

The Presbyterian Guardian

December 12, 1936

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 5

One Dollar a Year

J. GRESHAM MACHEN
NED B. STONEHOUSE *Editors*

Published semi-monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

THOMAS R. BIRCH,
Managing Editor

THE NEED OF EDIFICATION

IT IS interesting to observe how much the Bible uses the figure of a building to describe the things of the Christian life. One of the most notable passages where that is done is the great passage in the third chapter of I Corinthians. The only foundation of the Church, Paul says, is Christ: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

But then, Paul goes on to say, we build upon this foundation, and let every man take heed how he builds. Every man's work in building upon the foundation will be tested by the judgment day. That majestic Day will be revealed in fire, and the fire will test every man's work, of what sort it is.

Very sad will be the case of the man whose work in building upon the one foundation will not stand the test of the judgment.

It will not, indeed, be like the case of the man who actually defiles the temple of God. About such a man the apostle seems to speak in very different terms, when he says: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Unlike such a man (whom the apostle seems perhaps even to place outside the category of true Christians altogether), the man who does not destroy what has already been built, but builds with perishable materials, is distinctly said to be among those who are saved.

Yet his case will be a sad one—at least in comparison with what it might have been. Although he will be saved, he will be saved so as through fire. He will be saved, but his work will pass away.

How shall we avoid the shame of having our work thus destroyed at the judgment day? How shall we avoid the shame of finding that our work, of which perhaps we were so proud, was but wood, hay, stubble, after all? How shall we learn to build, instead, with the gold, silver and precious stones that will stand to all eternity?

Surely we can do that only by attending to the directions that are given in God's Word. If we do the things that the Word of God plainly directs us to do, and do them with an honest heart, then we may very humbly and yet very confidently hope that our work may endure to all eternity.

What then are the things that the Word of God plainly directs us to do; and are the activities of our present-day churches within the number of those things?

Well, about many of the activities of our present-day churches we may well be in doubt. Perhaps they are things that the Word of God, by implication, directs us to do; but perhaps also they are outside the category of those things. Perhaps they are gold, silver or precious stones; but in some respects they do look uncommonly like wood, hay or stubble. Frankly, we are in doubt about them. We ought no doubt to be slow about condemning them when others are carrying them on. We ought always to remember that Christ is the judge, not we. Our brethren stand in His presence, and one day they will stand before His judgment seat. But for ourselves we surely ought to seek those kinds of service in the Church about which there is no doubt, those kinds of service which are clearly in accordance with the directions which God has given us in His Word.

The Presbyterian Guardian is published twice a month by The Presbyterian Guardian Publishing Company, at the following rates, payable in advance, for either old or new subscribers in any part of the world, postage prepaid: \$1.00 per year; five or more copies, either to separate addresses or in a package to one address, 80c each per year; introductory rate, for new subscribers only: Two and a half months for 25c; 10c per copy. Address all editorial correspondence to: The Rev. Ned B. Stonehouse, Th.D. No responsibility is assumed for unsolicited manuscripts. Editorial and Business Offices: 1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia, Penna.

We shall not attempt to give a list of those kinds of service. But about one activity there can surely be no manner of doubt. Whatever other activities may be in accordance with the Word of God, surely there is one activity that is clearly in accordance with it. It is the impartation of a solid knowledge of the Word of God itself.

That activity has been sadly neglected in our present-day churches.

It has been sadly neglected in Modernist churches. That goes without saying. Modernist churches do not believe, in any real sense, that the Bible is the Word of God, and naturally they are not particularly interested in the impartation of a knowledge of it to their people.

But it has also been sadly neglected in evangelical churches. Many preachers, evangelical in their beliefs, have sadly neglected the work of edification. They have preached fine sermons—sermons that are perfectly good and perfectly true. But the trouble is that those fine sermons deal only with those parts of the contents of the Bible on which it is easiest to preach. The consequence is that the people have not been built up. They have not been grounded in any solid and systematic knowledge of the Word of God.

The teaching of the young also has been sadly neglected. The preachers, who ought to be the principal teachers in the church, have been called on to do so many other things—things that others could do just as well—that they have not been able to discharge their proper educational function. Sunday school instruction has too often been desultory. Real catechetical instruction has been neglected.

The result has been exactly what it might have been expected to be. Where a knowledge of the Word of God is absent from people's lives, the people have been led astray. A certain great theologian used to say that the Church is "dying of ignorance." He was not far wrong. The great need in the church—the necessary basis for evangelicalism, the necessary basis for prayer, the necessary basis for every other good thing—is a knowledge of God's holy Word. Before we can speak about God to others, even before we can speak to God ourselves, we must listen to what God has said to us.

How shall that knowledge of God's Word be promoted? How shall the people be built up in a knowledge of the great system of revealed truth which the Bible contains?

No doubt in a great many ways. We have not space just now to attempt even a bare enumeration of them. But about one thing that must be done we are perfectly

sure. We are perfectly sure that the historic Standards of our Faith must be taken from the shelf, and must be given their proper place in the edification of the people of God.

It is a mistake to think that the Christian should neglect the help which he can receive in his study of the Word of God from the previous study of it by godly men. No doubt some "helps" to the study of the Bible are harmful. But the proper remedy for helps that are harmful, helps that only *seem* to help and do not really edify in the long run, is not the neglect of all helps, but the use of helps that are true to the Word.

We Presbyterians profess to find such true helps in the historic Standards of our Faith. Our ministers and elders and deacons have solemnly declared at their ordination that they hold those Standards to contain the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. The Presbyterian Church of America at its second General Assembly, recently held in Philadelphia, formally adopted those Standards in their purity.

Those professions are splendid. We rejoice in them with all our souls.

But are they enough? No, they are not enough. The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms have been adopted as the doctrinal Standards of our church. That is good. But one other thing is also needed—that the system of doctrine contained in those Standards shall be written in the minds and hearts of the people.

We say advisedly "of the people," and not merely "of the ministers." It is true we welcome into our communion as members of the church—not as ministers—those who have not yet come to accept that system of doctrine. But it is a very great mistake, though a common mistake, to suppose that the Westminster Standards are intended only for ordained persons and not for the laity. No doubt persons can be received into the membership of the church who are babes in Christ, but that is not in order that they shall remain babes. On the contrary, it is in order that they may be built up in the Faith. And the means by which they are built up in the Faith is solid instruction given to them, through the pulpit and by other means—solid instruction in the full system of revealed truth taught in the Bible and so gloriously summarized in our historic Standards.

We Presbyterians have a glorious heritage. God grant that we may now address ourselves earnestly to the task of using it to the edification of the Church and to the honor of Christ the Head!