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The Foundation.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON

LAYING THE CORNER-STONE

OF

The Presbyterian Church.

BRIDESBURG, PA.

By B. F. STEAD, D. D. *of Antiochia*

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

PHILADELPHIA.

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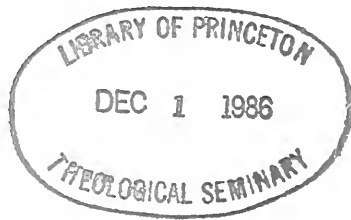
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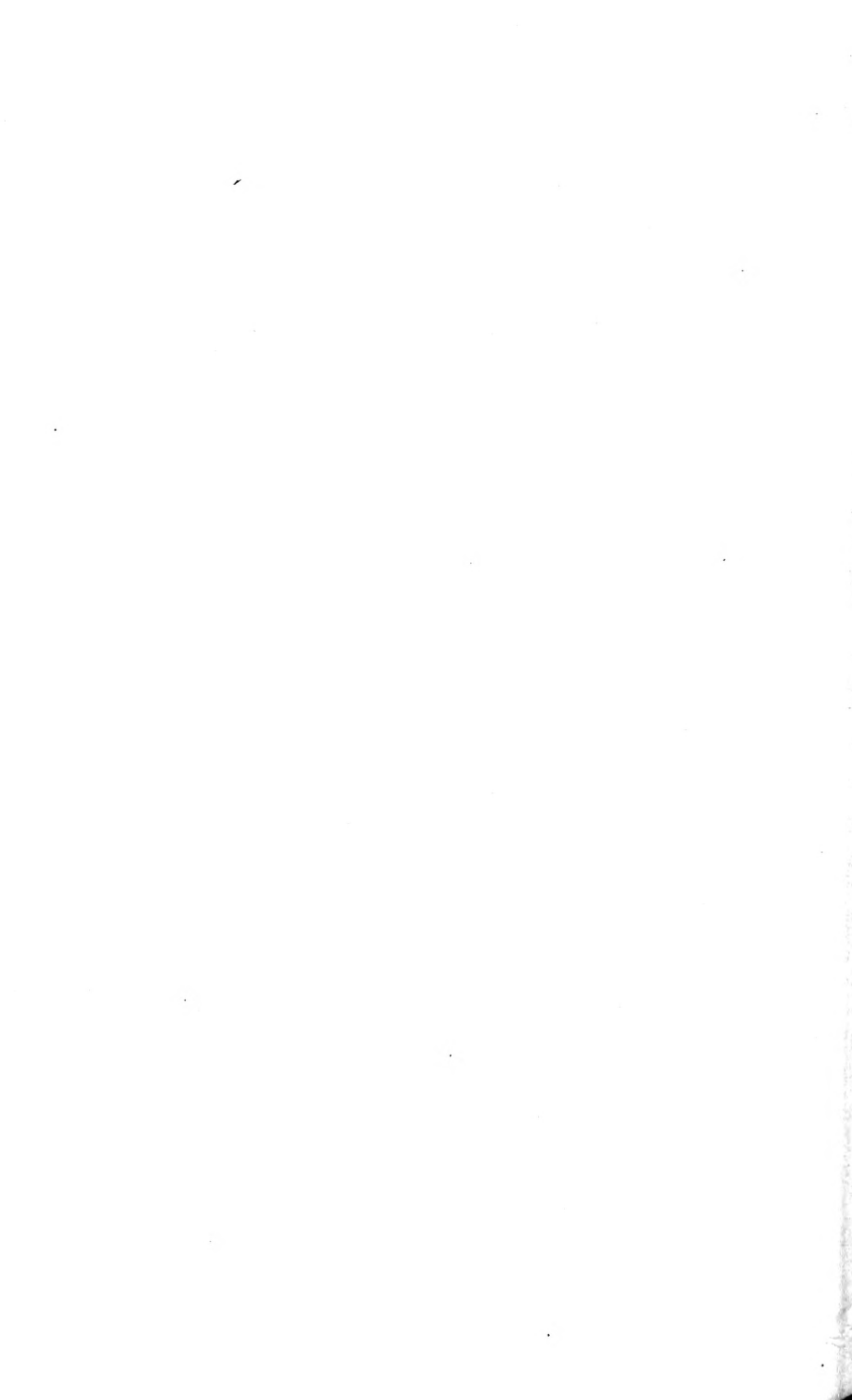
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DISCOURSE.

An American clergyman, visiting the ancient city of Damascus, ascended to the roof of one of the Mohammedan mosques. The building had been constructed from the ruins of some ancient Christian edifice, and on one of the slabs of marble the servant of Christ found an old inscription, which the followers of the false prophet had unwittingly placed upon their place of worship. On that old fragment, taken from some Christian church, was the inscription, in Greek,

TO CHRIST, THE ETERNAL KING.

Thus our Lord Jesus puts his mark on all the possessions of this world, and claims them for his own. The time shall come when all must respect this claim. His servants now recognize it and rejoice to say, "Thine is the Kingdom."

With King David when he consecrated to God the rich offering for the erection of the temple, let every Christian in every act of dedication say, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

We are here to lay the corner-stone of a house to be dedicated to Jesus, the King of Ages. On every stone, and on every part of the building, let his name be written, from the foundation to the top-stone; on the doors, that the people coming in and going out may remember whose house they are in; on the pews and on the pulpit—let pastor and people read and consider; on the communion table and on the choir, that every service, holy communion, prayer, discourse, and song of praise, and every strain of melody, may be for the honor of Jesus, the King Eternal.

On the foundation of the Church of God there is, as we read in Holy Scripture, a two-fold inscription. On the one side a recognition of the sovereignty and grace of God; on the other, a recognition of the duty of man: "THE LORD KNOWS HIS OWN;" and "LET EVERY ONE WHO NAMES THE NAME OF CHRIST, DEPART FROM INIQUITY." On these two principles the Church of God rests.

The Church may be considered as visible or invisible. As visible, it is made up of all who profess the Chris-

tian religion and of their children; as invisible, it is made up of all whom the Lord knows as his own. The Church visible is a field in which are some barren places; some hard-trodden like the way-side; some where the wild thorns have choked the seed; some where the under stratum of rock leaves no room for the root; but in other parts we see the seed growing and producing a rich harvest. The visible Church is a net; it gathers many fish,—some good, others worthless, which are cast away.

But the Church *invisible* is a flock: the Shepherd gives his life for it, he feeds it, he folds it; the *Lamb's Bride*, to denote the love of her Lord for her; the *body of Christ*—it partakes of his life, is pervaded by his Spirit, is subject to his will; the kingdom of God, and as the Church on earth recognizes the authority of her King, so should it be her aim and the aim of each member to know, obey and submit to her Lord's will, as angels do in heaven. The Church is founded on the fact of God's free sovereign grace; that he is the origin and fountain of life; as of natural life, so by his love, by his prevenient grace, the fountain of spiritual life. The Church invisible is made up of the Lord's own: the Lord's by the *Father's election*, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, elect according to

the foreknowledge of God, from the beginning chosen to salvation; the Lord's by *donation to his Son*: to them given to him, Jesus gives eternal life: them given to him he keeps, and none of them are lost; the Lord's by *regeneration* of the Holy Spirit, thus called effectually, enlightened, renewed, sanctified; the Lord's by *adoption*, and so, by his grace, becoming emphatically God's children; the Lord's by the *consummation of glory*.

Inspired Apostles give us, in their proper order, the links of the chain. Thus, Paul: "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." This is the chain of salvation: it is all contained in that first inscription, "THE LORD KNOWS HIS OWN."

Now let us walk around and read the inscription on the other side: "LET EVERY ONE NAMING THE NAME OF CHRIST DEPART FROM INIQUITY."

The principle of human duty, of man's obligation, is as real a principle to be recognized and preached as the fact of God's sovereign grace. We believe in the necessity of good works; but we do believe in putting this principle in its right place: good works, not as the means of salvation, but as the result of salvation.

The old covenant was, "DO AND LIVE." The new covenant is, "LIVE AND DO." There must be spiritual life before there can be good works. Christ is our life.

There are two powerful motives to lead men to do right: a sense of duty and the power of love. Duty is a noble motive, but it is not the strongest. Love is more potent. Solomon knew the power of love when he gave command that the living child, disputed for by two women, should be cut in twain.

That heart is the most strongly nerved for its work which feels the combined power of these two motives, love and duty. Thus the great naval hero of England, Lord Nelson, strong in the sense of duty to his king and country, and glowing with patriotic love for his own land, prodigal of his life, and exulting in the victory gained, although at the expense of his life, with his expiring breath uttered the noble sentiment: "I thank God for giving me this great opportunity of doing my duty."

The Christian feels the power of this two-fold motive: duty to his King, and love to his Saviour. His conscience and his heart respond to the proclamation of his Lord, "Ye must needs be subject to the will of the Lord." Duty impels him, love constrains him. Every one naming the name of Christ *should* depart from

iniquity, because God commands it. But he *must*, from the very nature of the case, depart from iniquity. One dead to sin cannot live in sin. They who are the Lord's have a new nature. That nature must manifest itself. Thus we see the harmony of these two inscriptions; they complete each other. The two indicate the foundation on which the Church rests: God's grace, man's duty. We are here to lay the corner-stone of a church to be built on that foundation—a church in which are to be preached these doctrines and duties, the doctrines of grace and the duties of holiness: to the end that God may be glorified and man blessed.

This is the gospel we believe and preach; a gospel of glory to God and good-will to man. This is the Christianity here to be inculcated; a religion of sound doctrine and holy practice.

Here is to be built a church, a **CHRISTIAN CHURCH**—Christian, thus distinguished from all mere naturalism or rationalism: holding the Bible to be the very Word of God; a supernatural revelation of God's character and will; of man's relation to God and of God's purpose and grace to man.

A **PROTESTANT CHURCH**—Protestant, as opposed to Romish or Papal; Protestant, as holding the Bible to be the only rule of doctrine and duty.

AN EVANGELICAL CHURCH—Evangelical as opposed to formalism; the formalism of ceremonies on the one hand, or the formalism of dead works on the other; answering the question, “What must I do to be saved?” not by this reply, “Do penance, or reform your morals,” but, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

A CALVINISTIC CHURCH. We call no man master; but this word, independent of its personal origin, has become distinctive—we might say, Augustinian, Pauline. We mean, recognizing God’s grace as the source of spiritual life; that the fact of spiritual life begins not with man but with God; that God chooses the sinner before the sinner chooses God; that God’s grace is free, prevenient, effectual. A Calvinistic Church, not ignoring man’s responsibility and duty, recognizing it, insisting upon it, but giving to God all the glory of man’s salvation. These things we hold and preach: the Word of God only; the grace of Christ only; the work of the Spirit only.

A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH—Presbyterian in doctrine, in order, in worship. In doctrine, holding and holding forth the truth as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Presbyterian in order, as stated in three propositions: “1. That the

people have a right to a substantial part in the government of the Church ; 2. That Presbyters who minister in word and doctrine are the highest permanent officers of the Church, and all belong to the same order ; 3. That the outward and visible Church is, or should be, one, in the sense that a smaller part is subject to a larger, and a larger to the whole.”* We are not sticklers for forms of government, but we hold that the Presbyterian form is according to the word of God, and admirably in harmony with our Republican institutions. Presbyterian in worship—believing in the simple, primitive forms of worship: the reading of God’s word, for the instruction of the people; the singing of God’s praise in a style so simple that all may join; the prayers, scriptural, for the time, adapted to existing wants, such as the Spirit of God may dictate; preaching—Christ’s great institute for the conversion of men, for the edification of the body of Christ, for the extension of Christ’s kingdom over the world—preaching: here let it occupy no secondary position.

This is the business of the hour: to lay the cornerstone of a church, Christian, Protestant, Evangelical, Calvinistic, Presbyterian: here to be set for a sign, for

* Dr. Hodge, *What is Presbyterianism?* pp. 6, 7.

a bulwark, for a fortress, for a lighthouse. An institution divine, positive, distinctive, as indicated by the names, Christian, Protestant, Evangelical, Calvinistic, Presbyterian; yet not controversial, except so far as the injunction of Holy Scripture requires: "Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

The foundation of the Presbyterian Church is a broad foundation. It is not exclusive in its spirit or its claims. It recognizes as Christians all who confess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not deny him by wicked works. It recognizes the sacraments of other denominations of Christians as valid, true, and holy. It respects all denominations of Christians as parts of the one Church visible. It makes no exclusive claims, uses no exclusive phraseology. For itself it only claims to be one grand division of the "Sacramental Host of God's elect."

No evangelical Christian can deny that in the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church saving truth is found in its fulness. This saving truth is what in our churches is chiefly preached. I doubt whether in any other pulpits are other denominations so seldom assailed, or doctrines so seldom taught to which all evangelical Churches would not agree. I would put into the hands of the clergy of other denominations a copy

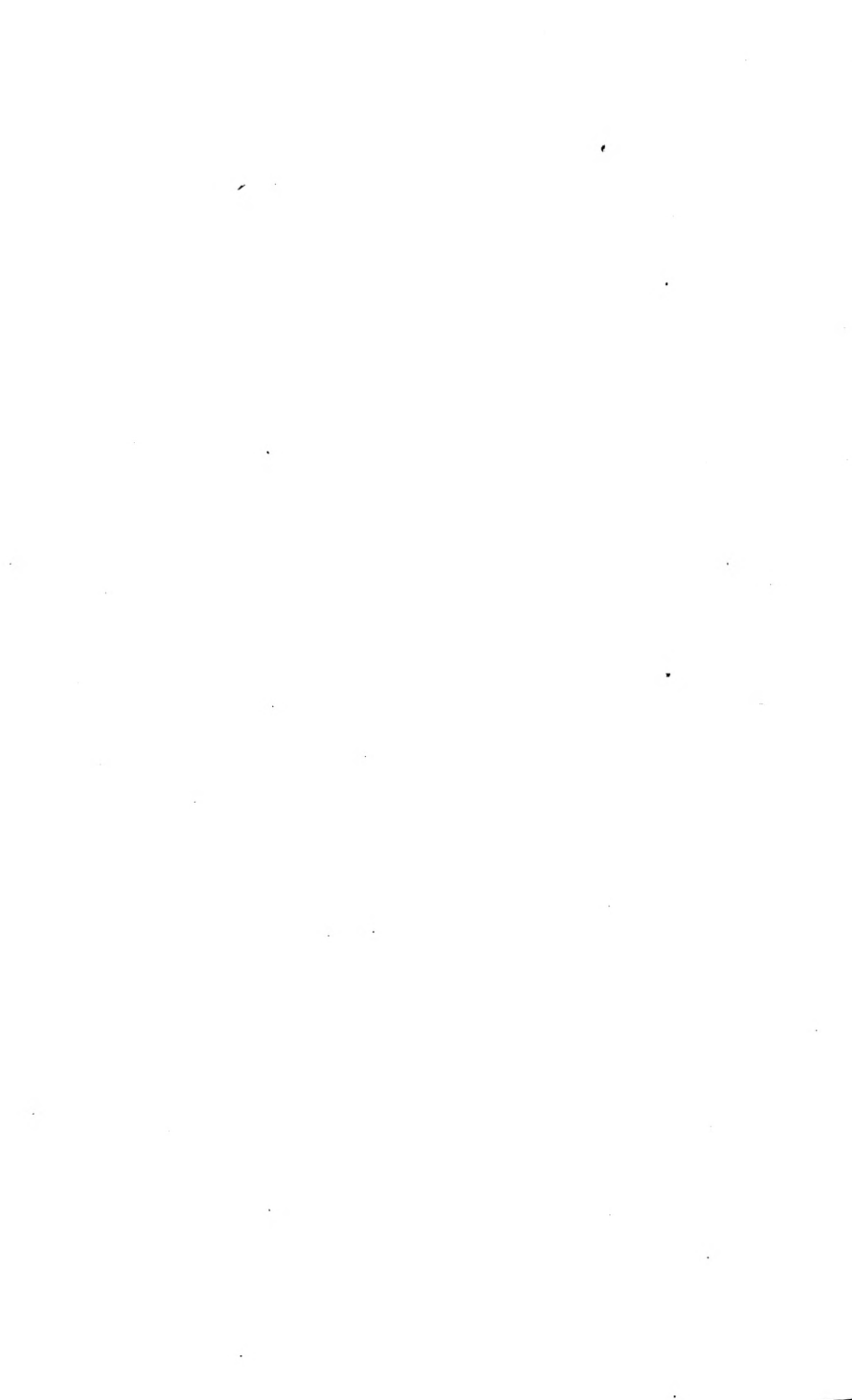
of our Shorter Catechism and ask, How many of its one hundred and seven answers do you object to?

My Roman Catholic brother, even he, need not object to more than six or seven. My Methodist brother would object perhaps to two. My Baptist brother to one or two. My evangelical Episcopal brother would not I think object to one. But this little book contains the substance of our teaching; in it we instruct our children in our families and our Sunday-school; we count it a most admirable summary of Christian doctrine, a choice form of health-giving words. The Christian character founded on the model of that little book must be intelligent, symmetrical, sound, practical.

A Church with its appliances and agencies holding and teaching these doctrines, with its pastor and elders, its preaching, its schools, its prayers, its life, must be a blessing to a community. Under its shadow all virtues flourish, honesty, temperance, industry, integrity, all kindly charities. It bears with it blessings for this life, blessings for the life to come. Let the men who give of their substance for the establishment and support of the Church be counted, as they are, the best benefactors of society. This fine area of ground, more than thirty years ago consecrated to Christ and

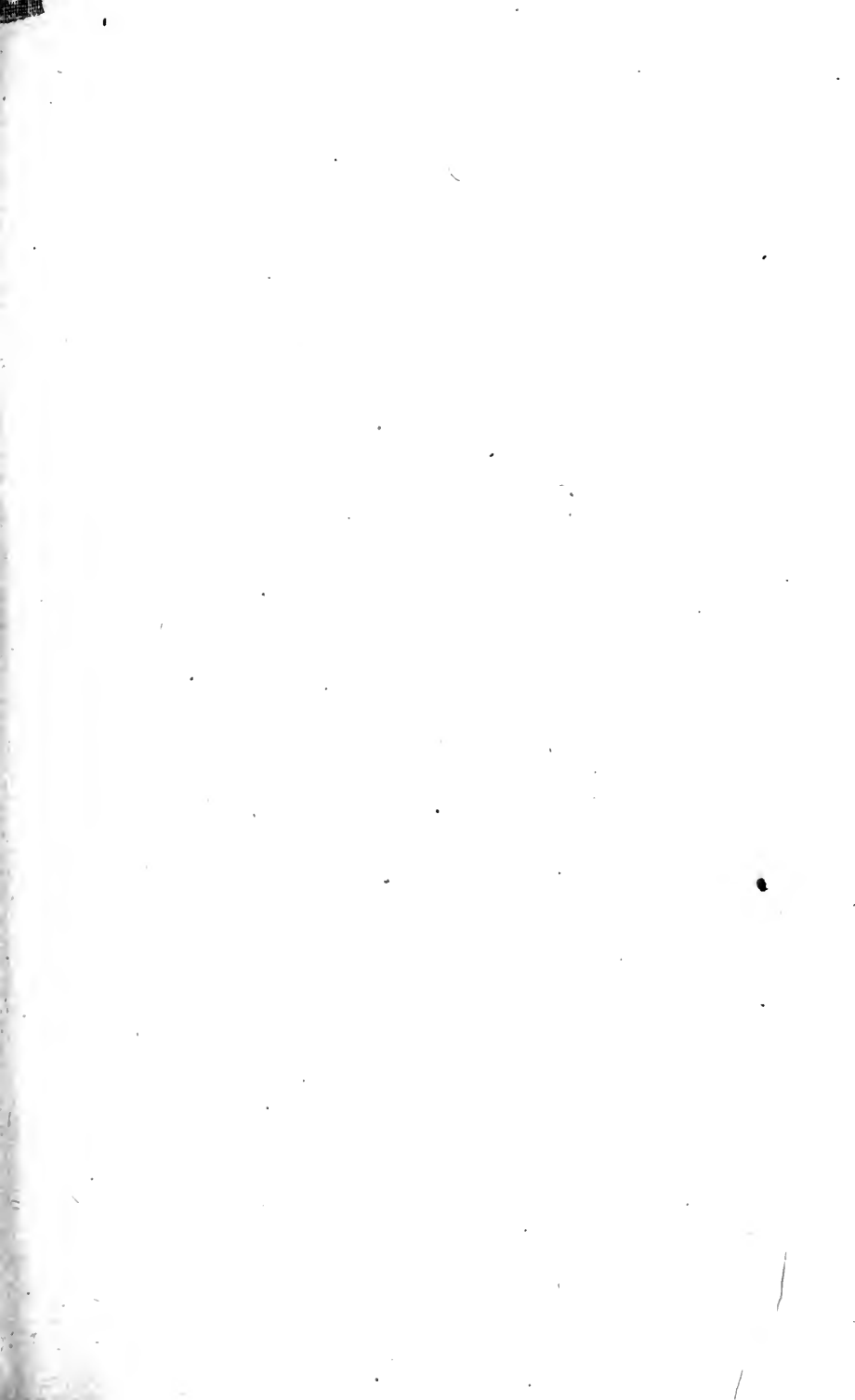
his cause, might have been devoted to other purposes; but it was a wise, Christian forethought that thus consecrated it. With the buildings upon it devoted to sacred uses, it stands a memorial of love to God and love to man.

The Fathers pass away, but the grace of God raises up successive generations to do his work. How faithful his promise, "Lo I am with you alway unto the end of the world." He who sits a Priest upon his throne, he shall build the temple of the Lord. All wealth is his, the gold and silver, all the undiscovered, all the untold treasures of the earth; all hearts are in his hand. He shall build until the top-stone shall be laid with shoutings of Grace, grace unto it. To Him, our Lord and Saviour, be glory in the Church throughout all ages, world without end. AMEN.









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