

[A sermon from the papers of Dr. Gordon H. Clark. Preached on the first anniversary of the the RPCES church in Muncie, Indiana, June 9, 1968]

Anniversary at Muncie
Westminster Church
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In searching for a suitable introduction to the sermon to this happy anniversary occasion, the Civil War battle at Shiloh came to mind. It is appropriate because in certain ways it is similar to our present endeavor and in other ways it provides a contrast.

The city of Corinth, Miss. is located on Route 72 between Memphis and Chattanooga. Twenty miles north is the battlefield of Shiloh. In 1862 General Grant had forced the Confederate army out of Tennessee; they had abandoned Nashville and had retreated to Corinth, Miss. General Grant had now penetrated to Shiloh, and was awaiting reinforcements under General Buell. He had occupied a ridge high above the Tennessee river, and as soon as Gen. Buell should arrive, he would attack Corinth.

But Gen. Buell was a little slow, and much to Grant's surprise the Confederates attacked him. Grant ordered Gen. Lew Wallace, later of Ben Hur fame, to bring his troops up from the river to the high ridge. But Gen. Wallace got lost in the woods and never got there before nightfall. It was also nightfall when Gen. Buell arrived. In the meantime a furious battle took place. The Union troops were largely disorganized and routed. Many threw away their arms and fled downhill to the river. But more of them fought with deathly determination. Deathly indeed, for some 16,000 of them were killed.

Grant tried to rally his fleeing troops. In some places he succeeded. In one place the Confederates failed to dislodge the Union force. It stood firm on a high spot of the ridge and repulsed the Confederate advance. Largely owing to this division of the army, the Confederates were unable to achieve a complete breakthrough.

The next morning with the addition of Wallace's divisions and Buell's army, the Confederates were routed with a terrible loss. They evacuated Corinth, and all Miss. was open and defenseless before Grant, had not his jealous superiors ordered him not to proceed.

The reason for recalling the battle of Shiloh, aside from the fact that I happen to be reading about it recently, is that in several ways it is similar to the situation in which Christians find themselves today. The first similarity is that Christian life is a battle and a war.

The Apostle explains this similarity somewhat fully in Eph. 6:10-17.

Reference should also be made to I Tim. 1:18 "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy ... that thou ... mightest war a good warfare."

In warfare there is usually a great deal of confusion. This was not only true at Shiloh, and through the whole Civil War. It is true of all wars, and it is true of our present war.

By our present war I do not exactly mean our war in Vietnam, though there is all sorts of confusion there. What I mean is the complete situation in which the cause of Christ now finds itself – including the war in Vietnam. The communists there have tortured and killed both western missionaries and native converts. If they are permitted to win and take control of South Vietnam, it would be a tragedy for Christianity. American attempts to defend the helpless Vietnamese against this campaign of torture are beset with all sorts of confusion. But in the world situation as a whole, Vietnam is only one source of confusion.

I could of course mention the recent communist riots in France and Germany. But let us look closer home. There is confusion and trouble here. Not only as citizens but as Christians we are involved in widespread disorder here in America. The crime rate has been rising for years and now threatens to destroy society. Last year a gang nailed a girl through her hands to a tree. In Indianapolis a woman tortured a child for weeks until the little child died. Now this mentality has taken the open form of riot and insurrection. Looting, arson, and murder occur on a large scale; and if the police are willing to preserve order, their efforts are nullified by criminally inclined courts. The confusion in our land is not only the reluctance to preserve justice in Asia, but reluctance to preserve justice even in America.

Do not think that I am making a political speech inappropriate for the pulpit. The Ten Commandments say, Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal. American society is violating God's commands, and such conduct is properly subject to condemnation from the pulpit. No doubt these things overlap the sphere of politics, but they are primarily moral matters, religious affairs, and Christian concerns.

In fact the more violent and more destructive crimes, such as riot, arson, and insurrection are the result of a larger process of moral deterioration. Christianity's emphasis on righteousness has been lost in the din of demonstrations, and with Christian standards gone, violence flourishes. Therefore it is not petty politics, or even partisan politics to call men back to the Bible and remind them that righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

As an example of the source of the wide spread immorality and wickedness, I wish to point to Joseph Fletcher, a professor of ethics in an Episcopal Seminary. This man, who professes to be a Christian, and who is a professor of ethics, no less, in a seminary attacks every one of the Ten Commandments right down the line from one to ten. He insists that in certain situation a man ought to take the name of God in vain, ought to commit murder and adultery and ought to bear false witness.

With the Ten Commandments gone, all sorts of evil spring up: not only riots and vandalism, but

on a more personal level L.S.D. and drug addiction.

If now we are willing to face the seriousness of the breakdown of morality in our country, we might ask how it came about. What caused the repudiation of the Ten Commandments?

The cause can be expressed in two ways, one more general, one more particular.

The more general cause of all our evils is man's sinful nature. In connection with Grant's battle at Shiloh I said that the Christian life is a warfare. The non-Christian life is also a warfare – a warfare against God. The Apostle says, in Rom. 8:7, “the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Men are naturally enemies of God They have an inborn tendency to fight against God and to violate his laws. This is what is now happening on a large open scale.

But there is also a more particular cause of our evils. In past centuries, the Church, whatever its faults and weaknesses may have been, however it oscillated between faithfulness and corruption, between life and death, nevertheless made a profession of the basic Biblical doctrines and more or less vigorously defended and advocated the Ten Commandments.

But now it is the visible Church itself that attacks the Ten Commandments; and the Church attacks the Ten Commandments because it has repudiated the Bible and its message. It no longer believes in salvation by grace and justification by faith because it no longer believes in sin. Rejecting miracles in the name of science, it not only denies the Virgin Birth, but the Resurrection as well. Indeed some Theological professors claim that God is dead so that they talk about an atheistic or secular Christianity.

Those who are not so outspoken talk about Christ and even about the Resurrection, but they mean only an existential experience, not actual events in the past. For example, Adam is a myth, no such man ever existed, but the story of Adam is an instructive fable, like those of Aesop, so that as every flatterer exemplifies the fox who got the crow's cheese, every man does things he ought not to do. Adam therefore is historical only in the sense that you and I are historical. I am Adam; you are Adam. So too Christ and his Resurrection are interpreted, misinterpreted, to be subjective experiences that you or I may have any day of the week. In this vein of thought one liberal theologian asserted that the Resurrection, Pentecost, and the Second Coming are all the same event.

I would like you to note here how bad theology and bad morals coincide. It is bad theology to deny that Jesus arose from the dead on the third day after the crucifixion. It is bad morals to talk about the Resurrection after making such a denial. These liberal are guilty of false witness, of trying to deceive the people in the pews by using Christian words in anti-Christian senses. Evil thrives on such confusion.

Too many people fail to see the dangers of bad Theology. In fact they are not even greatly excited by its immoral results. Some people begin to get awake when a church gives a dance for homosexuals or stages nude dancing for a Sunday morning service. These are indeed shocking, revolting, odious; but these offensive activities follow naturally from the repudiation of Biblical theology: the doctrine of sin, the death and resurrection of Christ, salvation by grace, and a consequent striving for righteousness. But the Gospel has been perverted, misapplied, and silenced for so long in so many churches that even people of the best intentions have lost their bearings.

In this battle confusion, what is an honest Christian to do? At Shiloh some soldiers ran away. They did not sympathize with the Confederate cause; in a sense they supported the Union; but they could not fight for it. They ran away.

There were others who were disorganized. Their ranks were broken. They had lost their officers. They were willing to fight, but did not know how. These were the men General Grant tried to reform into a battle line. There are many Christians like that today. They want to proclaim the Gospel; at least they want their church to proclaim the Gospel, but they find that their organization has been captured by the enemy and they don't know what to do.

Sometimes these people find or are found by a loyal officer, perhaps not a General, but a major or a captain. He will try to get them back into a line of battle. Some of the soldiers become active again; some are so confused that they disregard the officer's commands and either do nothing or do the wrong thing. Perhaps they start digging a trench, when the battle so surrounds them that trenches are useless and digging them wastes time and actually helps the enemy.

I know such people. They want to oppose liberalism and defend the Gospel. But they occupy themselves with activities they should have finished decades ago and which are useless now. Once a position is completely overrun, an uncaptured soldier is foolish to stay there and start digging a trench. This is the foolish tragedy of people who think they can win the war by staying in the territory of apostate denominations.

The people of this congregation have not acted in this foolish manner. Today we celebrate the first anniversary of reforming the ranks and pressing the battle. Here we stand, on a high ridge; we are not running away; we are not in the wrong army; we are fighting in a desperate battle. Of course, not everyone agrees with our stand. Jesus himself said that we "shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake; and then shall many be offended and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." This we must expect. But the gossip and underhand dealings that we must put up with in this country are nothing in comparison with the oppression, the persecution, torture, and death that loyal Christians have suffered and are suffering under communism. And we still hope it won't happen here.

But then between the battle of Shiloh and our battle there are also some dissimilarities. Grant knew that the division under General Wallace was near, and that the army under General Buell might arrive at any hour. But none of our human officers know whether reinforcements will appear or whether greater tragedies will occur. However, there is another dissimilarity that is more encouraging. General Grant could not control Wallace or Buell; he simply had to wait and hang on. But in addition to our human officers, who can only wait, fight, and hang on, our heavenly Commander controls the outcome. As David said to Goliath, “This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel ... for the battle is the Lord's.” Churches have become apostate before now, but God has promised that against his true Church, the gates of hell shall not perish.

Now I would like to conclude by mentioning two more similarities with the battle of Shiloh. The first is that you and I and our denomination are engaged in a battle. This immediate battle is not the whole war. After Shiloh General Halleck relieved Grant of his command, and the army did not march south and consolidate its victory. In fact, Grant was soon so discouraged that he decided to resign. Only General Sherman's strong opposition kept him from resigning. Later of course Grant became the commander of all the armies and he won the war. Shiloh was only one battle. If today we are fighting the battle of Shiloh, let us remember the war covers the whole world and will continue until the end.

Now, there is a final similarity. General Grant knew the strategy he had so far followed. He knew also what he intended to do next, if General Halleck did not stop him. And we today who read the history of the Civil War see the whole thing more completely than Grant ever could. This is what makes the reading of history interesting. Grand strategy is exciting stuff.

But still indispensable is the one division of footsoldiers who occupy a high ridge and keep the enemy from winning a complete victory. An army cannot fight without a General, but neither can a General fight without an army.

So too it is in Church History. We are gripped by the Reformation in Germany, in Switzerland, and especially in Scotland. There was 150 years of exciting times. You remember how John Knox defeated the adulterous and murderous Mary Queen of Scots. You also remember how our Covenanter forefathers were massacred by the dissolute Charles and the Catholic James. Those were stirring times, dangerous in the extreme, but glorious.

But the footsoldier usually cannot see far beyond his immediate station. His battle is right before him and all around him. Unless one division holds that one hill above the Tennessee River, the battle is lost, and who knows how the war will go?

Grant put certain soldiers at that given place. God has put you here in Muncie. Here is your

battle, as mine is in Indianapolis. A year has gone by since you started. You have not run away. You have no intention of running away. This is where you will stay to fight the enemy, with your loins girt about with truth, with the breastplate of righteousness, your feet shod with the gospel of peace, with the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and above all the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God.