

A Basket of Figs

February, 1999

Dedicated to the idea that the decree makes the difference. Jeremiah 24:2,3

Are The Foundations Destroyed?

If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. --Psalm 11:3-5

The Psalmist asks a rhetoric question. If there is nothing to build on, what are the righteous supposed to do? The answer is obvious: there is nothing to do. You cannot build on nothing. If the foundations of truth are removed, then there is no way to know what is true. If the foundations of right and decency are removed, then there is no difference between right and wrong, and no way to evaluate behavior. There is nothing but ruin and desolation, and we might as well eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die.

The Psalm was written in difficult times for the righteous. There were those who would say, 'Flee as a bird to your mountain. For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.' (Ps. 11:1,2). It seemed prudent to think of survival, to flee to shelters, to run away. What can the righteous do, if the foundations be destroyed?

The Psalmist answers his own question, and refutes his own temptation to despair. "The Lord is in His holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven."

The foundations are not destroyed, and cannot be destroyed, and there is a lot for the righteous to do.

The great apostle Paul put it another way, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest. ..." 1 Cor. 3:11-13. The foundation laid in Jesus Christ is beyond the reach of sinful man, or the gates of hell.

What are the righteous to do in times like ours? Answer: what the righteous have always done: build upon the eternal salvation of God's promise in Jesus Christ. The labor of the righteous man is never in vain, if it be built upon this rock. Jesus Christ is the Rock, the eternal foundation of righteousness and truth, and it is never useless to build upon Him.

How do we do this? The same way the church has always done it. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.” (Matthew 7:25,26)

The words of Jesus Christ reveal the unchanging nature of Jehovah, “I am that I am.” He is the rock of Ages who never changes. Satan can get no greater advantage over God’s people than to persuade them that it is useless to go back to first principles, to build our homes, schools, and churches upon the words of God. “The world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” (1 John 1:17)

The way to failure and ruin for the church, is to “get with it,” to become “up to date,” to listen to the siren song of those who say that it is futile to build upon the changeless nature of God. After all, they say, we live in a post-Christian era. (In their dreams!)

This means that the church of Jesus Christ must reject the philosophies and methods of the world, and return to the doctrine and teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles, for this is the winning formula. Nothing can shake that foundation.

This also means that church must not measure its success by worldly standards. We do not win because we attract the multitudes, have huge financial assets, or meet in ornate and rich buildings. It is the message which is the glory and power of Christianity. We must not confuse worldly success with spiritual success.

This does not mean that Satan will not turn loose his arrows. The wicked may bend their bow. The devil and his servants hate the righteous. Throughout the history of the church the words of Jesus Christ have been fulfilled, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’ John 16:33 God has not promised that it will all be peace and light to build on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, but He has warned that we will be successful only if we do so.

It is not necessary or possible to lay another foundation. It has already been laid in Jesus Christ, and to build on anything else is to build on sand. In days of apostacy and wickedness, the church must go on doing what Jesus called the church to do: teach, baptize, teach, teach teach. His throne is in the heavens and endures forever. All else comes tumbling down in due time.

Sexual Repression is Necessary

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” — 7th Commandment

“But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. —Matthew 5:28

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. —I Cor. 9:27

Freud taught us well. You know the line. Sexual repression leads to aggression, hypocrisy, and social repression. We need leaders who are not sexually repressed, for they will understand real compassion and be in touch with people.

It's all balderdash, of course. Those who are slaves of their sexual desires are low and miserable people. Those who live in pleasure, the Holy Spirit says, are dead while they live (I Tim. 5:6). They are dead because they cannot think of anything but the flesh and the desires of the flesh. Everything becomes bound to their pleasure. Truth is the first casualty, because they must lie to subject people to their pleasures; violence follows, because they are like small children who throw temper tantrums when they cannot have immediate pleasure. An unrepressed sexual society is a lying and a violent society. The slogan of the sixties, “Make love, not war,” is a good one unless by love you mean sexual sin. Making that kind of love makes war, war against the family, against society, against the church, and against God.

No Say

It was many years ago, in the early sixties. I was very young in the ministry, and with my new hammer and nail apron, was helping frame a new church in Anderson, California. One afternoon a man drove his pickup onto the lot, and soon engaged some of us in conversation.

He said he was “turned off” by church, using a phrase that was very “in” at that time. “I helped build a Baptism church in Kansas,” he volunteered. “I didn’t stay there very long, though,” he went on. “They wouldn’t give me no say.”

Nothing else mattered to him. The mind-set of this man, common in the forties and fifties, broke out into the culture of the sixties. Everyone has a right to have a “say.” I could visualize the situation. The man knew nothing of the Bible, nothing of the church, and nothing of God. But he felt that he had the right to have a “say.” When his silly opinions were rejected, he abandoned the church, rather than do the work necessary to have opinions that people would listen to.

And so it goes. People think they have a right to have a “say,” and by that, they mean that people must listen to them.

The right to speak doesn't mean people have a duty to listen. I do not think that the mind is a *tabula rasa* when a person is born into the world. It may have no information, but the mind is wonderfully prepared by God to receive and organize vast amounts of information. The mind of an infant is not nothing, as Paul Harvey would say. The categories of reason, quantity, and number, including the concept of infinity and horizon, are all ready to be developed. This is a natural light that leaves men without excuse in the presence of the Creator, for the mind can perceive and get information from nature, from his senses, from other people.

That being said, the belief that every man has the capacity for wisdom does not mean that every man has wisdom.

About the same time as the man who complained that he had no "say," I had a small vegetable garden in my backyard. In the night rabbits would come and eat the tender shoots, and I resented it, because I wanted food to feed my growing family. A friend who came to our church once in a while told me what to do. "If you put a string around the garden, the rabbits will bump into it, think it is a fence, and will go away." He seemed like a man of some sense, so I tried it out, although I felt a little foolish. The rabbits did not succumb to psychological manipulation. It was all in vain. A shotgun solved the problem permanently.

What is the lesson in all this rambling? My friend who thought that rabbits could be persuaded by psychological warfare was wrong, and I was wrong to give him a "say" in my efforts at horticulture. It was not wrong to listen to him, but it was foolish to try to give his opinion validity. Opinions are to be weighed, not counted. Noah's opinion as to the future of his world, was of far greater weight than the multitudes who perished in the flood.

Good and kind communications skills require us to listen to people. Wisdom requires us to reject foolishness and follow understanding. People may have a right to speak; no one has a right to have people listen to them.

When Truth Falls

And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. —Isaiah 59:14,15

The courts did not seem to be in touch. Innocent people were victims of violent crime, and very often the courts were corrupt and allowed the guilty to go free. Government officials were corrupt and lining their own pockets. The courts were filled with empty arguments and lying tongues. Lawlessness was everywhere.

This was Israel in the days of Isaiah, who diagnosed the problem: the carcass of truth blocked the street, so equity could not enter.

I. The root meaning of “Equity” is “straightforwardness” or “integrity.” Another form describes the walk of the righteous man (Is. 57:2). In Proverbs 8:9 the words of wisdom are “plain” to those with understanding. When Israel no longer wanted to hear the truth, they wished the prophets to prophesy “smooth things,” of deceit, not “right” (equity), straightforward thing (Is. 30:10).

The Bible teaches that there is a “plain” way: a simple, right, and honest way for a man to treat his God and his neighbor. This simple, right way is written in the heart of every man, in his very nature, so that he is without excuse. The Apostle Paul said that this law is even written on the hearts of those who have never heard of the Bible (Romans 2:13-16). In their wickedness, men are able to corrupt this law, and some may even succeed in “searing their conscience as with a hot iron” (I Tim. 4:2), but they can never entirely erase it, and it will rise up to judge them in the last day. The pure form of this “law of nature” was given in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20), and its summary is true love for God and our neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40). This law shows that man is a moral being and is accountable to God and to his neighbor for his actions. The humanist must deny this law of God.

II. In Christian nations, the legal system reflected this law of equity. In England equity courts originated in the legal system established after 1066 by William of Normandy. They were “courts of conscience,” administered by the king’s chancellor, a clergyman. (Smith, Chester H., *Smith’s Review of Equity*, West Publishing Co., St. Paul, Minn., 1958. P. 9) Until this century, courts of equity were part of the American judicial system. Webster defines equity:

“Justice according to natural law or right,” or “a system of law originating in the English chancery and comprising a settle and formal body of legal and procedural rules and doctrines that supplement, aid, or override common and statute law and are designed to protect rights and enforce duties fixed by substantive law.”

A substantive right or duty is one that exists for its own sake and rest in natural law. For instance, a man has no right to endanger life by shooting a gun at a passing train, even if there is no specific statute, or decision in common law to cover that case. He is expected to know that such actions are wrong.

Reasonable men want their courts to be upright, to dispense honest and fair decisions. Equity courts held a man responsible to behave in a right way toward his neighbor’s life, property, and reputation and were an attempt toward responsible, fair judicatories. The very existence of these courts testified to rights and laws that were above the statute and common law, and tended to affect decisions in the other courts. Jefferson’s allusion to the “laws of nature,” and of “nature’s God” in the *Declaration of Independence* is within the scope of this Christian heritage.

A number of years ago courts of equity were abolished in America, and combined with the regular system, and equity is usually ignored in modern courts, not the least because modern theology, aided and abetted by some evangelicals, had denied natural law, following the lead of Barth and others.

This development is understandable in present law theory where there is no recognition of natural law proceeding from the God who created us all. Understandable, but irresponsible. An exception was *Brown*, which ended segregation in public schools, the most famous equity decision in the history of America. In a reversal of positions, conservatives, whose natural position was to support natural law, tended to oppose *Brown* because it was a departure from statute law, and liberals, whose natural position was to reject natural law, tended to support *Brown* because it was “fair.”

III. Natural Law Presupposes a Creator, and That’s the Rub, in Hamlet’s Phrase. Modern man hates God and His law. He wants to live in a relativistic world, so that he can justify abortion, sodomy, confiscatory taxation, sexual harassment, perjury and obstruction of justice, and reap the power and income that comes from them. He sees himself a victim in an impersonal world; not as a responsible man under God.

In spite of this God is the Creator and Judge of all the earth. This is the truth that lies in the street and blocks equity’s way. Without a foundation of natural law, words can be twisted in any direction, made to mean anything, and justice and equity become impossible. Racism becomes worse than murder, and notorious murderers go free because a cop made racist statements. Lies under oath are not perjury because it is not possible to know what the person had in his mind when he told the lie. Powerful men may be excused from sexual harassment if their poll numbers are high enough. Equity cannot pass, because truth blocks the street.

The Christians who compromised with atheistic evolution in the public schools did not realize that this undermined a court system based on equity and natural law, turning loose a flood of lawlessness, criminal government, and general viciousness. But they did know what the Bible said, so they were without excuse, just as we are today if we do not work to have God’s law recognized as the basis for our law.

IV. But Equity is blocked only for us, not for God. It was so bad in Israel that God “wondered” [an *anthropomorphism*] that there was no man, no intercessor, to plead Israel’s case [Isaiah 59:15-17]. It displeased Him that there was no justice. So He took charge Himself. He “put on righteousness as a breastplate, and helmet of salvation upon his head...; vengeance for clothing, ...and zeal as a cloke” (Is. 59:17). God is the Judge of all the earth, and will not leave the path of Equity blocked.

When God rises to judge the earth, the truth is clearly demonstrated, that He is God and that there is none else. The wicked will not enjoy that day, when God causes truth to rise in the earth, and sets things right. God does not consult with focus

groups, nor poll the people, nor pretend that truth is not clear. The wicked will not like God's intervention, but the righteous will rejoice in equity.

The most dangerous time for the ungodly is when they are in great power and the people of God are without strength. It is in such times that God delights to show His power and glory. Those who live only in the world and seek all causes in the world, will be caught completely unawares.

The Fifth Lateran Council met in Rome from 1512 to 1517. In 1512 an orator declared, "Now nobody contradicts, no one opposes." Pope Leo X ascended the Papal throne in 1513 with the smug words, "Now that we have attained the papacy, let us enjoy it." The Council smugly adjourned in March, 1517. After all, they had the wealth, the power, the conscience of Western Europe supporting them. John Huss had been burned a hundred years before; the ashes of Wycliffe had been spread on the waters and dispersed throughout the world. Everything was under control. Everything except one German monk's conscience, who within eight months would post a document on the door of a church in Wittenberg that would bring down the whole godless, humanistic system.

According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense. So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. –Isaiah 59:18,19.

Hatred of Father

Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise. –Ephesians 6:2

A generation that turns against mother and father is an atheistic generation. The promise referred to above is, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth you." (Ex. 20)

A revolutionary generation has no future, because it denies the past. The history of such movements is dreary indeed. The revolutionary mindset wants to overthrow everything and start fresh, for they see no value in that which has gone before. Filled with their own pride and ignorance, they imagine themselves to be victims of the past and good in their intentions and their goals. They hate the generations that have gone before, despise their accomplishments, magnify their weaknesses and failure. True progress is always the result of building on the past, not rejecting it.

At root is the revolutionary's hatred for God. After all, it is God who is the ultimate Father, who provides all things, and works all things after the counsel of His own will. If we despise our earthly fathers, what is that but despising the God who gave us our fathers? Hatred of parents indicates a feeling of victimhood that is rooted in hatred of God, despising His gifts. When men are unthankful, is it any wonder that they turn in hatred against their parents. "I

didn't ask to be born," they complain. True enough. God made that decision and decided who the instruments would be. This hatred is directed against God Himself.

Love for God means loves for His works. The real truth is that what we are, we are by the decree and purpose of God. The most important things about us are not the result of our choices, but because of God's purpose and plan. We did not choose our sex, the color of our skin, the economic status and class into which we were born, the color of our eyes, the century of our birth, the place and citizenship of our birth, and ten thousand other things.

Hatred of parents is just ill disguised hatred of God, who used our parents to accomplish His purpose and plan for who we are, where we are and when we are. We use hatred of parents in order to justify rebellion against God for who we are, and some people spend their whole lives in venting this hatred. We seek to impose our will on the will of God, with frightful consequences to ourselves and to our generation.

Honor of parents does not mean that we do not recognize whatever faults they may have, their unbelief, or sinful lifestyles. It does not mean that Christians do not witness to unbelieving parents and seek to win them for Christ. But whatever failures and sins our parents may have does not change a fundamental truth: it was God's will for them to be our parents, so that we might be born exactly who we are. If we can be thankful to God for that, then we can be thankful to God for our parents, for they were God's instrument in bringing God's gifts, especially the precious gift of life, to us.

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Trinity Covenant Church

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You Are Invited

Trinity Covenant invites you to attend our worship services. If you desire a church that uses the Apostles' Creed and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, emphasizes family worship and responsibility, then Trinity Covenant may be for you.
Pastor: C. W. Powell