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Churches of Christ Salute You with a Herald of Truth: The Authority of the Bible

James Willeford

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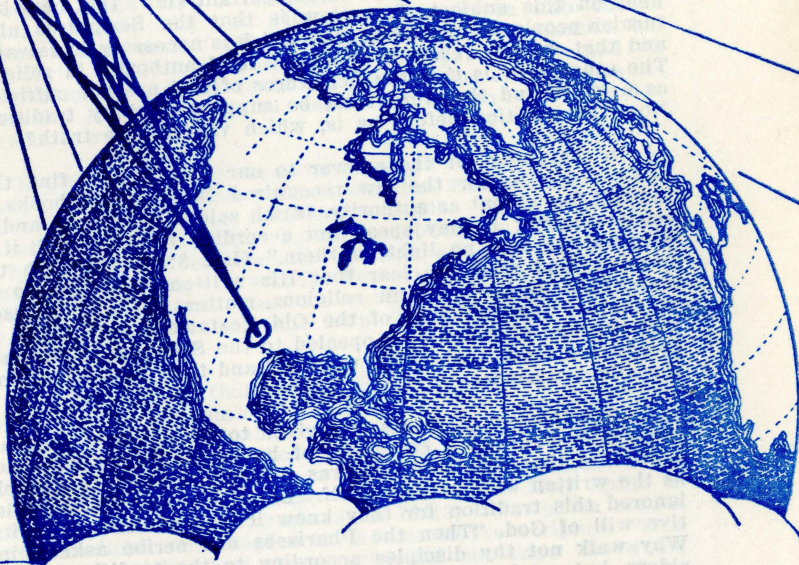
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The Authority of the Bible

By James D. Willeford

November 22, 1953

Herald of Truth

The Authority of the Bible

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"At the council of Trent, Bishop Nachianti, . . . maintained that Scripture was the only final authority, because in the Gospel everything was written which was necessary to salvation; but he was enormously outvoted, and it was decided that 'unwritten traditions were to be accepted with the same veneration as the Holy Scriptures,' (F. W. Farrar Quoting Ranke, I, p. 203).

This serves to introduce our lesson on the Authority of the Bible by exhibiting the two most important views that have been held on this subject. One view is that the Scriptures alone furnish people completely in that which is necessary to salvation and that we can resort to it as the final authority in religion. The other view is that the Scriptures of God are not sufficient as a guide and therefore must be supplemented by traditions. Now the question before us is, which view is the truth?

In searching for the answer to our question we find that God's people under the law recognized the inspired books of the Old Testament as authority. Isaiah said, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. 8:20.) Through the prophet, God made it clear that His written word was to be recognized as authority in religious matters. Christ Himself recognized the authority of the Old Testament, and when he was tempted of Satan He appealed to the Scripture. With each temptation Jesus said, "It is written," and then He quoted from the Old Testament.

After the law of Moses was given to the children of Israel the elders built up a collection of human tradition, and they contended that this tradition was as binding upon the people as the written word of God itself. But Christ and His disciples ignored this tradition for they knew it was not the authoritative will of God. "Then the Pharisees and scribe asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men." (Mark 7:5-8) Thus we see that Christ forever repudiated and rejected man-made tradition as authority in religion.

The word "tradition" is derived from a word which means "that which is carried over." Tradition is that which is repeated or carried over from one generation to another. Peter said Christ died to redeem men from the "vain manner of life handed down from your fathers." (1 Pet. 1:18.) Knowing that Christ

died to redeem men from tradition Paul said, "If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances? Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using.)" (Col. 2:20-22.) From the New Testament scriptures we learn that Christ credited the Old Testament books as the only authority for God's people under the law. He warned the Pharisees that they were worshipping God in vain when they followed tradition. (Matt. 15:9.)

When Jesus spoke "the people were astonished at his doctrine; For he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matt. 7:29.) After Christ rose from the dead he said to his apostles, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18.) There is no question but that Christ now has all authority in spiritual matters, and we must submit to His will. Jesus and His teaching are inseparable; to receive His doctrine is to receive him and to reject His doctrine is to reject Him.

The Old Testament was the standard of authority till the death of Christ, and since that event the New Testament has been the authority for the Lord's people. Paul said Christ "taketh away the first that he may establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). The New Testament is the last will and testament of Jesus Christ, and in His will the Son of God promises life everlasting to all who will meet the conditions stated by Him. If we add to or take from the New Testament we reject the authority of Christ.

We can be sure that the inspired books of the New Testament are the sole authority today, for Christ instructed His apostles to teach "all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). If these men were true to their charge we have everything Christ commanded, in their writings. Jesus promised the apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). Tertullian argues that if tradition were needed in addition to the Scripture "This would imply either that the apostles did not know the whole truth, or that, knowing it, they did not communicate it to those whom they taught" (Infallibility of the Church, by Salmon, p. 150).

Christ made it very plain that the apostles were human vessels through whom He was delivering His authoritative word, when He said to them, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me" (Lk. 10:16). When we read the writings of the apostles we are reading the words of Christ. Paul said, "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11, 12).

The Scriptures explain why the first Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). They knew

YOU MAY HEAR THE HERALD OF TRUTH OVER THESE STATIONS.

ALABAMA—

Albertville	WAVU	630	4:30 p.m.
Anniston	WHMA	1450	1:00 p.m.
Auburn	WAUD	1230	1:00 p.m.
Birmingham	WSGN	610	8:00 a.m.
Florence	WJ01	1340	8:00 p.m.
Ft. Payne	WFFA	1400	8:00 a.m.
Gadsden	WGAD	1350	1:00 p.m.
Greenville	WGYV	1400	4:00 p.m.
Hamilton	WERH	970	1:00 p.m.
Huntsville	WHBS	1490	7:30 a.m.
Marion	WJAM	1310	9:30 a.m.
Mobile	WALA	1410	9:30 a.m.
Montgomery	WAPX	1600	1:00 p.m.
Scottsboro	WCRI	1050	4:30 p.m.
Selma	WGWC	1340	1:30 p.m.
Talladega	WHTB	1240	1:30 p.m.
Troy	WTBT	1490	1:00 p.m.
Tuscaloosa	WJRD	1150	9:00 p.m.

ARIZONA—

Bisbee	KSUN	1230	1:00 p.m.
Clifton	KCLF	1400	3:00 p.m.
Flagstaff	KCLS	1340	7:30 a.m.
Kingman	KGAN	920	1:00 p.m.
Phoenix	KOY	550	7:00 a.m.
Tucson	KCNA	580	3:00 p.m.

ARKANSAS—

Eldorado	KDMS	1290	1:00 p.m.
Forrest City	KXJK	950	9:00 a.m.
Ft. Smith	KFSA	950	1:00 p.m.
Hot Springs	KWFC	1340	8:30 a.m.
Little Rock	KGHI	1350	1:00 p.m.
McGehee	KVSA	1220	9:00 a.m.
Springdale	KBRB	1340	6:00 p.m.

CALIFORNIA—

Bakersfield	KPMC	1560	10:00 a.m.
Blythe	KYOR	1450	3:30 p.m.
Brawley	KROP	1300	12:30 p.m.
Eureka	KIEM	1430	8:00 a.m.
Fresno	KARM	1430	3:30 p.m.
Indio	KREO	1400	3:30 p.m.
Los Angeles	KBCA	790	3:30 p.m.
Porterville	KTIP	1450	3:30 p.m.
San Francisco	KGO	810	3:30 p.m.
San Luis Obispo	KATY	1340	3:30 p.m.

COLORADO—

Craig	KRIA	1230	5:30 p.m.
Denver	KVOD	630	3:00 p.m.

CONNECTICUT—

Bridgeport	WNAB	1450	5:30 p.m.
Hartford	WHTT	1230	1:00 p.m.

DELAWARE—

Wilmington	WILM	1450	1:00 p.m.
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FLORIDA—

Gainesville	WGGG	1230	1:00 p.m.
Jacksonville	WPDQ	600	5:30 p.m.
Leesburg	WLBE	790	1:00 p.m.
Miami	WQAM	560	1:00 p.m.
Panama City	WPCF	1400	1:00 p.m.
Pensacola	WEAR	1230	3:00 p.m.
Sanford	WTRR	1400	6:30 p.m.
Tallahassee	WTNT	1450	5:00 p.m.
Tampa-St. Pete	WSUN	620	1:00 p.m.

GEORGIA—

Atlanta	WGST	920	1:00 p.m.
Augusta	WGAC	580	2:00 p.m.
Brunswick	WGIG	1440	1:00 p.m.
Calro	WGRA	1300	3:00 p.m.
Cartersville	WBHF	1450	10:00 a.m.
Columbus	WGBA	1460	7:30 a.m.
Dawson	WDWD	990	2:00 p.m.
Macon	WNEX	1400	1:00 p.m.
Rome	WLAQ	670	1:00 p.m.
Savannah	WDAR	1400	1:00 p.m.
Valdosta	WGAF	910	1:00 p.m.

IDAHO—

Boise	KGEM	1140	3:00 p.m.
Pocatello	KWIK	1440	9:30 a.m.

ILLINOIS—

Chicago	WENR-WLS	890	2:30 p.m.
Moline	WQUA	1230	7:00 a.m.
Quincy	WGEM	1440	8:00 a.m.

INDIANA—

Anderson	WHBU	1240	1:30 p.m.
Bloomington	WTTT	1370	1:00 p.m.
Evansville	WJPS	1330	1:00 p.m.
Ft. Wayne	WGL	1250	1:00 p.m.

IOWA—

Cedar Rapids	WMT	600	7:30 a.m.
Des Moines	KSO	1460	6:00 p.m.
Sioux City	KSCJ	1360	10:30 p.m.
Waterloo	KXEL	1540	8:30 p.m.

KANSAS—

Coffeyville	KGGE	690	2:00 p.m.
Dodge City	KGNO	1370	1:30 p.m.
Great Bend	KGVB	1590	1:00 p.m.
Topeka	WREN	1250	1:00 p.m.
Wichita	KWBB	1410	3:30 p.m.

KENTUCKY—

Bowling Green	KWCT	930	1:00 p.m.
Louisville	WKLO	1080	1:00 p.m.
Mayfield	WKTM	1050	4:15 p.m.
Paducah	WKYB	570	1:30 p.m.

LOUISIANA—

Baton Rouge	WLCS	910	1:00 p.m.
Monroe	KMLB	1440	2:00 p.m.
New Iberia	KANE	1240	1:00 p.m.
New Orleans	WDSU	1280	1:00 p.m.
Shreveport	KRMD	1340	1:00 p.m.

MAINE—

Bangor	WABI	910	1:00 p.m.
Portland	WPOR	1450	9:00 a.m.

MARYLAND—

Baltimore	WFRB	1300	3:00 p.m.
Cumberland	WDYK	1230	8:00 a.m.

MASSACHUSETTS—

Boston	WVAB	1260	1:00 p.m.
Gardner	WHOB	1490	1:00 p.m.
Lawrence	WLAW	680	1:00 p.m.
Springfield	WSPR	1270	2:00 p.m.
Worcester	WAAB	1440	1:00 p.m.

MICHIGAN—

Battle Creek	WELL	1400	1:00 p.m.
Bay City	WBCM	1440	1:00 p.m.
Detroit	WXYZ	1270	1:00 p.m.
Flint	WTAC	600	10:30 p.m.
Lansing	WILS	1320	1:00 p.m.
Ludington	WKLA	1450	1:00 p.m.
Mt. Pleasant	WCEN	1150	2:00 p.m.
Muskegon	WKBZ	850	2:00 p.m.

MINNESOTA—

Mankato	KTOE	1420	2:00 p.m.
Minn.-St. Paul	WTCN	1280	7:30 a.m.

MISSISSIPPI—

Booneville	WPIP	1400	1:00 p.m.
Centerville	WGLC	1580	8:00 a.m.
Columbus	WCHI	1340	6:00 p.m.
Greenwood	WABG	960	1:00 p.m.
Jackson	WLSI	930	2:00 p.m.
Kosciusko	WKOZ	1340	1:00 p.m.
Laurel	WLAU	1490	8:30 p.m.
McComb	WSKB	1250	1:00 p.m.
Meridian	WTOK	1450	1:00 p.m.
Natchez	WNAT	1240	1:00 p.m.

MISSOURI—

Cape Girardeau	KFVS	960	8:30 p.m.
Kansas City	KCMO	810	12:30 p.m.
Poplar Bluff	KWOC	930	check sta.
Rolla	KTRR	1490	8:45 a.m.
St. Louis	KXOK	630	9:15 p.m.
Springfield	KWTO	560	1:00 p.m.

MONTANA—

Bozeman	KXLQ	1450	8:00 a.m.
Great Falls	KXLK	1400	8:00 a.m.
Helena	KXLJ	1240	8:00 a.m.
Missoula	KXLL	1450	8:00 a.m.

NEBRASKA—

Lincoln	KFOR	1240	10:30 a.m.
N. Platt	KNBR	970	9:00 a.m.
Omaha	KOIL	1290	5:30 p.m.
Sidney	KSID	1240	9:30 a.m.

NEVADA—

Las Vegas	KENO	1460	9:30 a.m.
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NEW HAMPSHIRE—

Claremont	WTSV	1230	1:00 p.m.
Lebanon	WTSV	1400	1:00 p.m.
Manchester	WMUR	610	3:00 p.m.

NEW MEXICO—

Albuquerque	KOAT	1450	3:00 p.m.
Carlsbad	KPBM	740	1:30 p.m.
Clovis	KCLV	1240	1:00 p.m.
Los Alamos	KRSN	1490	3:00 p.m.
Santa Fe	KTRC	1400	3:00 p.m.

NEW YORK—

Albany	WROW	850	2:00 p.m.
New York	WABC	770	12:30 p.m.
Olean	WHDL	1450	1:00 p.m.
Poughkeepsie	WKIP	1450	1:00 p.m.
Rochester	WARC	950	9:30 a.m.
Saranac Lake	WEAV	960	2:00 p.m.
Syracuse	WAGE	620	12:00 p.m.

NORTH CAROLINA—

Asheville	WLOS	1380	1:00 p.m.
Charlotte	WAYS	610	1:00 p.m.
Durham	WTIC	1310	2:00 p.m.
Fayetteville (Sat)			

Salisbury	WFLB	1490	1:00 p.m.
Wilmington	WSAT	1280	1:00 p.m.
Winston-Salem	WGNI	1340	8:30 a.m.
	WAIK	1340	1:00 p.m.

NORTH DAKOTA—

Fargo	KFGO	790	1:00 p.m.
Grand Forks	KILO	1660	1:00 p.m.

OHIO—

Cleveland	WJW	850	1:00 p.m.
Columbus	WHKC	610	1:00 p.m.
East Liverpool	WOHI	1490	1:00 p.m.
Lima	WIMA	1150	9:00 a.m.
Toledo	WTOL	1230	12:30 p.m.
Youngstown	WBBW	1240	8:30 a.m.

OKLAHOMA—

Ada	KADA	1230	1:00 p.m.
Enid	KCRC	1390	1:00 p.m.
McAlester	KTMC	1400	1:00 p.m.
Muskogee	KBIX	1490	2:00 p.m.
Oklahoma City	KTOK	1000	9:30 a.m.
Tulsa	KRMG	740	2:00 p.m.

OREGON—

Eugene	KASH	1600	1:00 p.m.
Medford	KMED	1440	7:30 a.m.
Portland	KEX	1190	3:30 p.m.
Redmond	KJUN	1240	2:30 p.m.
The Dalles	KODL	1230	1:30 p.m.

PENNSYLVANIA—

Johnstown	WCRO	1230	1:00 p.m.
Lemoyne	WCMB	1460	7:30 a.m.
Philadelphia	WFLB	560	2:00 p.m.
Pittsburg	WCAE	1250	3:00 p.m.
State College	WMAJ	1450	9:00 a.m.
Wilkes-Barre	WILK	980	5:00 p.m.

RHODE ISLAND—

Providence	WPJB	1420	1:00 p.m.
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SOUTH CAROLINA—

Columbia	WCOS	1460	1:00 p.m.
Florence	WJMX	870	10:30 a.m.
Orangeburg	WDIX	1450	7:00 a.m.
Sumter	WSSC	1240	1:00 p.m.

SOUTH DAKOTA—

Aberdeen	KSDN	930	10:30 a.m.
Huron	KIJV	1340	9:00 a.m.

TENNESSEE—

Chattanooga	WAPA	1150	1:00 p.m.
Jackson	WTJS	1390	1:00 p.m.

Johnson City	WETB	790	6:15 p.m.
Knoxville	WBIR	1240	1:30 p.m.
Memphis	WHRQ	560	9:30 p.m.
Morristown	WCRK	1450	9:00 p.m.
Nashville	WSIX	980	4:00 p.m.

TEXAS—

Abilene	KRBC	1470	1:00 p.m.
Amarillo	KFDA	1440	1:00 p.m.
Austin	KNOW	1490	2:00 p.m.
Beaumont	KFDM	560	1:00 p.m.
Big Spring	KBST	1490	1:00 p.m.
Brownfield	KTFY	1300	4:30 p.m.
Brownwood	KBWD	1380	6:30 p.m.
Corpus Christi	KEYS	1440	9:00 a.m.
El Paso	KEPO	690	3:00 p.m.
Ft. Worth	WBAP	570	1:00 p.m.
Graham	KSWA	1330	4:30 a.m.
Houston	KXYZ	1320	8:00 a.m.
Longview	KFRO	1370	1:00 p.m.
Lubbock	KFYO	790	4:30 p.m.
Midland	KCRS	550	1:30 p.m.
Nacogdoches	KOSF	1230	1:00 p.m.
Paris	KPLT	1490	4:00 p.m.
Quanah	KOLJ	1150	12:45 p.m.
San Angelo	KGKL	960	1:00 p.m.
Texarkana	KCMC	1230	1:00 p.m.
Wichita Falls	KFDX	990	2:00 p.m.

UTAH—

Provo	KCSU	1490	3:00 p.m.
Salt Lake City	KUTA	570	7:30 a.m.

VERMONT—

Brattleboro	WTSA	1450	1:00 p.m.
Burlington	WJOY	1230	1:00 p.m.
Montpelier-Barre	WSKI	1240	1:00 p.m.

that the apostles were speaking and writing a revelation from Christ Himself, and so they accepted their message as authority in

We can rest assured that the Bible is our sole authority in religion for the Scriptures claim that authority for themselves. In 1 Peter 4:11 we read, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Peter said the Scriptures are the oracles of God, and when any man is speaking in behalf of Christianity he must speak as the oracles. In 2 John 9 we read, "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son." In this passage the Bible testifies that if we go beyond the teaching of Christ as given by the apostles, we have not God.

God gave the Bible, and He clothed it with divine authority. He told the children of Israel to go to the law and the testimony (Isa. 8:20). Christ said, "Search the scriptures" (John 5:39). Jesus said further, "the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The word of Christ is now the rule of living and it shall be the rule of judging. The fact that Christ will use the Bible as the standard by which He judges us is proof that it is now authoritative.

In closing the Bible the Lord taught that we must not add to His word or take anything from it (Rev. 22: 18, 19). This one statement is enough to prove forever that the Bible is our authority. If it were not authoritative we could change it.

For the first four centuries Christian scholars recognized the Bible as the only authority in religion. Basil said, "Without doubt it is a most manifest fall from faith, and a most certain sign of pride, to introduce anything that is not written in the Scriptures." Basil said further, "Those who are instructed in the Scriptures ought to test the things that are said by their teachers, and to receive what agrees with the Scriptures, and to reject what disagrees" (*The Infallibility of the Church*, by Salmon, pp. 143, 144).

Cyprian said, "God testifies that we must do the things that are written . . . Likewise, the Lord, when He sent His apostles, commanded them to baptize all nations, and to teach them to observe whatsoever He commanded. If, therefore, it is commanded, either in the Gospels, or in the Apostolic Epistles, or in the Acts, . . . then this is a Divine tradition, and let it be observed" (*The Infallibility of the Church*, p. 145).

Jerome said, "As we accept those things that are written, so we reject those things that are not written. These things which they invent, as if by Apostolic tradition, without the authority of Scripture, the sword of God smites" (*Ibid*, p. 147). It is evident from these quotations that if we were to leave the Scriptures and resort to the early Christian scholars for truth, these very scholars would send us back to the Scriptures as the only guide into salvation. Faithful Christians cannot recog-

nize human authority in religion. To them, the Bible and the Bible alone is the source of authority. Whatever it teaches they are ready to accept. Beyond its declarations they dare not go.

There are two classes of people in our respected country who reject the Bible as authority. The modernists are one of the classes. They say, "Liberalism is building a religion that would not be shaken even if the very thought of God were to pass away" (Curtis Reese, in *Unity*, Aug. 12, 1920, p. 329; quoted by John Horsch in *Modern Religious Liberalism*). Having rejected God, the modernists naturally reject the Bible as authority. They have enthroned their opinion, and they bow at its throne. On the basis of their opinion they accept parts of the Bible and reject what they dislike. One prominent modernist said, "we will have our Christianity in terms of thinking that honestly belong to us as intelligent moderns, or we will have none at all" (*Sermons*, by Paul Foutz, p. 11). "In other words," they are saying, "we will have none of Christianity unless it is approved at the bar of human judgment." Modernism rejects the Bible as authority and substitutes in its stead human judgment and opinion.

In Japan, growers have learned how to raise dwarf trees. They simply cut the tap root, and as a result the tree must live on the small surface roots only. And so, what would otherwise become a great oak or pine, now becomes a little tree of twelve or eighteen inches in height. When men reject the authority of the Bible they have cut the tap root of Christianity.

There are religious people in our country who sincerely feel that they are the friends of Christ, and yet they have given more authority to their traditions than they acknowledge for the Bible. In explaining their doctrine they say, "There are two sources of divine inspiration, the Bible and our traditions, and of the two, our traditions are more clear and safe" (*Catholic Belief*, by Faa di Bruno, p. 33). The Apostle Paul told Timothy to "Preach the word," and then he warned that the "time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but . . . they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:2-4). That prophecy was fulfilled when men allowed traditions to supercede the word of God as religious authority.

A statement of Paul is sometimes quoted to justify human tradition. The apostle said, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2 Thess. 2:15). The Apostle Paul is not referring here to human traditions, but to the divine traditions. Luke said the apostles spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). Paul said "the thing that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). Whatever the apostles taught in oral or written form was the truth of God, for Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 16:13).

It is through the Bible that Christ speaks to men, and having spoken, He expects us to listen and to obey His voice. We dare not turn a deaf ear for He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Christ said, "Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the 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 the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof" (Matt. 7:24-27).

Recently I read the remarkable history of the Eddystone Lighthouse off Plymouth, England. The history says that "the first architect, confident that he had erected a permanent structure, had this inscription chiseled into its side: 'Blow, O ye wind! Rise, O ocean! Break forth, ye elements, and try my work!' The winds and the waves accepted his challenge. Hardly three years after the tower was completed, a terrifying hurricane swept the entire lighthouse into the sea. Years later, after a second wooden structure was burned away, the task of erecting Eddystone Lighthouse was entrusted to John Smeaton, a pioneer in civil engineering. He built squarely on the top of Eddystone, laying the new foundation deep into its rocky depths. However, he also built on faith, and had these words of Scripture engraved on the new lighthouse: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' His lighthouse has stood unshaken for more than 185 years" (Believing the Book, by Peter H. Eldersveld, p. 11).

Friends, when you obey the gospel of Christ you are acknowledging his authority, and in so doing you are building upon the Rock. Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Through His inspired apostles, Jesus said, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). If you accept the Lord's terms of forgiveness you are building upon the rock and when the rains fall and the winds blow your house will stand. But if you hear the words of Christ and fail to do them, do not be surprised when the tempests of these turbulent times sweep your house into the sea of destruction.