

[A sermon from the papers of Dr. Gordon H. Clark at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary library. Preached 2 February 1967 at the First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis. These handwritten notes employ, like many of Dr. Clark's writings, the use of shorthand notation. Combined with his penmanship the text of this sermon in places is doubtful. - DJD 27 Nov, 2014]

The Church and Our Church

1. The Foundation of the Church
2. The Building of the Church
3. The Completion of the Church

The Church and Our Church

Jesus never acted haphazardly. Everything he did was in accord with a dominant and definite purpose. On one occasion he told his disciples, the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for man. This is a statement of purpose. Jesus came to die. Nevertheless, however true that statement is, and however important it is – and it is so important that there could be no Christianity at all without it – nevertheless it is not a complete statement of Christ's purpose. Christ saw beyond his death. He foresaw the affects his death would produce, and these foreseen and intended effects are also a part of his purpose. Because he had these future events in mind, Jesus on another occasion told his disciples, “I will build my Church.”

The sermon this evening will consider first the foundation of the Church, second, the building of the Church, and third the completion of the Church.

I. The Foundation of the Church.

1. Built on a foundation.

Not Peter; perhaps Peter's confession.
But more accurately:

“Other foundation can no man lay than this is laid which is Jesus Christ.” I Cor. 3:11

or, to change the picture slightly “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone” Eph. 2:20

and also “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner.” {Psa. 118:22, Mt. 21:42, I Peter 21:42, Acts 4:11}

The question of I Peter occurs in a text where Christians themselves are described as stones, indeed living stones, in God's building.

The picture of the building and the stones, in addition to the idea of solidarity and sturdiness, implies a careful method of building.

What is the Christian's method of building? In I Peter again, a negative statement is made. It speaks of some stones that can not be used in the building, viz: those people who stumble at the word. Positively therefore the stones useful in building are people who accept the word.

The same idea can be derived from Eph 3:20, where it speaks of the prophets and apostles as foundation stones next to the corner stone.

But how did the apostles found the church? What did they do? Obviously they preached the word.

i.e. the word of Christ. “Neo-orthodoxy says the Bible is not the revelation: Christ is God's revelation and the Bible is only a witness to the revelation. But Christ does not so separate himself from his word. N.B. he rebuked the Pharisees for rejecting the words of Moses: “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me” [so far believing Moses = believing what he wrote] and to continue “But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” Jn. 5:46-47.

I Peter [again] 2.2 is addressed to new converts and says “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, and ye may grow thereby.”

Literally: desire the logical milk.

But the milk is the word because of Hebrews 5:12-13.

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are becoming such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”

Both the milk and the meat represent the word.

And this is buttressed in I Cor. 3:2 explains that the Corinthians were babes and needed milk, because they could not yet eat meat.

Conclusion: The church is built on the word, and our learning it. And any organizing it does which honors the Word is clearly not the church of Christ.

So much then for the foundation. We shall now consider the process of building the church – a process that has gone on now for 2000 years.

The Growth or History of the Church

In talking about church history we sometimes exultingly say, that the Gospel conquered the Roman Empire. So it did, in a sense – but it took 300 years of pain, persecution, and hard work.

Any one individual sees about 40 years of church work. We do not really see 70 years of church history because as children and even as teenagers we do not understand what we see. Even as adults our view is often limited to one locality and we fail to note what the church is doing in other places.

Therefore I may suppose that many Christians in the second century doubted that the Gospel would conquer the Roman Empire.

What is worse, 300 years of hardship does not always bring victory. From 450-800 the church had to contend with barbarism and anarchy: civilization was destroyed and with the destruction of civilization the possibility of travel, necessary for missionary extension, was virtually wiped out.

After these 350 years of anarchy come 700 of ignorance and corruption.

Some small groups, such as the Waldensians in Italy kept the Gospel alive There were also a few rugged individuals who knew and preached the Word. One was Gottschalk, the full fledged Calvinist of A.D. 800, who suffered prison and torture for 20 years and died of his hardships. Another more fortunate preacher was Wycliffe in 1350.

But with such few exceptions this period was one of ignorance, superstition, and corruption. The church, the true church of God, had come upon evil days. Imagine! 700 years!

No, why was there such ignorance, superstition, and corruption? The answer is clear: the Word was not known. People began to worship images; they thought sins were forgiven by making payments of money. They thought that a man in Rome could admit them to or shut them out of heaven. They knew nothing of the Bible.

Then came the Reformation, from Luther's theses in 1517 to the writing of our confession in 1648, a period of almost 150 years. In spite of the persecutions, the imprisonments, the tortures, the burnings, and the massacres, this remains the brightest period in all Church history. The message of the Scripture was proclaimed by the Reformers, it was heard and accepted by immense sections of the populace in every nation, and the hope of William Tyndale was abundantly fulfilled that boys behind the plough would know more of the Scripture than archbishops and cardinals.

In the centuries that followed knowledge of the Scriptures has declined, gradually for two centuries, but in these latter days most precipitously. The Presbyterian wing of the Church universal suffered a major collapse between 1924 and 1936. In 1924 thirteen hundred Presbyterian ministers signed and published a document known as the Auburn Affirmation. It was more denial than affirmation. These men unanimously denied that the Scripture was the infallible Word of God. In addition to rejecting the Scripture they also asserted that the virgin birth, the miracles, the vicarious death of Christ, and the Resurrection were unessential to Christianity. That is to say, what they called Christianity would remain intact even if Christ were not virgin born, even if he had not worked miracles, even if he had not given his life a ransom for many, and even if he had never risen from the tomb. This occurred in 1924. In 1929 these men effected a reorganization of Princeton Seminary. The conservative directors were dismissed, the most orthodox professors left, and the modernists took control. Then in 1936 the leaders of the orthodox forces were excommunicated and expelled from the church.

Since that time the Bible has been effectively removed from the teaching ministry of the denomination now called the U.P.U.S.A., as it had been earlier removed from other large denominations. The result and present condition is this. Not only is ignorance of the Bible complete with the large numbers of people who never attend any church, but what is worse, knowledge of the Bible is almost extinct in the large denominations. If it is used at all, it is used as a fable or myth; its truthfulness is constantly denied; and the essential doctrines of Christianity, such as the Atonement and Justification by faith have been replaced with left-wing political action.

Thus the Church universal has come upon evil days, and very few people seem to care. But the

saints care.

Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder
By heresies distressed
Yet saints their watch are keeping
Their cry goes up, How Long?
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church, founded in this country in 1774, has never repudiated the Scriptures. It has always remained true to the Westminster Confession. Unfortunately under the pressure of the dominant modernism in society, the Reformed Presbyterian church declined in numbers. During the first half of this century it came to resemble, or even only faintly resemble the faithful seven thousand of Elijah's time. But in 1958 three or four new congregations were added, several more appeared about 1960. In 1965 a merger with the Evangelical Presbyterians was consummated, and the name changed to the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod. By public standards and averages, we are still a very small denomination, but also, we are still true to the Scripture and Westminster Confession. Not a single minister in our church denies the virgin birth, and every one of them preaches the atonement and the resurrection.

So it is with this congregation at 79th St and Allisonville Road, Indianapolis. As God placed Gottschalk in France of the ninth century, and as God sent Wycliffe and his Lollards to England in 1350, and as God called Tyndale to translate the Bible so as to extend the Reformation, so too God has chosen us for this time and this place. No man can really know what the results of his life-work will be. Gottschalk may have hoped that his friends would help in the defense of the Gospel; but as his prison term lengthened to twenty years, he must have learned that his labors were in vain. Wycliffe seemed to win considerable success, but his movement was stamped out after his death. Tyndale was a martyr, but his labor of translation produced results beyond his fondest hopes. What we here and now can do, we cannot even guess. It may be that God will bless our efforts and crown them with public success. Perhaps we can build up a big congregation on this corner and establish other congregations in Indiana.

God has already granted us a measure of success, and for this we are grateful. The enemies of the Gospel sued us for our property and tried to extinguish our congregation. But the lower court decided in our favor. Our enemies have now appealed. Therefore it is still possible that we may lose our old property, but with the original case decided in our favor, a future reversal is less likely. But even if the un hoped for and unexpected reversal should occur, our enemies have failed in the main point. They expected us to wither away and die. This expectation has now been decisively defeated. We are alive, we shall remain alive, and we shall grow. For all this we glorify God.

Yet this encouraging measure of success cannot with confidence be projected on any large scale. Though we pray for public success, for new congregations in the state of Indiana, and for widespread repentance throughout the nations, this may be the age when God will fulfill his prediction of the Great Apostasy. In spite of God's precious blessings to ourselves, this more dismal possibility can easily become fact. On a large scale the nations of the world are more and more showing their hostility to our Lord Jesus Christ. Some nations prohibit missionaries from entering their territory; others expel those who are already there; in East Berlin it is a crime against the state to walk down the street with a Bible under your arm. Here in America anti-Christian teaching is wide-spread in the school, while the

Gospel is banned.

It is therefore possible that the near future will be the age of Apostasy when the man of sin shall be revealed, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God. Does this mean that the church will fail? Does this mean that we should relapse into inaction? No, it does not, for Christ said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The Church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord, to defend,
To guide, sustain and cherish
Is with her to the end.
Though there be those who hate her,
And false sons in her pale,
Against or foe or traitor
She ever shall prevail.

The Completion of the Church

The New Testament tells us that Christ shall build his church; the Old Testament tells us that he shall see the travail of his soul which shall be satisfied. At the end Christ will be well satisfied with what he has done.

Therefore we do not evaluate the Church in terms of public success and temporary blessings, or in terms of temporary tragedies either. A judgment on history and a judgment on Church history cannot be made until history ends. The war is not over nor is the victor visible until the last battle is finished. Christ will build his church, but no building shows its beauty until it is completed. Therefore in blessing and in trial the Church, the bride of Christ, awaits the day of completion.

