

A sermon preached by Dr. John Clayton at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith, Arkansas on October 14, 2018.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:24–29).

John’s Gospel begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In his first epistle he continues, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... we proclaim also to you” (1 John 1:1-3). Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, the living *Logos*, has given us His written Word delivered through His prophets and apostles, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

As the Spirit of Christ spoke through the prophets (1 Peter 1:11) and brought to remembrance all He had said to His apostles (John 14:6), so the Word of Christ has been delivered to us in a complete canon of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, the written Word of God. As such, there is an integral relationship between the Word and our relationship with God and with one another. John explains, “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:3-4).

Consider this essential truth: There is no gospel, no explanation of our sin, no record of God’s covenant of grace, no history of redemption, no account of the virgin birth, or Jesus’ righteous life, or His sacrificial and atoning death, no revelation of His miraculous and glorious resurrection without the Bible. While nature reveals there is a God, God has chosen to reveal Himself specially in His Word that we know Him and live for Him. Because it is His revelation, it is total and complete truth. True in every part and true as a whole. Its truth is not dependent upon us, for if you and I are the deciding factors as to the veracity of God’s Word, then Scripture is untrustworthy. But, Scripture is not the work of man, but “breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16), which we receive by faith. What the prophets and apostles delivered (2 Peter 1:20-21) God confirms by His Holy Spirit (Rom. 9:1) in the heart of everyone who believes (1 John 5:7).

The unbeliever rejects Scripture as the Word of God, because he sees it through the natural lens of the flesh. The believer sees it as the very Word of God as the indwelling Holy Spirit has revealed it and confirms it to be so. Therefore, when we come to the conclusion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we hear not merely the concluding remarks of an auditory speech, we hear a dissertation on the eternal Word of God. There is indeed *true* Truth, a foundation of rock. Rich with application, Jesus tells us that His Word is so foundational to the Christian life that

there is a necessity to listen, but if we merely listen and do not obey we are foolishness. Wisdom is listening and obeying the Word of Christ.

The Necessity of Listening

Jesus said, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24). It is not only that the Word of Christ exists, but it is necessary that we listen to it. What good is an unopened Bible? What good is an ignored sermon? How then do we listen to the Word?

First, as it has been delivered to us in writing, we listen by reading. The Christian is to be in the Word often. How often? Well, what are babies like when they are hungry? “Like newborn infants,” we are to crave “the pure spiritual milk” (1 Peter 2:2). Drawing from our Reformed heritage, I believe that every Christian should read the Bible at least once per day, and preferably twice, morning and evening. Our Protestant ancestors held to the doctrine of sola scriptura, and integrated exposure to the Word into the daily and weekly rhythm of their lives. In contrast, we are so busy entertaining ourselves to death that we hardly have time to read the words of life. Our biblical illiteracy has been rewarded with a superficial Christianity and a susceptibility to false teaching. You and I need a steady diet of the Word to mature as Christians.

Second, we listen to the Word by memorizing it and meditating upon it. The psalmist rejoices, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). And, “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways” (Ps. 119:97). To meditate upon Scripture is to stop and focus, to allow it to dwell within us, so to speak. Similarly, Paul encourages us, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). For something to dwell in you, you must first take it in. Once you have taken it in, let it dwell there by meditating upon it.

Third, we listen to the Word by faithfully and attentively listening to the preached Word. As God calls and equips preachers of the Word, we must be faithful to listen to the preached Word. This is an active rather than a passive process and requires diligence: be faithful to hear the preached Word. Be prepared to listen *before* the sermon. Pray before the sermon asking God to give you ears to hear. Following the sermon, examine what you have heard by the Scriptures. As it accords with Scripture, receive it as truth “with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind” (WLC 160). In summary, you may believe in the Word of God and believe in its truth for your life, but unless you are taking it in like a baby craves milk, then you will not know how to obey it, and if all you do is take it and do not obey it, then you are foolish.

The Foolishness of Disobedience

The wise man built his house upon the rock of Christ’s Word, but the foolish man, the one who hears the Word and does not obey, “built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matt. 7:27). The storms of life, like the warming sunshine and the nourishing rain, come to the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). It is not if or when the storms will come, but what is your foundation when they do come? If your life is not rooted in the Word of God, if your heart is

captivated by lies, if your soul rejoices in the wisdom of this world, if you disobey God's Word, you will be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Eph. 4:14). What are warning signs of an unstable foundation, that you are not founded on the rock of Christ's Word?

First, you consider God's Word as optional advice. Scripture becomes a collection of wisdom to be compared with other options, granted consideration by your sinful flesh. This is often expressed by referring to Jesus as "the wise teacher" but not the Son of God or Lord of glory.

A second warning sign of an unstable foundation is you consider the Bible as a fallible collection of the writings of men. Rather than accepting the testimony that "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21), you believe the men wrote, chance collected and councils formed a canon of mixed religious literature.

A third warning sign is that you don't believe that Scripture is sufficient. For you, it is the Bible plus experience, or the Bible and how you feel, or the Bible and the cultural reaction. While you may concede the helpfulness of your accepted portions of Scripture, you are always looking for more to add to it. Take what makes you feel good and leave the rest. The whims of your sinful flesh become the validators of reliability. Which in turn is a design for an unstable foundation with devastating consequences. These warning signs reveal a heart bent on disobedience and a great fall to come.

The Wisdom of Obedience

Jesus did not say only "hear these words of mine" but the one who "does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt. 7:24). James echoes this: "be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (James 1:22-25). A doer who acts on the foundation of the Word is one who obeys it. Because it is the Word of God, and not of man, it is a trustworthy foundation.

In Jesus' parable, "the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock" (Matt. 7:25). In this life, the torrential rains will come, the floods will rise, and the hurricane winds will blow. If your life is rooted in the Word of God, if your heart is captivated by its truth, if your soul rejoices in its wisdom, if you are obedient to God's Word, though the storm may rage all around you, you will be on stable ground. How do we know that the Word produces so sure a foundation?

First, the Word is eternal. Though the circumstances of this life change daily, the "grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isa. 40:8). Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). God's Word existed before your temporal circumstances and will exist well beyond them.

Second, the Word is a sure foundation because it is alive. The writer of Hebrews explains, “the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Who knows your heart better than God? Who searches your heart deeper than the Holy Spirit? What pierces to the depth of your greatest needs like the Word of Christ? The Word does this because it is not a tome of archaic literature but alive by the Spirit of Christ.

Third, the Word is a sure foundation because it is sufficient to mature us in our walk with Christ. Paul explains, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God’s Word teaches us about God and about ourselves unlike anything else. God’s Word reproves us, confronting our sin. Your sinful flesh may seek to justify your sin but open up God’s Word and it will be confronted. Incidentally, this is why many do not believe the Bible to be the Word of God and authoritative over life. If the Bible can be denied, they presume that their sin is not reprovved. When in reality, they deny God’s Word to protect their sin. Similarly, God’s Word can serve as a rod of correction, disciplining us to believe and walk in the truth. And, God’s Word trains us in righteousness. Showing us the holiness of God, and how to live for Him. All that we need to know, all that we need to mature, all that we need for “every good work” is given to us in the Word.

So, the Word is eternal, alive, and sufficient, serving as a solid rock foundation in the Christian life. Just as there is wisdom in obeying God’s Word, there is foolishness in disobeying it.

The Authority of the Word

Just as Jesus taught as “one who had authority,” so also His Word has authority. It is not an optional resource for life; it is the very Word of God. What is your life founded on? Is it founded on the rock of the Word? Only the Word of God reveals that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Only the Word of God reveals “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Only the Word of God reveals that “God shows his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Only the Word of God reveals that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9), and “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

Only the Word of God reveals that “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1), and therefore there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). And only God’s Word reveals the assurance that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

This and so much more I know, for the Bible tells me so! What is your life founded on? I pray that by God’s grace through faith in Christ your life is founded on the stable rock of the Word of Christ.