that the Lord has been preparing. But right now, the way a person gets into heaven and into the presence of Jesus Christ is through the experience of death.

Certainly when the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was being stoned to death, we have in Acts 7:59 the very clear declaration that what awaited him is what awaits every believer at the point of death, and that is the person, indeed, of Jesus Christ: "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, 'Lord Jesus receive my spirit.'" He had previously declared to them in verse 56, "Behold, I see the heavens open, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." So, to the eyes of Stephen, there was (in the moment preceding death) the particular expression of dying grace. Of course, that's what the Lord has for all of us. He has grace for living; and, at the point that we are checking out of this life, He has grace for dying. There is living grace and there is dying grace.

If you're not prepared through the Word of God, dying is a very hellish experience. It's a very frightening experience. It's a nightmarish experience. It is really bad business to have to stand in a room in the presence of somebody who does not possess dying grace because he's not been prepared through the intake of doctrine into his soul for that moment. It is just as pathetic as to see a person who's struggling through life with his legalistic ways because he doesn't understand the principles of living by grace and the real success story that that involves.

So, here is Stephen at the point of death. Dying grace for him included seeing heaven open and seeing who was waiting for him. This is exactly what happens in every experience of death for every believer. At the point of that moment (that split-second), when your soul leaves the body, and the brain waves flatten out, that is the signal of death – that the brain waves flatten out. At that point, the soul and spirit have left that body, and a split-second before, the eyes open upon Jesus Christ who is standing there with His hand extended waiting to welcome you into His presence, even as Stephen was welcomed.

All of this does seem, indeed, to put some weight to the argument that death is when Christ returns to a Christian, because at the point of death, you do come into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even though He does receive our spirits and our souls, He does not physically leave heaven. Don't forget that He is a God-man. He is not only God now, but He is a God-man, and He always will be a God-man. He is a human being, and He stands in heaven. But He does not leave heaven to receive us at the point of death.

**The Rapture**

What does actually happen is described for us in that famous passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 that we all know so well. This passage tells us some very important things. It tells us that Jesus Christ is someday going to physically and literally descend from heaven. It tells us that Jesus Christ will raise the bodies of all the believers who are dead, and He will reunite them with their human spirits and their souls. It also tells us that the living believers will also be transformed physically so that their bodies now become immortal and unable to die. And they will be unable, as human beings, to use those bodies as instruments of sin any further. They will, in that transformed body, be taken up to meet the Lord in the air, along with the Christians who have been raised from the grave in those transformed bodies.

So, the return of Jesus Christ here is very clearly differentiated from the experience of physical death. Some of these people don't have physical death at all. For many of you, probably, if the world's history and the world's experiences keep moving and events keep moving the way they are now, the Lord's return is around the corner, and you will be caught up alive. Then the return of Christ will not be dependent at all for you upon death. It will be something totally different. It will be his actual physical presence and arrival.

So, the idea that death is the concept of the return of Christ again does not fit the picture of Scripture. He will return whether some of you die or not.

**Postmillennialism**

Then there is a fifth concept of the return of Christ, which also does not fit the bill, and that is called postmillennialism. There was a time when we hardly even had to talk about postmillennialism. In my teenage days, this was a very hot view about the return of Christ. It was a very live view. Then gradually it had been shaken by World War I, and when World War II came along, the concept of postmillennialism was just shattered. It was shredded. Nobody in his right mind ever stood up in the pulpit and taught this concerning the return of Christ. Unfortunately, believe it or not, old ideas, like old soldiers, never seen to die. They just seem re-occurring again. Like old soldiers who never die, they just smell that way, so, this idea has that same kind of odor. But people keep propping it up, and they keep bringing it back.

The postmillennial idea says this: The earth is going to go through a period where it will gradually get better. People are going to get nicer. People are going to get better. The governments will get better. People will become more honest. People will become true blue. All of this will be the result of the gospel permeating through all of society and all the nations of the world. So, gradually, the whole world gets better and better and better. And there will be a wonderful, wonderful result of conversion.

The word "millennial" means 1,000 years, and "post" means after the millennium. The postmillennialists teach that the 1,000 years isn't exactly 1,000 thousand years. It's just kind of a period of time that finally eventuates in a reconstructed world. This idea was not dead. Even at the end of World War II, I can remember being in Bible classes with the head of the Bible Department at Baylor University, and hearing this sincere man get up and expound enthusiastically and ecstatically on how the world is going to now move forward as the result of the great victory that had been brought about by the free world in the preservation of Western civilization and the opportunities that are now open for the gospel. The United States was the dominant nation of the world. We had a weapon that nobody dared to oppose us with in any way. We had an atom bomb. No one else had it. Japan laid prostrate at our feet. Germany laid prostrate at our feet. We would be able to move in there with the gospel. All the world was at our beckon call. He just carried on, and if you didn't know the Word of God, you thought that that made a lot of sense – that the world was now in a condition that finally the postmillennial dream was going to be realized.

Well, unfortunately, all of you know what's happened since World War II. Man has not become better. He has become more bestial. Everywhere that communism has put its perverted satanic hand, bestiality has come forward out of the human heart in greater degree. There are several Scriptures. We won't read them now, but these Scriptures are the basis of a postmillennial idea which is argued in some quarters today – that gradually the world is going to accept the gospel; then eternity will begin after there is a general resurrection; and, then we will have the judgment of the saved and unsaved (John 5:28-29, Matthew 16:27, Matthew 26:31-46, 2 Peter 3:3-13).

All of this idea ignores the Bible's warning that the world of humanity will become worse – not better. All of the descriptions that we have in the Bible concerning world conditions when the Lord arrives are all conditions that describe that the world is ready for a catastrophic, self-destructive end. We won't read all of Revelation 19:11 through Revelation 20:6, but in that section of Scripture, you will find listed several things that give us a totally different picture from that of postmillennialism relative to the return of Christ. Instead of Christ returning after a period when the world has finally been converted, what we read there is that Jesus Christ comes to judge a world full of wicked people; that the first resurrection is completed (and that includes believers only, as many unbelievers are put to death); that the millennial kingdom begins; and, then at the end of the millennium (this 1,000-year period), that is when Jesus Christ judges the unbelievers. There is no judgment for the unbelievers before the millennium. Their judgment is after the millennium. That millennial period is the result of a despotic, beneficent dictator rule of Jesus Christ upon this earth.

Matthew 24:42-44 warn us to be watchful for the return of Jesus Christ. If the return of Jesus Christ is dependent upon the world being converted, it hardly makes any sense to tell people to keep your eye open for the return of the Lord. All you have to do is look at the world and say, "Boy, there is no return of Him impossible. This is not a converted world. This is an evil world:" "Watch, therefore, for you don't know what hour your Lord comes. But know this: that if the householder had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into." It is stupid (when you know there are thieves around) to permit your house to be in such a condition that it can be broken into and you can be robbed. You will be on your guard because a thief arrives suddenly; unexpectedly; and, without announcement. That is the nature of the return of Jesus Christ. If postmillennialism were true, that Scripture doesn't make any sense at all, because unless you could see a converted world, you would know that there is no possibility of His return. But He is not going to return to a converted world. He is going to return to a world that is very much unconverted.

**Amillennialism**

Well, following the destruction of postmillennialism as a doctrine explaining the return of Christ, there was another one that came into popularity which is the most popular one today. It's called amillennialism. Amillennialism means that there is no millennium. This is not entirely new. This is an old Roman Catholic doctrine. Unfortunately, it is the view of the return of Christ which the Protestant reformers also accepted. The Protestant reformers did not engage in eschatology. Eschatology is the technical theological term for the study of end times – the study having to do with the fulfillment of prophetic matters.

It is understandable that the leaders of the Reformation were fighting other truths, such as the authority for spiritual truth. They were fighting the issue of: whether the Pope spoke for God; whether the Bible spoke for God; whether a church council of a bunch of bishops spoke for God; and, whether there was such a thing as a clergy and a laity. All of these issues dealt with salvation by grace apart from human works: whether a person received God's salvation as a gift apart from what he did; or, whether a person received salvation indeed as a work of grace, but a work in which he himself had to perform certain works in order to be qualified to receive the good works of Jesus Christ. That's called meriting the merit of Christ. Today, a Roman Catholic does not object to the fact that you are saved by grace. But he would say, "Yes, while that is true, yet, you must merit the merits of Christ. You must earn. You must deserve. You must do something to deserve to receive this gift."

All of these were the areas that they fought out. Those were the crucial, life-and-death issues. They just never got around to dealing with the meaning of the book of the Revelation; the timetable in Daniel; and, so on. So, they just sort of floated along with the amillennial concepts that had been handed down eventually from the Middle Ages.

This says that there is no time in history when Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth to be its ruler. He will not come as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in the sense that He will be seated in the city of Jerusalem, and that that will be the headquarters of the world. And from that position, He will rule all the nations of the world for 1,000-year period, which is what Revelation 20 describes.

Amillennialism says, "No, He is never going to rule over the city of Jerusalem and over the nations of the world. What He does, rather, is to return physically for a great judgment day. Those of us, who have who were brought up in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, know from our childhood Sunday school days that what we were taught about the return of Jesus Christ was summed up in the two words: "judgment day." We were taught that there would be some great day in the future, which was called "Judgment Day," when some tremendously fantastic thing was going to happen, which was the return of Jesus Christ to judge all of humanity. Unfortunately, we were also given the impression that at that point, we would all discover what our destiny was, and that we would then find out whether we were going to heaven or to hell. That is why people who are out of reformation churches of a certain kind are shocked when you tell them that if they have a doubt concerning whether they are going to heaven or not, they in all likelihood are not going there. In their minds, it's something that they deserve by what they do. And immediately, they have contaminated the grace basis that God has for saving a human being.

So, amillennialism says that there's no rule of Christ on this earth, but one of these days, He's going to pop out of the blue, and He's going to judge all of the people on this earth, and then He is going to usher in eternity. Amillennialism corrected a serious error of postmillennialism, and that is that it views the world as a place that is not going to get better, but that it is increasingly going to become more evil. It recognizes that Matthew 13:36-43 (which gives the parable of the wheat and the tares) indicate that there will be evil right to the end when Christ returns to this earth.

We won't go into this view too much in detail. If you want to pursue this, there is extensive information in Berean studies in the series on the dispensations. They explain that the basic premises of the Abrahamic covenant (the promises to Abraham) have never been fulfilled. God made certain promises to Abraham which related to the nations of the world, and specifically to the Jewish people. Later, those promises were expanded in three subsidiary covenants. The Palestinian covenant dealt with the Jewish people owning the territory of Palestine from the Euphrates River in the north to the Nile River in the south, and to possess that for all eternity. Secondly, the Davidic Covenant related to the Jewish people having a king who would reign over them forever who was in the Davidic line which Jesus Christ came to fulfill. The third covenant was the new covenant where the Jewish people would be given the new birth. They who were rejecting Christ as Messiah would see that He is the Messiah; they would recognize Him; they would accept him; and, they would be given a new heart and a new birth. All of these are further expansions of the Abrahamic covenant. None of that has been fulfilled.

Major features of that have never been fulfilled in any way. Some have been fulfilled in some detail. So, amillennialism is up against the fact that it cannot treat the Bible literally. It must spiritualize these covenant promises to the people of Israel. It must take a word like "Israel" and say, "Israel is a symbol for gentile church members." You might say, "Well, where do you get the idea that the word "Israel" is used in the Bible for gentile Christians?" They just say, "Well, that must be what it means." They don't get it from the Bible. They get it from an assumption. Right down the line, they make the assumption that the Sabbath day now is no longer Saturday, but it's now Sunday. They assume that Sunday is the Christian Sabbath. You say, "Where do you get that from the Bible?" They say, "Well, that's a logical conclusion that we reach." And you say, "Well, the whole concept of a priest; of an altar in a church; and, the liturgy in worshiping God such as Israel used – where do you get that?" They say, "Well, that's because the church has become the new Israel. The church is the New Zion."

All of these concepts that do not separate between Israel as the chosen people of God, and the church as the chosen heavenly people of God. So, amillennialism has to resort to a non-literal interpretation of Scripture. So, the result is a distorted view of the return of Christ. So, He is coming. He is coming to a world that has gotten worse. He is physically and literally going to come. But when He comes, He will not be ruling over this earth and the kingdom of the Jewish people for 1,000 years from the capital city of Jerusalem.

The result of all that is that you have all kinds of Scripture that you don't know what to do with. It's like somebody who is trying to put a jigsaw puzzle together, and you find yourself with pieces that you just cannot fit into the picture. No matter how you try to squeeze them in, they don't go, because you have begun with the wrong framework. So, amillennialism does not fulfill the requirements of the return of Christ in terms of the biblical meaning.

**The "Never-Went-Away" Return**

There is another distortion, and that is the "never-went-away return." The "never-went-away" return is the key concept of liberal theology today. Liberal theology, when it looks at the Bible, first of all, begins with the basic assumption that Jesus Christ is still in His grave. The bones of Jesus Christ either lie somewhere on this earth (buried someplace), or they have completely deteriorated and are turned to dust. Liberal theology begins with the concept that Jesus Christ never physically rose from the dead. I won't go through all the nonsense theories that they have come up with in order to try to figure out how to fulfill what the Scripture says. For example, they have "the swoon theory," where Jesus Christ never died. What He did was He took such a beating between the soldiers and the crucifixion that He fainted, and everybody thought he was dead. Even though he took a terrible bruising, he wasn't dead. But once they put him into the garden tomb, it was damp and it was cool and it refreshed Him, and He revived, and He got up and walked out. His disciples saw Him alive, and they just bandaged Him up, and He got healed. That's why they passed the word around that He was raised from the dead, but He never was dead in the first place. There are any number of variations of that idea. The concept is that the disciples themselves were propagating the idea that He was raised from the dead. They made it up because they had a cause that they were trying to champion.

Liberal theology begins with this concept: Jesus Christ never rose physically from the dead. So they say that He is alive today only in spirit. He is alive today as a spirit being. And spirit beings are not related to space. So, it is not possible for Him to return to the space of this earth. It is not possible for Him to return to this earth in the body because He never rose. As a spirit being, He cannot move in space. That is the concept of liberal theology...

What they teach is that Jesus never went away in His body because He was never raised, so He cannot be said to return again. But again, John 14:1-3 clearly declare that Jesus said that He would go away, and He would return again. When He departed in Acts 1, we're told that He's going to come back just as he left. Indeed, the Bible is clear that He did leave. Liberals theology has to simply say, "Well, those people who wrote that were mistaken. He never rose from the dead, so He never could have left. So, that's the "never-went-away" theory.

**The Secret Return**

There is another return and that is the secret return. The Jehovah's Witnesses hold to this theory. They say that Jesus Christ returned to this earth secretly in the year 1874. In 1874, Christ returned to this earth. He returned secretly. Since 1874, the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that He has been overthrowing the kingdoms of this world, and He has been setting up His own kingdom. I haven't talked to one recently, so I'm not sure which kingdoms it is that He's overthrowing, and which kingdoms are the ones that Christ has now set up to get things all together. I get a little confused as to who is overthrowing what, and who represents what. But all of this has been going on for over 100 years now since 1874. This system of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the secret return concept denies the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, because remember that Jehovah's Witnesses teach that death means the annihilation of the physical body. In death, the physical body is annihilated.

However, we know from Daniel's prophecy that the church dispensation falls between the 69th and the 70th week of Daniel. After the 69th week, Daniel describes the crucifixion of the Messiah (the cutting off of the Messiah from His mission). Then suddenly, there is this gap, and the Bible does not tell us how long that gap is between that 69th week of seven years, and the last week (the 70th week), which is seven last final years, which the Bible refers to as the tribulation week. That final week of Daniel's 70 weeks of years has never been fulfilled. We don't know how long this gap is between 69 and 70, and that's where the church fits in. So, therefore, we don't know how long the church age is. When Jesus Christ does return, the church age is over. But until the times of the gentiles, for example, is at an end, the church age has not come to an end. Certainly that was not happening in 1874, or since then.

Daniel 9:24-27 is the anchor point on this for these dates. All we know about this period is that the gap ends when Jesus Christ returns. The length is unknown. So, the point of the return of Christ cannot be specifically determined. There are events which are predicted as following the return of Christ for the church which have never taken place. Matthew 24:21-27 give us a long list of things that are going to result after the church is removed, and these have never taken place. These are after Christ has returned for the church. Matthew 24:21: "For then shall be great tribulation (this 70th week) such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall be. Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved. But for the elect's sake, those days shall be shortened." The elect, of course, are the Jewish believers that are in the tribulation world, and the gentile believers who are born again in the tribulation. This period of seven years, which is this final 70th week of Daniel, is going to be shortened. We don't know how much, but God says if He didn't shorten that, mankind would destroy itself.

Verse 23: "Then if any man shall say unto you, 'Lo, here is Christ, or there,' don't believe it, for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." There are often people who arise and say, "I am the representative of God." Some call themselves the Messiah. Some give themselves the titles of deity. Well, Jesus Christ says, "When I have taken the church out of this world, boy, there are going to be claims of the new messiahs; claims to being the Son of God; claims to being the fulfillment of Scripture; and, there are going to be claimants all over the place. Those of you who are believers in the tribulation, don't be conned by it." "Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, 'Behold, He is in the desert (this new messiah),' don't go forth. If they say 'Behold, He is in the secret chambers,' don't believe it." It will not be a secret coming, and it will not be a secret Messiah. "For as the lightning comes out of the East and shines even unto the West, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." When the real Messiah comes, you're going to know it. Everybody is going to know it. It will be visible. Nobody is going to have to come and tell you, "Hey, I've found Him. Come over here. I want to show you where He is. He's out in the desert. He's in a secret grotto here. He's meditating in His chamber. "For wherever the carcass is, there will be the eagles gathered together."

This has to do with the moral corruption of the world, apparently, at that time. In any case, the secret coming is not a biblical picture of the return of Jesus Christ. The Bible is clear that when He does return, both in the rapture and in the Second Coming, it will be a clearly worldwide known event. So, those of us who are believers, the rapture, of course, will be an event such that there will be no secret about it. But it will be no secret to the earth either that something has happened. Those who remember what we are teaching, and what teachers of the Word of God have taught during the era that Christians were here, will remember that this event of the rapture was predicted, because it will be worldwide turmoil as the result of millions of believers suddenly being removed from this earth with all the consequences of that kind of removal.

This idea of a secret return of Jesus Christ is a very serious threat to the spiritual stability of believers. That's another thing that is against this concept of return. In 2 Timothy 2:17-18, we read, "And their word will eat as gangrene does, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus." These were people were promoting false doctrine: "Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is already past, and overthrow the faith of some." To say that the resurrection is already past is to say that Christ has returned, and that is shattering to the faith of many believers. You can see how you would feel if suddenly somebody came and said, "Hey, Jesus Christ has returned. He came secretly. You didn't know what was taking place, but it's all over and you have missed it."

**The Wisdom Return**

The next false return of Jesus Christ is the wisdom return. This is another popular one today. This has to do with systems like Christian Science which looks for a great teacher who embodies universal wisdom. Universal wisdom, which is attributed to Jesus Christ and some religious leader in the form of a guru, is a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. So, Jesus Christ returns to this earth in the form of wisdom (mystical wisdom) which is transmitted through these great teachers. This idea is very popular, particularly in Eastern religions where they try to fit Jesus Christ in, and they view him as a great teacher who had great mystical wisdom. His return in the concepts of wisdom are through these great teachers that have arrived on this earth. Jesus Christ is seen as being the reincarnation of these teachers.

Satan opposed the fact of the first coming of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 4, we already pointed out, that Satan did everything he could (and has been doing everything since) to deny that Jesus Christ ever arrived. I remember when Madalyn Murray O'Hair had her debate on radio with the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dr. Criswell, here in Dallas. One of her arguments was that there is no evidence that anybody like Jesus Christ ever lived on the face of this earth. There is no record outside of the record the Christians give that there ever was anybody by the name of Jesus Christ who ever lived and whoever did these things. But Satan is saying that. That is exactly what Satan does. 1 John 4:1-3 tell us that Satan is doing everything he can even now to convince people that there never was a Christmas Day: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world. By this, know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of antichrist, of which you have heard that it should come, and even now already is in the world." The person of antichrist was not yet in the world, but the spirit that antichrist represented (the viewpoint), the opposition to the first coming of Jesus Christ as a reality – that spirit is already in the world.

So, the devil is opposing that now, but 2 John 7 tells us that the devil is also opposing the concept of a literal Second Coming of Christ to this earth: "For many deceivers are entered into the world who don't confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." So, Satan seeks to destroy both of these concepts of a literal return of Christ with this idea that there are reincarnations of great teachers who have His wisdom, and that that's how Jesus Christ returns.

**In the Form of the Bible**

We can add another false concept of the return of Jesus Christ. This is one that one of our college students mentioned to me as he left this morning that I hadn't come into contact with. That is that Jesus Christ has returned in the form of the Bible – in the form of the completed canon of Scripture. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So, the idea here is that the Word of God is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. But the Bible also makes it clear that there is the written Word of God – the recorded revelation of God's thinking. Remember that the word "word" (this symbol "word") means an expression of the mind of God. That's what the word "word" means. It's the word "logos" in the Greek. "Logos" means an expression of a mind. Here it is the expression of the mind of God. Jesus Christ was the expression of deity (the living expression). The written Scripture (the canon of Scripture) is the written expression of the mind of God.

So, 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration (by in-breathing) of God, and is profitable for doctrine; for reproof; for correction; and, for instruction and righteousness." Then Hebrews 4:12 gives us a very important declaration concerning the fact that the Bible (the written Bible) has life in it because it is the representative of divine thinking: "For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." So, here the concept is that Jesus Christ is returning to this earth in the form of a completed Scripture. He is the living Word, and there is the written word, and the two are equated as being the same thing.

Well, of course, this again ignores the regular biblical revelation that the return of Jesus Christ is not going to be in the form of a book that records His words or that records the revelations of God, but that He is going to come as He left. Acts 1:11: "Who also said, 'You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up in the heavens? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner, as you have seen Him go into heaven.

So, these concepts of the return of Jesus Christ are concepts that you will run into. People will say, "Yes, I believe that Christ is going to return to this earth. Christ is going to return from where He went from this earth: in the spiritual sense; in judgment; in conversion at the point of death; in the postmillennial sense; in the amillennial sense; in the never-went-away sense; in the secret sense; in the wisdom sense; and, in the sense of a completed canon of Scripture." All of those are false, though some of them have some degree of truth related to them. There is one, and only one that fits the biblical pattern for the return of Christ, at which point the believers here in Sardis were promised that they would receive garments of white, representing ultimate sanctification, when they receive the ultimate expression of their salvation. We shall look at that through the biblical picture of the return of Christ next time.

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