

51. BISHOP CLAUDIUS: A WARNING VOICE

The true Apostolic church, which continued at Pentecost, had sunk deeper and deeper into the bog of superstition and unbelief. God had used the apostles to lay the foundation of His church. They had brought the gospel to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and then to the Gentiles. They risked their lives for that; almost all had died martyr's deaths.

The church of the Lord continued to exist and, amazingly, despite the terrible persecutions, grew and spread rapidly. The Roman emperors could not exterminate that church, although they did their best through many brutal, bloody persecutions. But now, centuries later, that same church accepted and believed one false doctrine after another! That *same* church had become the false church!

The truth had to yield to the lie. The congregations had turned away from the pure foundation which the apostles had laid. What if Paul, Peter, James and John had lived to see that? How they would have grieved, preached, and warned against all that false doctrine! But they did not know it. Their task on earth was finished.

But did the Lord just let all that happen? Didn't He warn His straying church? Or did He simply leave the church to her fate? No, not at all! God *did* warn! Repeatedly!

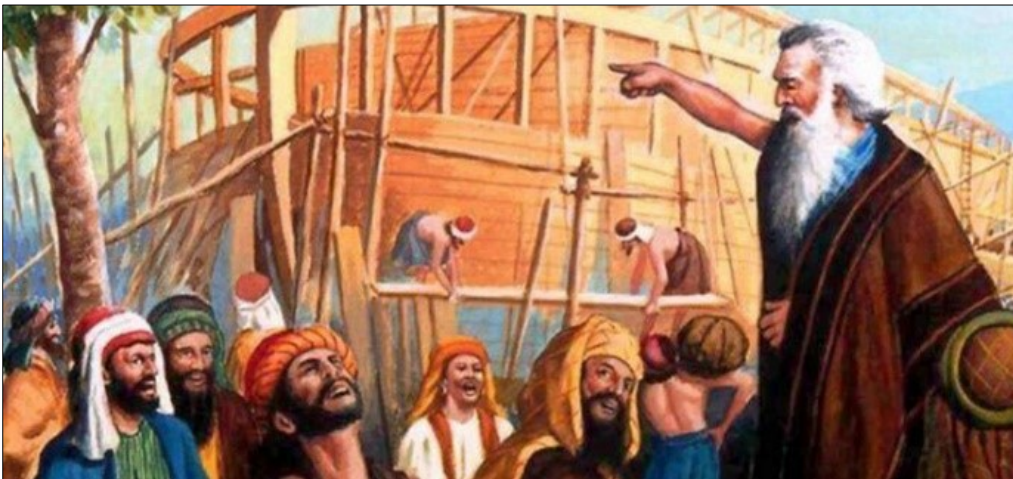
¹⁴ Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of His saints,¹⁵ to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." Jude 1:14-15

The Lord *always* does that! He does not let *anyone* go without warning them! God always delivers on His promises! He never gives us reason to accuse Him. Didn't God give us His laws and statutes? Doesn't He send His servants to preach the gospel and warn us Sunday after Sunday? Not one of us will be able to say that nobody warned them.

But we cannot escape His wrath if we *neglect* such a great salvation! The Bible clearly shows that God always warns people even before they sin. I will mention a few examples.

When Cain walked around plotting to murder Abel, God warned him not to commit that sin. God warned the first world before He sent the flood. God first sent Enoch, a preacher of righteousness who then already announced the impending judgment. Noah preached for one hundred and twenty years! But when the people rejected that preaching, the flood destroyed them

all. Through Moses, God warned Pharaoh before He drowned him and his people in the Red Sea. Through many prophets, God repeatedly warned the people of Israel before they were carried away captive to distant lands.



Noah preaching repentance. <https://www.thegospeltruth.org/>

I could go on and on.

Now God was warning the New Testament church, which had become Roman Catholic after a struggle of centuries. He told her He would leave her if she did not repent! God worked with that church for *so* many years before He took His people out of her! His warnings echoed across many European countries. Through the increasing darkness of heresy, that Light has shone, the 'Light' of the truth! God gave men who earnestly and forcefully preached against all those false doctrines.

But... the Roman Catholic Church did not *want* to listen to all those admonitions and warnings and fiercely *resisted* them! They persecuted, ill-treated, and often killed those faithful preachers! They had to be silent! They were not *allowed* to preach the truth! If they did not voluntarily keep quiet, they would silence them through a martyr's death!

For centuries, God was patient and worked with them. But He abandoned that false and wicked church when the people did not repent.

Then He sent the Reformation, not *within* but *outside* the Roman Catholic Church.

Yet, the work of the men who had repeatedly raised their voices against Rome's false doctrines was not in vain. More and more people became aware that things were going wrong. More and more people began to realise that the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church was not based on God's infallible Word anymore but was often in conflict with God's Word.

Gradually, God opened the eyes of more and more people to see the dreadful errors that had become accepted teachings in the church.

In that way, God was preparing them for the Reformation. And when the Reformation came, thousands and thousands of people would turn their backs to the Roman Catholic Church. What God had previously sown in their hearts by sending faithful preachers bore fruit!

The Lord had two aims in sending His obedient servants to preach the truth. First, the Lord *warned* the Roman Catholic Church, and second, He *prepared* the people for the Reformation.

We will now look at some forerunners of the Reformation. They did not labour in vain because the Lord was pleased to bless it richly, thereby increasing His Kingdom and glorifying His Name.

UNREST IN TURIN

The city of Turin lies in the north of Italy, close to the French border. That city suffered much unrest and turmoil during the first half of the ninth century.

The people stand together in groups on the street, busily discussing what is happening in front of their eyes. One said:

"I think our bishop is right; why have we got all that rubbish in church anyway? It does not belong there! Get rid of it!"

Another hotly answered:

"*Rubbish?*... How dare you say that? I think it's terrible. I disagree with you!"

The first one snaps back:

"Oh really? The sooner we toss those dead images out of the church, the better. They should have done that long ago."

The other answers scornfully:

"Oh yeah? You wait! The bishop is going to get into trouble over this! When the pope finds out, he will order him to put it all back again! That's what I reckon!"

What on earth are those people talking about? Come, we'll find out.

Look, there stands the large cathedral of the city of Turin. Its doors are wide open. Workers are walking in and out.

When we enter the church, we see



Bishop Claudius.
Wikipedia



several men working. Is the building being fixed up or cleaned? No, but several long ladders are set up against the strong pillars. A few men climb up them. On one of the pillars hangs a giant statue of Paul. The workers

unhook the image from the supports to which it is attached and carefully lower the stone or marble statue. Then a few strong men drag that heavy lump out of the building and throw it down somewhere.

Meanwhile, other men move the ladders and take down the next image, perhaps that of Peter. The men work steadily, quietly and calmly. The images on the pillars, the walls, galleries, the large one of Christ at the front, and all the images in that spacious church building are taken down and removed. Finally, none are left. But at the entrance, some more are hanging above the oak doors. The men also remove them. Then everyone quietly leaves the building. The gates are closed, and... they set off to the next church in Turin!

They do the same there!

The men clear *all* the images out of Turin's church buildings!

All at the command of the bishop!

Occasionally, the bishop visits to see whether the work is going smoothly and if everything is done orderly and neatly.



Images were worshipped in the church.
Catholicfaith.co.uk

Some people watch what's happening with obvious pleasure and approval. Others shake their heads and mockingly shrug their shoulders. And others clench their fists and look angry. Which bishop dares to remove all those images from all the church buildings? How *dare* he do that?

In those days, honouring the images of saints was universal. The people did not know better! They thought that was how it *should* be! It took courage to give an order for the removal of those idols! That bishop would have understood that he would incur the hatred and enmity of many with this act.

CLAUDIUS TAKES A STAND

That bishop's name was *Claudius*. In the history books, they call him Bishop Claudius of Turin. He was born in the north of Spain.

You may remember that Charlemagne had to fight a bitter war against the Muslims in Spain. Time and again, they tried to invade France to recapture lost territory. Finally, after much effort, Charlemagne succeeded in driving them back behind the Ebro River. Claudius was born in that northern part of Spain, conquered by Charlemagne. We know very little about his youth. He studied to become a priest and later travelled to France, where he became a teacher at the court school of Louis the Pious. By then, Charlemagne had died, and his son Louis the Pious was on the throne.

Teacher Claudius continued to study. Through that study, he became acquainted with the works of Augustine, the famous church father. These writings were a rich blessing to him. By reading them, God opened his eyes more and more to the errors of the Roman Catholic Church! With increasing clarity, he saw that the Roman Catholic doctrine went against the Word of God in many things.

In 820, Louis the Pious had to appoint a new bishop in Turin. Louis' eye fell on Claudius, and he appointed him as bishop of that Italian city. So



Louis the Pious 778-840.
lindhoutcc

Claudius was compelled to leave France. He travelled to sunny Italy.

The Turin clergy taught the heresies that were widely accepted in the Roman Catholic Church, and the people believed them. The church buildings were

full of images of the saints they worshipped. However, Bishop Claudius did not like that at all! He recognised the danger and decided to take decisive action against all the general superstition and unbelief. So he ordered the removal of all the images from the churches. But Claudius did more because images were not only in church buildings but also in homes! Many images of deceased saints held a place of honour in thousands of homes! When Claudius preached on Sunday, he seriously warned the people against worshipping the images of those saints.

But that was not all. Not only were the *images* of the saints worshipped, but the people worshipped the saints themselves! Didn't Rome teach that after their death, the saints became omnipresent?

Bishop Claudius thought that worshipping the saints was terrible. He vehemently combatted that idolatrous Roman error.

He said:

"You are returning to ancient paganism by praying to saints! Many years ago, the Romans also had their idols. Their idol temples were full of images of their chief god Jupiter and other gods. But we are doing the same! Our churches are full of images too! We also make idols of them. We have just given them different names. Instead of Jupiter, we have Paul or Peter or other saints. But God commanded us in His Word: 'You shall not make for yourself *any* graven image!'

When Claudius preached like that, it was breathlessly quiet in the church. What he said was perfectly true! In their hearts, many people had to agree with Claudius.

Soon the news spread that Claudius had cleansed the churches from all the images. And then bitter enmity erupted against him, the enmity of the other bishops and monks. If it had been possible, they would have murdered him! Good friends suddenly became bitter enemies! They accused him before Louis the Pious, but they came to the wrong man. Charlemagne had opposed image worship, and his son Louis also disliked it. That's why Louis the Pious did not have him arrested; instead, the powerful emperor protected him and ensured his enemies did not harm him. Claudius himself says of this:

"If the Lord had not helped me, they would have devoured me alive."

They wanted to kill him, but God watched over him; they could not harm him. The Lord used Louis the Pious for that.

RELICS

Claudius also warned against the heresy of praying to relics. In those days, the veneration of the remains of saints had reached an unprecedented height. At first, they preserved those articles as a *keepsake*. That in itself was not so bad. We do that, too. But it did not stop there. They began to *worship* those articles.

The clergy was constantly discovering new relics. They even 'found' the tears of Christ!



Relic of St Valentine. Catholic.com

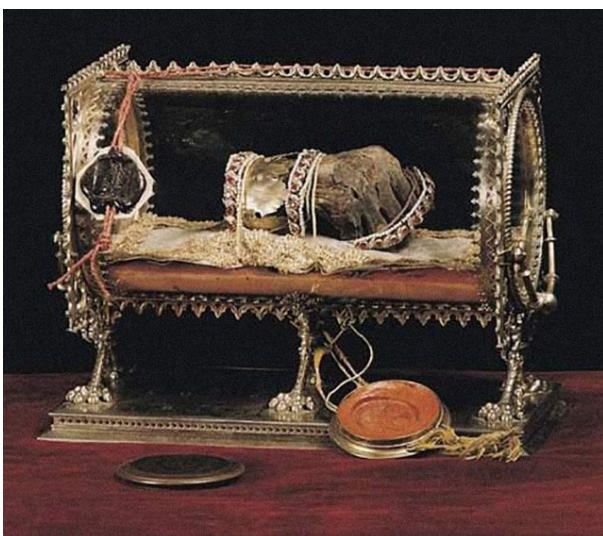
They had 'found' them somewhere in France! Then they 'found' the blood of the Lord Jesus! We would expect that they would discover Christ's blood near Jerusalem, for that's where the Lord Jesus suffered and died. That's where He had *shed* His blood! But no, Christ's blood was 'found' in Switzerland, on a small island in the Lake of Constance!

I could go on like this for quite a while. They 'found' the most incredible things! And the people readily believed all that nonsense. Naturally! Rome believed everything.

We already discussed relics in chapter 27; we will not repeat that. But centuries later, faith in those worthless things still existed! In the days of Bishop Claudius, trading in relics had reached an all-time high. And it was *all* based on lies and deceit because it is obvious that those so-called tears of Christ were *not* genuine and that the so-called blood of Christ was *not* His blood!

I shall mention one more example.

Somewhere in Spain, the Roman Catholic Church carefully kept and worshipped the bones of a 'saint'. But what turned out to be the truth? Those bones were not from a saint at all but belonged to a condemned criminal! Thousands of people believed they were from a saint. Hundreds of pilgrims had made an effort to travel to these bones to worship them! A mother had made a very long and dangerous journey with her



The holy right hand of St Peter. Wikipedia

mortally ill child to pray to those bones for her child's health! How *incredibly* sad! The church was misleading them! Poor people! They knew no better.

The Roman Catholic church made enormous amounts of money from the trade in relics. I wrote, 'from the trade'. But no, that is wrong. That was not trading; it was swindling!

Bishop Claudius also warned most earnestly against the dreadful error of idolising worthless articles. In our thoughts, we see him standing in the pulpit and hear his powerful voice.

He says:

"To prevent the Israelites from committing idolatry with the body of Moses, the Lord buried him on Mount Nebo, and no one has ever been able to find his grave. Must we then commit idolatry with the mortal remains of saints? No way, God has strictly forbidden that. That's why we must get rid of those things."

Worshipping the cross had also risen to an all-time high. When they asked him his opinion, Claudius gave a slight smile and said:

"If we must worship all the lumps of wood which have the shape of a cross, then we must also worship all mangers, for didn't the Lord Jesus lie in a manger when He was born?"

Yes, the people understood very well what he was saying, and some secretly chuckled about it because what their bishop said was true. But Claudius had not finished speaking yet. Just listen! "Then we must also worship all the swaddling clothes because His mother wrapped Him in them when He was born.

Then we must also worship all donkeys because He was sitting on one of them when He entered Jerusalem."

The bishop waits a moment and concludes: "We must not *worship* the cross, but we must *bear* the cross."

That means: 'When we meet with adversity and difficulties in this life, when troubles and sorrows come our way, then we must willingly submit ourselves to them without complaint.'

The people went on many pilgrimages in those days. Some travelled all the way to Rome because of a particular relic the church kept there. Then they travelled to a city in France because the church kept another relic there! They made long journeys to many different places regardless of cost and trouble.

Bishop Claudius preached against that too. Said that brave bishop:

"We don't read a command for that anywhere in the Bible."

A proof text he used to back his view was the story of the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan woman. When she asked Jesus:

"Lord, the Jews tell us that we must go to Jerusalem to worship God, and we say that *our* temple is the place where we must serve God. Who is right?" Jesus answers seriously:

"Woman, the hour comes, and now is, that it does not matter where we pray."

We can worship God everywhere. It makes no difference where we are, in an attic, a barn, or the field.

It does not matter. But we must pray in *truth*. God is everywhere, and He hears our prayers wherever we are.

Bishop Claudius, you are perfectly correct! All those pilgrimages are from the evil one. They are not necessary at all!

Not the place *where* we pray is important, but *how* we pray is what counts. We must pray to God in truth and sincerity.

The Roman Catholic Church also taught that the good works of the saints contributed to the salvation of others.

Vehemently Claudius responded:

"That is *not* true; nobody has ever been saved by the works of some other human being. We can only be saved and inherit glory through *Christ's* merits!"

When Claudius spoke about good works, he said: "Good works must be done by faith, to the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbour."

PREACHING THE TRUTH BRINGS ENMITY

Bishop Claudius saw the errors of the Roman Catholic Church very clearly. He was opposed to the worship of saints, images, relics, the cross, and pilgrimages. He proved from Scripture *why* he was opposed to them. I could mention many more things, but we now clearly understand who Bishop Claudius was and how he preached.

Indeed, also through his work, the Light of the Bible shone in the darkness of Rome's errors.

And has that earnest and faithful preaching borne fruit?

The hostility which rose against him was terrible. His enemies called him a serpent who wanted to destroy the Church. They first accused him before the emperor and, when that did not help, before the pope. The pope wanted to get rid of Claudius. He did his level best to silence this faithful preacher. However, all their efforts failed because the mighty emperor, Louis the Pious, protected him.

That was a good thing for Claudius; otherwise, they would undoubtedly have murdered him, but now his enemies did not dare to harm him. Although they called him horrible names and looked at him angrily, they did not dare kill him. They clenched their fists in powerless fury, but that was all they could do!

Claudius was no church *destroyer*; on the contrary, he wanted to *save* the severely straying church from perishing. He wanted a reformation *within* the Roman Catholic Church. But he was not successful in that. They did not want to listen to

his well-meant warnings.

Although the 'light' of truth shone, the people loved the darkness more than the light. The time was not yet ripe for a Reformation *outside* the Roman Catholic Church. Ages

later, that great change would come. Yet, Claudius has been a *forerunner* of the Reformation. In the year 839, he died peacefully despite the raging of his many enemies.

"Good works must be done
by faith, to the glory of God
and the benefit of our
neighbour."

Bishop Claudius stayed in office until his death. His work shows something of the concern the Lord still had for the Roman Catholic Church by sending such a man who sought the welfare of the church. He showed the way *back, back* to the *truth* and *back* to God's infallible Word in simple obedience.

It didn't seem to help - yet. Sadly, Rome did not *want* to abandon its errors. Not because God was incapable, nor because the preaching of Claudius was faulty, but because of the hardness of the hearers' hearts.

QUESTIONS

1. How did the Lord warn the Church before He took His people out of it?
2. What is a 'forerunner' of the Reformation?
3. Who was Claudius.
4. How did God use Augustine's writings for Claudius' spiritual growth?
5. How did Claudius combat idolatry?
6. Why did the emperor refuse to punish him for removing the images?
7. What is the difference between a keepsake and a relic?
8. How did Claudius oppose the trade in relics? How did he regard the worship of the cross?
9. What did Claudius mean when he said: "We must not *worship* the cross, but we must *bear* the cross"?
10. What argument did Claudius use to oppose pilgrimages?
11. What three requirements did Claudius insist upon before a deed could be called a good work?
12. How did Claudius react to the belief that good works can merit eternal life?
13. Why did a complete reformation fail to come within the church at this time?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Compare the work of Claudius with that of John the Baptist.
2. This chapter mentions warnings given to various individuals in the Bible. What warnings did God give to the following:
a) Cain b) Enoch's generation c) Pharaoh.

REVIEW

Make all false statements true. Leave the true statements as they are.

1. The Crusades caused a decline in the power and influence of the church.
2. Many slaves were freed because they served during the Crusades.
3. The monasteries became more corrupt because they became more wealthy after the knights sold their lands to the church.
4. The orders of knights were primarily established to guarantee protection to the crusaders and to care for wounded and sick pilgrims.
5. Trade between the Arabs and the Europeans occurred primarily because the Arabs desired the spices that the Europeans brought for trade purposes.
6. Feudal estates grew after ex-servants began to settle in them after the crusades, leading to a third class's growth.
7. An indulgence is a written statement of the forgiveness of sin.
8. Bernard was converted after entering the monastery of Chalons on the Saone.
9. Bernard erred in all the following: support of all images, monastic life, crusades, and popery.
10. Bernard commanded that Jews should have the gospel explained to them. They should be urged to repentance.
11. Bernard may be termed a forerunner of the Reformation.
12. God used Ambrose's writings for Claudius' spiritual benefit.
13. Claudius regarded the veneration of saints as idolatry.
14. Claudius stated that good works must be based on the following: It must be done to the glory of God and benefit our neighbour.
15. Claudius opposed pilgrimages because he found no example of a pilgrimage in God's Word.