



THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

Rebuilding the Church's Foundation

Introduction

The Church is the pillar and ground of the Truth. It is the body of Christ who is the incarnate Word of God (the *Logos*, Truth in its fullness). The Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Yet it is now deeply divided. It has lost its headship where it once flourished. It languishes in captivity to the world. The Church is to worship God in spirit and in truth and to make disciples of all nations. To do so it must rebuild on a deeper foundation. What is that foundation?

Foundation comes from three sources: philosophical, from the clarity of general revelation; theological, from the Biblical Worldview of creation–fall–redemption; and historical, from the cumulative insight of the Church's Creeds and Confessions. Foundation is given in narrative form from the beginning of Scripture in Genesis 1–3. It is also given theologically in summary form as seven pillars of the faith: clarity and inexcusability, sin and death, curse and promise, repentance and faith, justification and sanctification, baptism and calling, resurrection and reward. Sin empties these terms of their meaning. Rebuilding on rock must deepen their meaning. To introduce the task at hand, the following is a brief comment on these seven pillars.

1. Clarity and Inexcusability

Foundation must begin with the clarity of general revelation. If there is no clarity, there can be no meaning, no morality, and therefore no Christian faith. The basic things about God and man and good and evil are clear to reason. The invisible things of God, his eternal power and divine nature, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made so that unbelief concerning what is clear about God is without excuse. It is clear that there must be something eternal and that only some (God) is eternal: matter exists and matter is not eternal; the soul exists and the soul is not eternal. Man is created in the image of God, a body/soul unity, a rational animal. The moral law is clearly revealed in human nature. It is clear that God is good and that he created the world very good (without any form of natural evil) and that natural evil as a call back from moral evil requires special revelation to show God's justice and mercy.

Clarity has been largely ignored. Without clarity and inexcusability the Church lapses into fideism (belief without understanding) and the world lapses into skepticism (doubt without understanding). We have become deeply mired in this antinomy without the doctrine of clarity.

2. Sin and Death

Sin or moral evil is an act contrary to man's nature as a rational being. It is to neglect, avoid, resist and deny reason concerning what is clear about God. Left to oneself, no one seeks God, no one understands, no one does what is right. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Through the work of dominion man was to fill the earth with the knowledge of God. But all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Without glorifying God, no one can enjoy God.

The wages of sin is death. This death is spiritual, present and inherent in the sin of not seeking and not understanding. It is meaninglessness (words are more and more empty of meaning); it is boredom (desires are without satisfaction); and it is guilt (self-accusation without relief). Denial of spiritual death by the doctrine of hell, taken literally as future and imposed, is a denial of God's justice, a perpetuation of self-deception and a removal of the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom.

3. Curse and Promise

Man is called back from sin and death by the curse and promise. Original creation was very good. Natural evil (the curse) was due to moral evil. The curse of toil and strife and old age, sickness and death (increasing at times to war, famine and plague) is God's third and final call back from sin and self-deception and self-justification. Natural evil is not punishment for sin. It is God's call back from moral evil. Natural evil serves to restrain, recall from and remove moral evil. It is God's call to stop and think.

The promise is that through a spiritual war, which is age-long and agonizing, good will overcome evil. God permitted evil to deepen the revelation of his glory. Evil is made to serve the good. Christ in the place of Adam will undo what Adam did and will do what Adam failed to do. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He rules at the right hand of God through the Church until all thoughts raised up against the knowledge of God are taken captive to the obedience of Christ. Redemption does not bypass man's original calling in creation nor sets aside man's chief end, but fulfills them in a deeper way.

4. Repentance and Faith

Repentance begins with a change of mind from unbelief to belief regarding the manifold Word of God. It begins with the root sin of not seeking and understanding what is clear about God from general revelation. It arises from a personal conviction of sin and death. This conviction arises from regeneration that restores man to the life of reason. A change in thinking brings about a change in action. If a person seeks they will understand. If they understand what is clear they will be able to show what is clear. They will use reason to understand the meaning of Scripture. They will accept the work of the Holy Spirit leading the Church into all truth through its Councils and Creeds.

Biblical faith is belief based on understanding. Understanding gives evidence for (or reasons to believe) what is not seen. The general object of faith is the worldview of creation-fall-redemption. The particular object of faith is a saving understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Faith without understanding is fideism, a blind dogmatism, not biblical faith. Faith is inseparable from reason as truth is inseparable from meaning. Faith grows as understanding grows; faith is tested as understanding is tested.

5. Justification and Sanctification

Justification assumes vicarious atonement, which assumes the Fall of man in Adam. Adam's sin is imputed to all in him. Our sin is imputed to Christ. Christ's righteousness is imputed to all in him. Believers are accounted righteous (justified) on the basis of Christ's righteousness received by faith alone. In the order of redemption (*ordo salutis*) justification comes after regeneration (effectual calling) and conversion (conviction of sin and death and repentance and faith). It is followed by sanctification. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Sanctification is the process of being cleansed from all unrighteousness to become more like Christ. It is distinct but inseparable from and presupposes justification. We are sanctified by knowing the Truth. (The *Logos* is Truth.) Knowing the Truth is through a life-long process of trials of faith. Sanctification ends with physical death, the end of natural evil and suffering in trials of faith. All of salvation is by grace alone, through Christ alone. Works are a fruit of grace, not a source of merit.

6. Baptism and Calling

Baptism signifies regeneration (being born again) even as circumcision signified a new heart. Regeneration is also spoken of as a new creation and as a resurrection from the dead spiritually. The (sacramental) sign of baptism is not the reality of regeneration. Sign and reality may each exist apart from the other; baptismal regeneration collapses the distinction between sign and reality. Regeneration is solely a sovereign act of God who works when and where he wills. Baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It acknowledges our union with each person of the triune God, each in his distinct work: God the Father decrees; God the Son accomplishes redemption; God the Holy Spirit applies redemption.

Our distinct work (calling) is based on the work of Christ as prophet, priest and king who carries out the will of the Father through the Church, the body of Christ, by the Holy Spirit. Christ came to undo the sin of Adam and to do what Adam failed to do: to glorify God through the work of dominion, given to all mankind in the beginning. Dominion requires us to name the creation (the natural and the human world) in all its parts and aspects, and to rule over all through the natural law and the moral law. Each person is to love God with the whole heart (mind, soul and strength); yet each is to serve all in their varying offices as prophet, priest and king under Christ.

7. Resurrection and Reward

Man is created a body/soul unity in the image of God. Physical death is not original at creation; it is part of the curse imposed by God as a call back from sin and spiritual death. By man came death. Under the curse: Dust you are and to dust you shall return. But as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. All in the grave (both the just and the unjust) will be raised from the dead when all has been subdued to Christ. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. After the resurrection comes the rapture. We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed, to have bodies no longer subject to death. After the general resurrection of all the dead, those who are alive and remain shall be changed and caught up together with all resurrected believers to meet the Lord in the air. Therefore a pre-millennial rapture is a false hope.

After the resurrection of all comes the Last Judgment in which all must give an account of their thoughts and words and deeds. Man's chief end that is corporate, cumulative and communal is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Since God is glorified through the work of dominion, one's reward is according to work that has lasting fruit. In the work of dominion history unfolds from the Garden of Eden to the City of God, the Kingdom of God, which is the inheritance of all who believe. Hope for the good, eternal life, the knowledge of God in its fullness, apart from the completion of the work of dominion is therefore a false hope.

Conclusion

The Church's foundation enables believer to go on to maturity, fruitfulness, unity of the faith and the fullness of Christ. Without the foundation the Church has division and apostasy and the culture has decay and collapse.