

# THE MESSAGE

of that

Eminent and Faithful Friend

and

Minister of Christ Jesus,

GEORGE FOX,

As Revealed

by the

*Quotations of Scripture*

in his

Epistles Unto Friends

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May 15, 2010

# 1 Introduction

George Fox has always been famous for his knowledge of the bible. His writings are infused with scripture references, frequently containing only snippets of verses, and usually without providing the chapter and verse that he is quoting. Fortunately, Esther Mürer has endeavored to track down Fox's scripture references, as well as those of other early Friends, and has made them available on the Quaker Bible Index (<http://esr.earlham.edu/qbi/>).

In 2007, I used the Quaker Bible Index to compile a list of the bible verses that George Fox quoted most often. I was particularly looking for devotional or inspirational verses. After some online discussions with Kirk Wattles, I realized that my list included quotes used to defend Quaker doctrines and teaching. I compiled a new list using only those verses appearing in Fox's epistles, reasoning that the epistles were more pastoral in nature and I wanted the verses that Fox would quote when writing to other Friends.

From this set of verses, and looking at the way Fox used them, I pieced together a description of Fox's message that, while possibly incomplete, shows the major parts of that message and their scriptural foundation. Essentially, this message is:

Christ, the light or the seed, enlightens every one in the world, and is known inwardly and spiritually, not by the teachings of humans. He destroys sin, purifying those who obey him, and restoring them into the image of God in which they know peace and love. Those who obey Christ as the ultimate ruler become members of the body of Christ, and are brought into unity with him and with each other, and are called to fight a spiritual war against evil, for which they are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

## 2 Christ, the Light and Seed, Enlightens All

George Fox uses a wide variety of terms to refer to Christ, sometimes with simple titles like "the light" or "the seed", sometimes with more formal titles such as "the Lord Jesus Christ", and still other times with descriptions such as "that which is pure" or "that which shows and discovers." Fox uses the title "the light" frequently, as does the Gospel of John (e.g. "I am the light of the world", John 8:12<sup>1</sup>). Particularly, Fox makes many references to John 1:9, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

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<sup>1</sup>All scripture quotations in this paper are from the King James Version

The idea that the light of Christ is available in every person was of central importance to Fox's message, but it is not the whole message. In Fox's teachings, the light of Christ is present in every person so that if they turn towards it, they might experience a transformation and be brought closer to God. For example, in epistle 366, Fox writes that the light enlightens every person so that "every one may believe in the light, and may become a child of the light, and have eternal life, and be saved." [5, p. 193] The phrase "be saved", as we shall see shortly, refers to the inward transformation that takes place. The universal presence of this light means that every person has this potential.

Fox also makes many references to Christ as "the seed", which typically refers to either of two promises. First, in Genesis 3:15, God tells the serpent that "[the seed of the woman] shall bruise thy head." Typically, the references to this verse are in the context of destroying sin, and will be discussed in more detail shortly. The other common reference to "the seed" originates in Genesis 22:18, in which God tells Abraham "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." The Apostle Paul refers to this promise to Abraham several times, especially in chapter 3 of the epistle to the Galatians. In Galatians 3:16, Paul says that Christ is Abraham's seed to which the promises had been made (with a similar statement in Romans 4:13). Fox echoes this idea frequently by referring to Christ as the seed "that is heir to the promise". In calling Christ the seed of Abraham, Fox is not just making a theological statement describing some aspect of God that needs to be believed. These references are frequently accompanied with exhortations to know the seed, or feel it, or dwell in it, implying that the important thing is in doing, not just believing.

### 3 Known Inwardly and Spiritually

The inward knowing of Christ, the light, the seed, is such an integral part of Fox's epistles that it is rare to encounter one that does not recommend that Friends walk, dwell, keep in the light. The prophet Jeremiah writes about a new covenant in which God says "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," (Jeremiah 31:33) and Paul also writes about it in Romans 2:15 ("which shew the work of the law written in their hearts"). For Fox, this new covenant describes his experience of inward revelation and direct experience of Christ, and he frequently makes reference to the new covenant in terms of the inward experience of God. He also writes of the covenant as a covenant of light, which echoes Isaiah 42:6, "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles."

Like Jesus and Paul, Fox frequently emphasizes the inward work of the Spirit by

contrasting it with the teachings and opinions of people. One of Paul's statements that Fox uses is from Romans 2:29, "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." In other words, it isn't the external things that make one a Jew, but what is in one's heart. Fox makes heavy use of not only the idea of the circumcision of the heart, but also in admonishing Friends not to seek human praise – it is God that Friends should seek to please. In fact, most of the places where Fox uses the phrase "of men" he is contrasting worldly matters with spiritual ones.

Fox's use of the phrase "led by the spirit", echoes Paul's writing in Romans 8:14 that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Of course, the idea of being led by the spirit is central to Fox's writing and is expressed in a wide variety of ways.

Fox also makes numerous references to the "carnal mind" or just plain "carnal", which refers to being concerned about worldly things as opposed to spiritual ones. This concept appears in Romans 8:6, which says "to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." A typical example of this would be sentence in epistle 58: "The teachers without exalt the carnal mind, but the teacher within destroyeth it." He contrasts human teachers (often "without" means outward or external) with the inward teacher, Christ.

Fox frequently uses the term "letter" in referring to ministers and teaching that is not from the Spirit, and this likely comes from 2 Corinthians 3:6, which says "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." It has been a doctrine of Friends from the beginning that the Spirit is the primary authority and that the scriptures are secondary, and Fox's references to "the letter" tend to take on a dualistic flavor, implying that those who teach "the letter" have no knowledge of the Spirit.

## 4 Destroys Sin, Purifies Us

While the universality of the light, and the inward, spiritual knowledge of God are important aspects of Fox's message, it is the transformation of the soul brought about by Christ that is the real core of his message. When Fox quotes Genesis 3:15, referring to the seed of the woman that bruises the serpent's head, he is referring to Christ bruising the head of Satan by driving out deceit and sin from the heart. For example, in epistle 4, Fox writes that as the seed bruises the serpent's head, it will "discover all deceit, and rend all veils and coverings, that the pure may come to life, which deceit hath trampled upon." [4, p. 18] That is, the seed discovers and drives

out Satan (the cause of evil and deceit) from your heart, so that you may come to know the pureness of the Spirit.

Fox often describes this transformation as being “restored into the image of God”, referring to Genesis 1:27 in which humans were created in the image of God. Fox also describes this process as becoming “a new man, renewed in the image of God”, which echoes Colossians 3:10 (“renewed in knowledge after him that created him”), Ephesians 4:24 (the new man is “created in righteousness and holiness”), and 2 Corinthians 5:17 (“he is a new creature: old things are passed away”).

One of the ways that Fox expresses this transformation is in the idea of doing everything for God’s glory. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Fox frequently uses the phrase “to the glory of God” in reference to transformation, and often in the form of being “ordered” (i.e. transformed, put into right order) to God’s glory. Most of the time, Fox speaks of this ordering as a result of waiting in the light, although occasionally he uses it in terms of being mindful of God. For example, in epistle 200 he expands on the idea of doing things to God’s glory by saying you should “have God’s praise and glory in your eye in all your speakings and doings, then ye will be preserved to his glory.” [4, p. 198]

Fox makes frequent references to Titus 2:11-12, which says “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” This one verse contains elements of these first three parts of Fox’s message - that the grace of God (Christ) has appeared to *all* people, that he teaches us directly, and that he brings us to live what Fox refers to in his journal as a “holy and sinless life.” [1, p. 79] This transformation or purification is the salvation that this verse in Titus refers to. In contrast to the mainstream Christian view where salvation means being saved from the penalty for your sins (i.e. hell), this kind of salvation is being saved from sinning, in which one lives a truly holy life. Fox makes this clear in epistle 158 where he writes “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, to teach, season, and establish you, which brings your salvation.”

## 5 The Ultimate Ruler, Who Must Be Obeyed

It isn’t enough to say that Christ is known inwardly, he must also be obeyed. Fox refers to Christ using various terms denoting leadership. For example, he refers to Christ as the head, referring to Colossians 1:18, which says that “[Christ] is the head of the body, the church.” Fox emphasizes not just that Christ is the head of the church, but that the church is defined as a community that recognizes Christ as its

head. In epistle 230, he writes “there is no true church but where Christ exercised his offices in and amongst them.” [4, p. 244] By offices, Fox is referring to the various roles Christ takes on as the head of the church – prophet, shepherd, counsellor, commander, bishop, priest. [5, p. 54] In one of his doctrinal epistles, addressed to “all Kings, Princes, and Governors in the whole world”, Fox gives some examples of how Christ is known in various offices:

His office, as he is a counsellor; do you hear his voice from heaven, concerning your heavenly state: his office, as he is a leader to lead you out of sin and evil, and to rule in your hearts by faith, as a commander: his office, as he is a shepherd, are you his sheep? and do ye hear his voice? [3, p. 319]

Fox also draws numerous titles and images from Isaiah 9:6-7, which is familiar to fans of Handel’s “Messiah”:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

The title “Prince of Peace” occurs quite frequently in Fox’s epistles, often accompanied with the title “Prince of Life.” The kingdom and government of Christ also get mention from Fox. He often refers to the kingdom as the “everlasting kingdom”, touching on Daniel 9:4, which says “How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.” Not surprisingly, Fox also refers to the “kingdom of God” that occurs throughout the New Testament.

As usual, Fox’s emphasis is not on giving Christ these titles, but in acting accordingly. For example, in epistle 49 Fox emphasizes that “the kingdom of God ye may all come to see, waiting in the light, taking heed to it, which calls to repentance, which informs your minds towards the kingdom of God, where there is no end, but love, joy, and peace for evermore.” [4, p. 65] The kingdom, in this case, is realized through obedience to the light.

Fox often encourages this obedience through the phrase “walk in the light”, which refers to 1 John 1:7: “But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

The well-known Fox phrase “walk worthy of your calling” may come from Ephesians 4:1, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called”, although it could also refer to 1 Thessalonians 2:12 “That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”

Fox also warns against disobedience in various ways. He often warns Friends not to “grieve the spirit” or to “take heed of grieving the spirit”, referring to Ephesians 4:30 “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” One Fox’s favorite terms for disobeying or ignoring the spirit is “quenching the spirit”, which comes from 1 Thessalonians 5:19 “Quench not the spirit.” Instead, Fox exhorted Friends to walk “as becometh the gospel” echoing Paul in Philippians 1:27 “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.” In Fox’s time, the word “conversation” didn’t just mean talking, it referred to one’s whole manner of being, the way one carried one’s self.

## 6 Brings Into Unity

Fox emphasizes the importance of the spiritual community. While he often refers to the body in order to emphasize the headship of Christ, he also makes references to the body in terms of unity, as described in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit.” Fox seems to use this verse more often in his later epistles, perhaps reflecting the difficulties in dealing with the growth of Quakerism and maintaining more and more meetings.

Part of Friends’ witness to peace was in maintaining a peaceful community amongst themselves. Fox usually describes this as being in “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”, taking the phrase from Ephesians 4:3. In epistle 180 he tells Friends to keep in the power of the Lord, “that to the Lord ye may be a blessing in your generation, and a peculiar people in tenderness, and full of that faith which overcomes the world and all things in it; through which ye may come all up into the unity of the spirit which is the bond of peace.” [4, p. 170] Fox tends to use the phrase in relation to meetings, as he does in epistle 18, urging Friends to “meet together every where, and keep the unity of the spirit, which is the bond of peace.” [4, p. 25]

Fox also refers to the “unity of the faith” in various forms, quoting Ephesians 4:13 “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” He often couples this phrase with “in which ye have the victory”, alluding to 1 John 5:4 “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory

that overcometh the world, even our faith.” In other words, it is our faith that is the victory.

## 7 Empowers to Fight the Lamb’s War

Fox often refers to victory because he believes that part of the life in the Spirit means engaging in a spiritual war against Satan. This battle is often referred to as the Lamb’s War, as described in Revelation 17:14, “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.” Fox writes that “the lamb must have the victory”, which seems to allude to this verse. Another favorite verse that refers to the Lamb’s War is Revelation 12:17, “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” While he occasionally mentions the dragon, Fox usually quotes the latter part of this verse, emphasizing that Friends should keep the testimony of Jesus.

Epistle 55 is titled “Concerning the spiritual warfare” and illustrates what this spiritual war entails. For example, Fox writes “Arm yourselves like men of war, that ye may know, what to stand against. Spare not, pity not that which is for the sword (of the spirit,) plague, famine, and set up truth, and confound the deceit, which stains the earth and cumbers the ground.” [4, p. 70] Setting up, or establishing truth, and confounding or trampling deceit is a major theme of Fox’s epistles, and is the way this spiritual war is fought. There are different aspects to this deceit. On one hand, it is simply the way Satan blinds you to the light of Christ in your own heart. It can also be the various false doctrines, practices, and organizations in the world that Fox and other early Friends were often critical of. In epistle 55, Fox also encourages Friends to “go on in the work of the Lord, that ye may trample on all deceit within and without,” thus emphasizing that the spiritual warfare is not just fought by outward ministry, but by the inward work of waiting in the Light.

The sword of the spirit mentioned in epistle 55 is the word of God, according to Ephesians 6:17. Now, traditional Christianity refers to the bible as the “word of God”. For example, the original King James Bible contains a message from the translators to the reader that says that the bible “containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God.” For these Christians, then, the sword of the spirit is the bible. To this day, many Christian children in sunday school participate in “sword drills” in which they must look up verses in the bible as fast as they can. Friends, however, maintained that Christ is the word of God. In responding to an opponent who claimed that the scriptures are the word of God, Fox says that “the scriptures of



truth are God's words, which Christ, the word, fulfils. They are not the word of God, which thou has blasphemously affirmed, but Christ is the word of God." [2, p. 397] Thus, for Fox, it is Christ who is the sword of the spirit by which the spiritual war is fought – the spirit of Christ in one's heart that leads one to speak and act in various ways, is a sword against evil and deceit.

This usage of the "word of God" as the "sword of the spirit" is another variation of Christ as the seed who bruises the head of the serpent. In fact, the purifying and transforming action of the seed within the individual is at the center of the Lamb's War. It is in turning people towards the light of Christ within themselves that evil is defeated. Fox often speaks of his mission the same way Paul does in Acts 26:18, in which he was "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." In epistle 216, Fox ties together the themes of turning people to the light, purification, and the defeat of evil: "Yet work ye and labour in the power of the Lord God ... to the renewing of people's minds in the light and power of God, and knowledge of Christ Jesus, turning them from the enmity and the darkness, (the power of satan,) to the light, and to God, that they may be renewed into his image and likeness; that the image of the devil, and his likeness, may be defaced." [4, p. 218]

In addition to the "sword of the spirit", Fox also seems to like the metaphor of the word as a hammer or as a fire, as found in Jeremiah 23:29, "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" In epistle 23 he writes that the word "saves the soul, and hammers down, and throws down, and burns up that which wars against it." [4, p. 30]

Fox is careful to distinguish spiritual warfare from worldly warfare, often referring negatively to carnal weapons as found in 2 Corinthians 10:4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." For example, in epistle 205, he writes that "in the spirit ye will worship God, and have fellowship and spiritual weapons, and come to be spiritual men, and not as the carnal world that rule and wrestle with carnal weapons, and with flesh and blood." [4, p. 204] In addition to 2 Corinthians 10:4, this one sentence also brings in John 4:24 (that God is worshipped "in spirit and in truth"), and also Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Fox often emphasizes the importance of ministry and that it proceeds from the light and not from human reason. He also emphasizes not the words, but the spirit that gives them forth. This flows, to a large extent, from the understanding that the gospel is not simply a message, but is the power of God. This idea comes from

Paul, who writes in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” In epistle 372, Fox equates the gospel with Christ, and emphasizes over and over that the gospel itself is power: “Now the gospel being preached to, or in, every creature under heaven; which gospel is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believes; so all that receive this gospel, the power of God unto salvation, in their hearts, receive Christ, (the power of God,) and his government and order in the power. And Christ reigns in their hearts in his power; and such come into the gospel order.”[5, p. 207] Fox’s subtle insertion of “or in” to his quotation of Colossians 1:23 (“the gospel ... which was preached to every creature”) is very telling, in that it emphasizes the internal work of Christ on the heart, and not simply a message that one must accept.

Not surprisingly, Fox also makes use of Ephesians 6:13-17, which identifies the equipment for spiritual warfare:

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

In addition to the sword of the spirit, Fox mentions both the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation numerous times. In epistle 206, Fox makes the interesting connection between salvation and Christ through the helmet metaphor, saying “Christ Jesus being your helmet and your head.”[4, p. 204] In epistle 314 he suggests that “your heads [are] preserved by the helmet of salvation, and your hearts fenced with the breast-plate of righteousness.” In epistle 377, Fox provides a variation on the spiritual armor theme that has a wonderfully gentle feel: “And therefore mind the Lord in all your sufferings, and keep all low, and in the humility of heart, and there you will feel that he that inhabits eternity, dwells with an humble heart, and he will be your shield and buckler, and defender in time of trouble.”[5, p. 215]

In carrying on the Lamb’s War, Fox frequently urges Friends to be “valiant for the truth upon the earth.” This is a variation on Jeremiah 9:3, “And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me.” Because this verse describes those that are not valiant, the implication of “be valiant” is not just to be brave, but to be truthful and to know God.

## 8 Conclusion

Although there are numerous aspects to Fox's message, most of them having a parallel in the scriptures, it is important to remember that they all flow from one thing - the light of Christ in the heart. If Friends dwell in this light, they find themselves purified, taught, brought into a peaceful unity, and both empowered and encouraged to bring that light, the gospel, to others. Without this indwelling presence, there is no spiritual basis for the rest. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:20, Christ is the chief cornerstone.

## 9 Scriptures Used

Gen 1:27	Rom 2:29	Eph 4:30
Gen 3:15	Rom 4:13	Eph 6:12-17
Gen 2:18	Rom 8:6	Phil 1:27
Isa 9:6-7	Rom 8:14	Col 1:18
Isa 42:6	1 Cor 10:31	Col 1:23
Jer 9:3	1 Cor 12:13	Col 3:10
Jer 23:29	2 Cor 3:6	1 Thess 2:12
Jer 31:19	2 Cor 5:17	1 Thess 5:19
Dan 9:4	2 Cor 10:4	Titus 2:11-12
John 1:9	Gal 3:16	1 John 1:7
John 4:24	Eph 2:20	1 John 5:4
John 8:14	Eph 4:1	Rev 12:17
Acts 26:18	Eph 4:3	Rev 17:14
Rom 1:16	Eph 4:13	
Rom 2:15	Eph 4:24	

## References

- [1] George Fox. *The Works of George Fox, Volume 1*. Marcus T. C. Gould, 1831.
- [2] George Fox. *The Works of George Fox, Volume 3*. Marcus T. C. Gould, 1831.
- [3] George Fox. *The Works of George Fox, Volume 5*. Marcus T. C. Gould, 1831.
- [4] George Fox. *The Works of George Fox, Volume 7*. Marcus T. C. Gould, 1831.
- [5] George Fox. *The Works of George Fox, Volume 8*. Marcus T. C. Gould, 1831.