

The Hymns We Sing  
Sermons on the Great Hymns  
The Church's One Foundation

*With Study Questions*

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# The Church's One Foundation

*Ephesians 2:19-22*

This hymn was written by Samuel Stone in 1866 in response to a book written by an Anglican Church Bishop which attacked the historic accuracy of the Pentateuch. Stone wrote a series of twelve creedal hymns based on the Apostle's Creed to combat this higher criticism that was invading the church. His goal was to show that the church must rest solely upon the recognition of the Lordship of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that Stone took it for granted that in order for the Lordship of Christ to be maintained, the Scriptures must be respected. It is also interesting to note how he appealed to the creeds for his views on Sola Scriptura. We will focus on the four stanzas that have become most recognized throughout the years, with maybe a brief reference to the others (Stone's original seven stanzas are at the end of the notes). The composer of this hymn was Samuel S. Wesley, grandson of the great hymn writer, Charles Wesley.

## *The Church's one foundation Is Jesus Christ her Lord,*

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ. By this we mean that everything the church believes and performs is determined by Christ. We have not the liberty to alter the doctrines of the church, even if we think the doctrines are difficult and appear overbearing or somehow unfriendly. His doctrines are true, immeasurably and immensely excellent and a blessing to the church.

Nor do we have the liberty to spread His truth in a manner that seems most expeditious to us. Christ has determined not only the message, but also the means by which the message is to be conveyed. I used to take the liberty in my sermons to use all sorts of visual aids, such as water hoses and hammers and fire and drama. I thought this was cutting edge and just what the church needed. But I later found that God's mandate was that His word be preached. He did not command to be represented by a circus, no matter how well meaning.

And I hope it doesn't sound pretentious for me to gently correct the hymn but Christ, according to Ephesians 2:19-22, is not so much the foundation as He is the Cornerstone. It is the apostles and prophets (the Scriptures) that are the foundation. For what we know of the chief Cornerstone is only found in the Scriptures.

**Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but  
fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of**

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories*, (Kregel Publication, 1982), pp. 243, 244.

**God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).**

*She is His new creation*

Being a Christian means we are a new creation. Yet at the same time the old man must continually be put off (Ephesians 4:22). This strongly relates to the prior verse. My thoughts about God must now be dictated by His word; my thoughts about how I serve God must also be dictated by Him. On a daily basis I find myself warring against my old and worldly notions, against who God is, and against how I am to relate to and with Him.

The world, Satan and our natures are powerfully adversaries. The old man must be put off both morally and philosophically. I may think I have wonderfully ingenious ways of presenting and defending the existence of God, but these must be according to the word of God.

**Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).**

*By water and the Word*

The Word in person is Christ, in terms of our knowledge it is the Scriptures. Water very likely refers to the water recorded in Ezekiel 36 that cleanses us from our filthiness. The sacrament of baptism is a sign of this cleansing water. It is passages like these, and many more like them, which lead the framers of the great creeds and confessions of church history to determine that a church which has Christ as its foundation is a church full of Word and sacrament. This is the means by which the church genuinely grows.

**Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:25, 26).**

**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:25, 26).**

*From heaven He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride*

The Word, who was with God and was God, became flesh and dwelt among us; this is Christ. He came seeking His bride that He might rescue her from her adulterous ways and destiny of damnation. He plunged Himself into the death and darkness that she might have light and life.

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).**

**Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).**

*With His own blood He bought her  
And for her life He died*

The rescue mission of God the Son was not without casualty. A repetitive theme in Scripture, and in the great hymns, is the redeeming work of Christ. The church has been purchased with the blood of Christ. He paid for the sins we committed.

**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).**

*Elect from every nation,  
Yet one o'er all the earth*

Though it started with Israel, the Christian faith would make its way to every nation, kindred, and tongue. Although we are members of a local church, we are in another sense to view ourselves as part of a universal body. Truly only Christ could bring unity to such a diverse mass of humanity.

**And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:9).**

*Her charter of salvation,  
One Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy Name she blesses,  
Partakes one holy food*

The unity Christ brings through His charter or proclamation is quite singular in nature. There is one Lord, one faith, one birth. In this we have been regenerated or born again. And those who have been brought near will continually bless the name of Christ through the partaking of His body by communion.

***There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism;<sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4, 5).***

*And to one hope she presses,  
With every grace endued*

It is the church, singular in its vision, that presses toward the hope of eternal life and the sure knowledge that she has been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. The church, who presses thus, lacks nothing.

***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).***

*'Mid toil and tribulation,  
And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace forevermore*

The Christian should not think that Christianity means life will be free from difficulty. I never cease to be amazed at those who depart from the faith because they had no idea that life might get so hard. Well it might. Jesus promises that we will have tribulation. He also promise that those who are faithful to the end will not be hurt by the second death.

***These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).***

**Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:10, 11).**

*Till, with the vision glorious,  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great Church victorious  
Shall be the Church at rest*

We are currently the church militant; we are fighting a war on many fronts, including our own natures. There will come a time when we will be the church victorious. As John saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, we shall see with unveiled eyes the full expression of the glory of God’s deliverance.

**Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).**

**And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).**

*Yet she on earth hath union  
With God the Three in One*

God the Father sent God the Son who we come to believe in by God the Holy Spirit.

*And mystic sweet communion  
With those whose rest is won*

There is an event which God designed to foster unity between Himself and His people. It is the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. We partake because the rest has been won for us.

**For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. <sup>56</sup> He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him (John 6:55, 56).**

*O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we  
Like them, the meek and lowly,  
On high may dwell with Thee*

I will finish with a quotation from the Apostle Paul.

**For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. <sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, <sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence. <sup>30</sup> But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – <sup>31</sup> that, as it is written, “*He who glories, let him glory in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).**

## The Church’s One Foundation

The Church’s one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word.  
From heaven He came and  
sought her  
To be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He  
bought her  
And for her life He died.

She is from every nation,  
Yet one o’er all the earth;  
Her charter of salvation,  
One Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy Name she blesses,  
Partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses,  
With every grace endued.

The Church shall never perish!  
Her dear Lord to defend,  
To guide, sustain, and cherish,  
Is with her to the end:  
Though there be those who  
hate her,  
And false sons in her pale,  
Against or foe or traitor  
She ever shall prevail.

Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her sore oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed:  
Yet saints their watch are keeping,  
Their cry goes up, “How long?”  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song!

’Mid toil and tribulation,  
And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace forevermore;  
Till, with the vision glorious,  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great Church victorious  
Shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union  
With God the Three in One,  
And mystic sweet communion  
With those whose rest is won,  
With all her sons and daughters  
Who, by the Master’s hand  
Led through the deathly waters,  
Repose in Eden land.

O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we  
Like them, the meek and lowly,  
On high may dwell with Thee:  
There, past the border mountains,  
Where in sweet vales the Bride  
With Thee by living fountains  
Forever shall abide!

## Questions for Study

1. What does it mean when we say that Jesus is the church's one foundation (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some ways the new creation can put off the old creation (page 3)?
3. What are the water and the Word (pages 3, 4)?
4. How did Jesus purchase His bride (page 4)?
5. How are we to view ourselves as citizens in Christ's kingdom (page 4)?
6. How is Christ's church to be singular in nature (page 5)?
7. What is the hope the church presses to and what has she been endued with (page 5)?
8. Does the Christian faith promise a life of ease (page 5)?
9. What is the difference between the church militant and the church victorious (page 6)?
10. What is one of the most intimate events a Christian can have with Christ (page 6)?