

The Church of the Living God

The pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3: 15).

W. H. Westcott, Inkongo, Congo Free State.

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The house of God is the church of the living God, "the pillar and ground of the truth." The idea of the house being God's house and the church being God's church or assembly makes plain that its *inception* and *form* and *administration*, as well as its *destiny*, can only be rightly appreciated as we listen to what God has to say about it, and can only be properly responded to as we are subject to what He says.

Then what He says through the Apostle in this verse is that it is the pillar and base of the truth. With both of these ideas there is a necessary suggestion of solidity and immutability. A pillar — whether forming part of a habitable structure or standing like a triumphal column detached — conveys less than anything else the idea that it can be moved at will. A base, a foundation is equally suggestive of unalterable stability, for if the foundation be shifting and changeable, what structure can be reared on it?

Here we have an answer to such as state that the Christianity of the New Testament is to be "liberally" understood, and is to be adapted to the environment of succeeding centuries. The fact is that there is nothing more unbending than a pillar nor more unshifting than a foundation; and in whatever age the church is set for Christ it is the witness for God against any and every innovation from the thoughts of men. Of Christ it is said — or rather He Himself says — "I am the way, the *TRUTH*, and the life." Our thoughts of Him may be narrow or circumscribed, but, let others advocate what person or system they will, the truth is contained alone in Jesus of all that God is — the truth, the *whole* truth, and *nothing but the truth*. In Him resides all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. It was pleased to dwell there; and none can gainsay it without denying Christianity. How restful to the heart it is to know Jesus. There is nothing false in Him, nothing of disappointment, nothing of change. It is a reduction to absurdity to say that when the human mind can enlarge itself to find something greater than God, then will Jesus cease to suffice.

But if God be God, then Jesus is the manifestation of Him. The very next verse in Timothy states this. "*Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*" Of whom is that premised? Of none other than Jesus. And *this* is the mystery of godliness, the mystery that produces likeness to God. There is an outline of the *Truth there*, and its ethical result. It is a mystery, because all do not see it, nor can they without divine blessing; but it is not mystical, for it produces practical piety, and shows how one ought to behave oneself in the house of God — in the assembly of the living God, which is the pillar and base of the truth.

But this truth of the person of Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is stamped upon the church for her testimony and for her own internal stability. Perhaps the pillar gives the notion of testimony, *i.e.* it is made to be seen of men. Samson, when the sport of at least 3000 spectators, was put near the *pillar*. Two *pillars* were conspicuous before the eyes of every worshipper who went to Solomon's temple. Often there were inscriptions written on pillars, hieroglyphics and the like. And the church is here for positive testimony, to possess the writing of Christ, to stand erect and unbending in uncompromising witness of the truth as it is in Jesus, neither softly absorbing any notions which are not of Christ, nor

consenting to part with the least detail of the truth as to Him — His deity, His incarnation, His atoning death, His glorious resurrection, His priesthood, His advocacy, His lordship, His eternal sonship, and all the co-related truths of His glory, His church, and His kingdom.

But these truths of Christ have an internal relation to the church — a relation of faith and hope and love. If it be true — and it is true — that God was manifested in Christ, it is no less true that Christ is seen in His church. The assembly formed by the descent of the Holy Ghost, and being completed for the day of glory, is the vessel in which Christ will be hereafter displayed to the world. But it is even here the transcript (in its normal state) of His nature as the risen Man, and of His character as the Christ; enjoying relationship even as He does with His Father and His God.

None knew this so well, perhaps, as the saints at Ephesus, where Timothy was. Every feature, every trait of Christ, every delineation of the truth as it is in Jesus is projected into the saints who form the house of God, the church of the living God. This is true *if we view them as God's workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. This solid, perfect, permanent work of Christ's delineation in the saints seems to me to represent the idea of the church being the base of the truth. To get a true idea of it we have to abstract them from their present external and really misleading condition: to see them apart from the flesh in them, which is actually condemned in the death of Christ, and apart from their position in this present world, which is, so to say, accidental (for it falls out so, and is no part of their heavenly calling), and to view them in all their purity — justified before God, having been blessed in Christ, sealed by the Holy Ghost, and brought to God. They are possessed of life after Christ's order; the graces of Jesus are all in them in germ, by the Holy Spirit's work, and need ministry and pastoring and use to draw them out. They are unknown in the world, but are shortly to be displayed in glory; they are now sons of God, and are predestinated to be conformed fully to Christ's image, holy and without blame in love. In them faith, love, and hope abide, these three; and by their means Christ is responded to in all His love and glory. What is there, then, of Christ outside of them, so viewed, on earth? The church being the base of truth, all that does not tally with the truth of God intended to be set forth and wrought out in her is off the foundation, and is only at best some human structure not destined to remain.

Such, for instance, are all designs of empire that do not head up in Christ supreme; and all thoughts of ecclesiastical organization or reformation which are not begun, continued, and ended in Christ. Yes, and all systems of ethical teaching, too, which start not with the new birth and the exclusion of all footing for the will of unregenerate man. "Christ in me" is the secret of moral change, and "I live by the faith of the Son of God" is the secret of moral superiority to every diversion here.

It seems to me that if we understand that the church of the living God is thus the pillar and base of the truth, we can humbly but firmly reject all idea that Christianity is to absorb a little from Buddhism and a little from Mohammed and a little from Darwin, etc., to become a perfect religion for all mankind. It comes to dictate, not to listen; and rightly so, for *the living God*, to whom all ages are ever present, has marked out the lines of the foundation on which everything true and answering to Himself is to be constructed for the and eternity. "*WITHOUT CONTROVERSY*, great is the mystery of godliness." What can evolution do after *God* manifest in flesh? It is not the working up into some state higher by any means, whether survival of the fittest or the striving of the whole race after its grandest ideal, but it is the coming down of the mighty God to us in Christ that is to be the true lever for man's recovery to God.