

WHAT THE CHURCH SHOULD BE NO. 1436

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“That you may know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”
1 Timothy 3:15.

PAUL'S design in this epistle was to instruct young Timothy how he should behave himself in the church of God, so as to discharge his office as minister, evangelist and pastor with honor to himself and profit to the people. He reminds him that the church is the house of God and in God's own house a man ought to be upon his best behavior, for it is no light thing to draw near unto the Lord. A poor man who is called to visit a prince or king will anxiously inquire how he ought to act. We, poor creatures that we are, when we are admitted into the church which is the house of God, should inquire what conduct will be decorous and comely in those who are admitted into the presence of the great King, and permitted to dwell within His palace gates. Especially should each of us, endeavor to behave himself aright in the house of God, if we know that we are looked up to and imitated. All who teach the young, all who are parents, all who are persons of age and experience, all who occupy influential positions and especially all deacons, elders and preachers, should pray the Lord that they may know how they may behave themselves in the house of God, lest inadvertently their misbehavior should be injurious to the weaker sort. Such need to learn how they should behave to their brethren, to the Elder Brother, and to the great Father of all. We need to learn the ways of the house, the customs of the palace. Part of the objective of the sermon this morning, will be that those of us who are in the house of God may learn how we should behave in it. But special prominence will be given to steadfastness in the faith which makes a man not only a dweller in the church but a pillar of it.

I am not going to trouble you this morning with the various interpretations which have been given to the passage before us. It has been a sort of Plain of Esdraelon, where battles have been fought from time immemorial. Many suggestions have been made as to its interpretation, so as to avoid the sense given in our version, because that sense has been perverted into a defense of the Romish church. It seems to me however, looking at it as carefully as I am able to do, that our translation is about the best possible one and I feel sure that it has in it the mind of God. Probably the sense would never have been disputed if it had not been for the controversies which have arisen in which this verse has been misused and misrepresented. I am rather suspicious of interpretations which arise out of controversies. What have we to do with giving either a Protestant or a Catholic sense to Scripture? Is it not our duty to give the true sense, be it what it may? There can never be any justification for twisting Scripture, in order to wrench it out of an enemy's hand. Nor is there any need in this case, even if it were allowable. In vain has the Romish church tried to gather from this verse that she is the great source of truth, for the passage can never apply to her, since she has utterly gone aside from the truth, and is described by the apostle in the verses which follow the text as departing from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, forbidding to marry, and so forth. Popery or no popery, let us take the Word of God in its natural and evident meaning, and we shall be instructed thereby. May God the Holy Spirit enable us to understand His own word.

I. First, I shall at some length *expound* the text, and then try to *enforce* the lesson from it.

In expounding it, I see three things to note, and the first is THE GLORIOUS NAME OF THE CHURCH—“The Church of the living God.”

First, it is called *the church*. What is a church? It is an assembly. And a Christian church is an assembly of faithful men, of men who know the truth, believe it, affirm it, and adhere to it. The Greek word signifies an assembly summoned out of the whole population to exercise the right of citizenship. An ecclesia, or church, is not a mob, nor a disorderly gathering rushing together without end or purpose,

but a regular assembly of persons called out by grace and gathered together by the Holy Spirit. Those persons make up the assembly of the living God. In order to be a church, there must be a selection and a calling out, and that calling must come from God, who alone can call effectually. Touching all the members of this select assembly there is an eternal purpose which is the original reason of their being called, and to each of them there is an effectual calling whereby they actually gather into the church. Then, also, there is a hedging and fencing about of this church, by which it is maintained as a separate body, distinct from all the rest of mankind. The command which calls them away from the world is very clear—“Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” The church is not a number of unregenerate people coming together entirely of their own notion to defend such-and-such dogmas. Such persons may form a club, but they cannot make a church. There must be a coming together of renewed men, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and these must meet for purposes which God Himself ordains, and be joined together after His own fashion. Jesus must be the uniting cornerstone, and His Spirit the indwelling power, as it is written, “In whom you also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.”

But the title grows upon us when we read it as “*the church of God.*” There is a synagogue of Satan, and there is a church of God. There are churches so-called which are not of God, though they take upon themselves His name. But what an honor it is to be one of the assembly of God, to be one of those whom God has chosen, whom God has called, whom God has quickened, whom God has sanctified, whom God loves and calls His own! How honored is that assembly in which He resides! The text speaks not of the church of a country, or of a city, nor of the church of king or prelate, but of the church of *God*. Blessed be God, since Jesus Christ ascended up on high there has never ceased to be a church of God in the earth, generally hidden and concealed, often persecuted and always despised, yet still living. This church, like its Lord, has been more often found among the poor than among the rich, more frequently confessing at the stake than honored in the palace. Still has she been present bearing witness for the truth even in the darkest times. There has been left to us a remnant, according to the election of grace, in every age. I speak not, now, of this denomination nor of that, but of the truly spiritual people who have witnessed faithfully in the life and power of God to the truth as it is in Jesus. This is the church of God.

The title is enhanced in its excellence by the word which is applied to God. It is, “*The church of the living God*”—not your congregation, O Diana, though, they said of you that you did fall from heaven, for you are a lifeless image! What was Diana of the Ephesians? What life or power was in that senseless block? Timothy knew that the assembly which gathered in the name of Diana was not called out by a living god. Brethren, it is a glorious fact that our God, the God of the church, lives and reigns, and that He shows His life all around us. We see Him sustaining nature, ruling providence and reigning in the midst of His church, and while we see Him we adore Him. Jehovah is the living God, and the divine life is seen in each of the adorable persons of the Godhead. Our Lord Jesus Christ is not to us a dead Christ, we love and bless Him because He once died upon the cross, and we adore Him because He always lives to make intercession for us. We are bold to preach the gospel because of His living power, and we are earnest to observe His commands because we acknowledge His living government in the midst of the church. The living God proves His life among us by the Holy Spirit, by the conversion of sinners, by comforting and instructing saints, and by edifying the faithful into a building fitly framed together. Since, then, the church belongs to the living God, what is a dead church? Is that the church of the living God? How can it be? Only as you and I possess the Spirit of God quickening us to a life of godliness may we dare to think ourselves a part of the church of the living God. If you have never been quickened by the Spirit of God, if you are dead in trespasses and sins, what have you to do with the church of the living God? O you dead and corrupt, how can you have communion with the living in Zion? Only when you live unto God may you be built up as living stones into the living temple of the living God. The thing most to be dreaded in any one church is the decay of life. We may soon fall into formalism, and even hold the truth in the cold grip of spiritual death. Prayer may be neglected and the other offices of spiritual life may be disregarded, and then all will languish. “You have the name that you live and are dead” is the dreadful sentence which must be written across the brow of a merely nominal church. Brethren, if we would be the church of the living God, we must be thoroughly alive unto God.

What an august body is this church of the living God. Where do I see it? I say not that I see the whole of it, for as yet this bride of Christ is in the making. As Adam saw not Eve until she was perfected, and therefore we cannot suppose that she saw herself, so we see no visible embodiment of the entire church of Christ nor shall we see it until Christ shall come a second time, and shall present her unto Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Today we must walk very much by faith as to the church of Christ, for her members are yet being fashioned and are best discerned by spiritual men. Happy are we if we are members of that church, yes, members of Christ Himself by the living faith which unites us to the living God. Never let us speak disrespectfully of the church of God, or think of her with other than love and with intense devotion to her interests, for she belongs to God. Let us pray for her peace and prosperity, since she is the city of the great King. Let us ask the Lord daily to make His own Church more and more visible and powerful in the midst of mankind, that she may come forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

II. Now, secondly we will consider HER DESIGN IN REFERENCE TO GOD. The Apostle speaks of the church of the living God as *the house of God*. This is a very beautiful and instructive figure. "The Most High dwells not in temples made with hands," whether they are called cathedrals, churches, or meeting houses. Today there is no consecrated shrine, no appointed building where we must resort if we would meet with God, for behold the Lord is to be found everywhere by those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. True hearts view the entire universe as a temple wherein everyone speaks of the glory of God. Yet there is a shrine and a temple, but it is living and spiritual, the called-out assembly, the church of the living God is the special abode of Deity.

I suppose we are to understand first, by the church being God's house, that it is *the place of His worship*. As of old the temple was the holy place to which the children of Israel went up in pilgrimage, the point towards which they opened their windows when they prayed, and the place of the one altar and the one sacrifice. So now the church of God is the sole place of God's true worship. He is spiritually worshipped nowhere else. They who were never called and never quickened by Him may pretend to worship Him, but what is dead worship to the living God? They may profess to serve Him with gorgeous ceremonies, smoking incense, and harmonious music, but what is this to Him who is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth? It is only where men are spiritual that there can be spiritual worship. It is only with their love and with their trust and with their joy in the name of Jesus, and with their prayers and praises, presented by the power of the Holy Spirit, that God is to be worshipped at all. Do not dream, you ungodly, that you can worship the living God. The first essential to your acceptance is that you accept His salvation. Be first reconciled to Him by the death of His Son, for how shall His enemies present to Him acceptable praises? You must become a part of the living church by being born again, or else you cannot worship the Lord at all.

But I like better still to get away from the somewhat ceremonious idea of a temple to the more familiar thought of a house or home. The Lord makes the church *the place of His indwelling*. The thought itself is charming. It is that old prophecy fulfilled, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." God calls His church a house in the sense of His residing there. He is everywhere, but His special resort, the place of His feet, the home of His heart, is His called-out congregation, His elect, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified church. Does not this invest believers with a wondrous dignity that God should dwell in them? "Know you not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit?" God dwells in you. If you are indeed quickened of the Spirit, the Spirit abides in you and shall be with you forever. Of the church we read, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

In his own house a man not only dwells, for he might do that in any inn, but there he feels himself to be at home, and therefore, it is *the place of his manifestation*. You do not see the real man on the bench, for there you see a judge, nor on business, for there you see a trader. But at home, with the children, as one of them, you see the man, the father, the husband; you see his heart and soul. And God is not seen in the entire universe with anything like the degree of clearness that He is beheld in the midst of His people. The Lord God is more gloriously manifested in His people than in all the works of creation. First in the person of His Son He has revealed Himself right gloriously, and then in all those who are united to His Son. He manifests Himself to us as He does not unto the world. Oh, what unbending of divine majesty have we seen! What unveilings of the incomprehensible, what revelations of the infinite has the

Lord caused to pass before His church! “I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet unto my taste.” “He brought me into the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.” It is in the midst of His church that we see our Lord and are glad.

A man’s house is, also, *the place of his paternal rule*. In the church we are under the present rule of our heavenly Father. In the church of God you will sometimes see this very remarkably. I believe that when Paul said, concerning certain offenses in the church, “For this cause some are sickly among you and many sleep,” he gave us a hint of the remarkable discipline which the great Head of the house exerts over church members. I do not say over members of all churches, but I say that among members of pure churches there is a solemn discipline going on, for the Lord is jealous over His house, and He will be sanctified in them that come near unto Him, therefore “be you clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.” If a man is a father, he expects that his word should rule his household. In the blessed household of God our Father, our Lord is the sole ruler. In God’s house we know no law but God’s law, and we acknowledge no legislator but Jesus, who said, “One is your Master, even Christ, and all you are brethren.” Blessed is that rule, and blessed are they who submit to it, doing His commandments, listening to the voice of His Word. God grant us grace to stand up for the crown rights of King Jesus, and the paternal authority of God in His own church. And never may we allow any merely human authority in the church, however long the usurpation may have continued. If any come among us and speak not according to His Word, let us judge that they have no light in them, and let us give no place for subjection to them—no, not for an hour.

Once again, it is for his own house that a man works and spends his strength. It is *the object of his choicest purposes*. If a man shall compass sea and land to gain gold, it is for his house. If he rises up early and sits up late and eats the bread of carefulness, it is still for his house. And so the great Householder rules all things for His chosen family, and the end and the design of all providence, if we were to trace it to its ultimate objective, is the good of them that love God, and are the called according to His purpose. The Lord’s people are His portion and His inheritance. Dwelling in them, He regards them as His palace. He looks upon the church as the eye of the universe, the joy of the earth, the crown of all His works. Towards her His thoughts of love go forth, and for her are His words of truth and acts of power.

We will not leave this point without observing *how holy*, then, should all members of Christian churches be! “Holiness becomes your house.” An unholy member of a church! What shall I say? Let that black stone be wet with tears of penitence this day, and then may it be washed in the blood of Jesus. O member of the church, is your conduct inconsistent with your profession? Judge yourself and be zealous and repent. All of us may well humble ourselves in the sight of God and ask Him to cleanse us that we may be fit for Him to dwell in.

How obedient also should we be, for if we are a part of the house of God, let it be our joy to submit ourselves to the Master. When we were children in the home of a loving father, his rule was not irksome to us, and with such a Father as our God, we admit that His commandments are not grievous. Let us obey carefully and joyfully, each one of us.

How struck with awe ought every church member to be to think that he is built into God’s house. Truly, as I enter among the people of God, I feel bound to cry with Jacob, “How dreadful is this place! It is none other than the house of God.” Take not lightly upon yourselves a profession of Christianity. And when you have been baptized into the name of Christ, and are united with His church, see that you walk circumspectly, and that you adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things.

At the same time, *how full of love* ought we to be, for God is love. A house is no home if love is absent and a church is unchurchly if there is division among the brethren. Is it not written, “The Father Himself loves you,” “Little children, love one another,” “God is love and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in Him”?

III. Thus, have we spoken upon the design of the church in reference to God—the tug of war comes in the third place, THE DESIGN OF THE CHURCH IN REFERENCE TO THE TRUTH. Paul compares it to a pillar and its pedestal or basement, for that, I think, would be a fair translation. The temple of Diana, at Ephesus, was adorned with more than a hundred columns of stupendous size. They were mostly of Parian marble and were either furnished by the various cities of Asia as offerings to the goddess, or were contributed by wealthy men and princes. These pillars are said to have been immense

monoliths. Single stones of sixty feet in height and they were set upon a basement which was elevated ten steps above the surrounding area. Diana had her pillar and her basement, but she had no pillar or basement of the truth, hers was all imposture throughout. Now, Paul calls the church of God the basement and pillar of the truth. What does He mean? Notice, that she is not the creator of the truth, or the inventor and fashioner of doctrine. You would think from the talk of certain divines, nowadays, that the church of God must surely be a manufactory of notions, a school of inventions where clever men think out new gospels for new times, or, like spiders, spin out of themselves fresh webs as the old ones are broken. Our admiration is solicited for those who are “abreast of the times” and who keep pace with the wonderful advance of the 19th century. Now, the church of God is not the inventor of the truth, she is the pillar and basement of it.

Let it be remembered, also, that the figure must not be pushed beyond what it was meant to teach. In a certain sense the church cannot be the pillar and ground of the truth. Truth is true of itself, and owes its origin to God Himself and the nature of things. The church is not here described as the deepest foundation of the truth, for the basement of the pillar of truth rests on a rock, and the church rests on God, the Rock of ages. But truth in itself is one thing, as truth as existing in the world is another thing. You often hear it said at public meetings that truth is mighty and will prevail. I dare say the proverb is true, but if you put a truth away on the shelf and no man mentions it for ages, it will not prevail. Truth never prevails till some living mind believes it, vindicates it and proclaims it abroad. The person, who thus takes up a grand truth, declares it, fights for it and makes it known, may be very properly called the pillar and the basis of the cause, for the spread of the principle depends upon him. We may say of the Reformation, Luther was its pillar and basement, or of Methodism the same might be said of Wesley. Note how in another place, Paul says that James and Cephas and John seemed to be pillars, that is to say, they held up the good cause. There are men alive at this day of whom we may say, “They are the pillars of the cause,” and in the same sense the church of God is the pillar and the basement of the truth among mankind.

Notice that the text speaks of “The *church* of God,” meaning all the people of God and not the clergy alone. There is a very grave lesson here. We frequently hear it said, “So-and-so is gone into the church.” Now remember that everybody who has gone into Christ Jesus has gone into the church, but no one else. The clergy are not the church. It would be a great pity if they were. In all churches it is a great fault if the whole of the people are not recognized in the work of the Lord, in the affairs of His house, and especially in the maintenance of His truth. As fish are said to stink first at the head, so will you find that the first people to depart from the truth are those who ought to be the very last, namely, the professed teachers of it. If the people could but speak so as to be heard, we should not have one-half the heresy which now defiles the house of God. The people are very often put on one side, as if they were not at all to be considered, but were to be managed and catered to by their spiritual lords. Then, alas, these great ones betray the cause and sell Christ as cheaply as Judas did. They mix up the teaching of the Spirit with the conceit of the flesh and become so wise that they refuse to know Christ and Him crucified. They will not keep to the Scriptures, but dive down into their own thoughts and imaginations, till they stir the mud at the bottom of their subjects and do not themselves know where they are, nor can any man tell them. Most of the false doctrine in the world has been suggested by those whose very office it is to preach the truth. Hence the truth is not trusted to the ministry. It is based and pillared upon the whole church. The poor old bed-ridden sister who sings of Jesus’ everlasting love is quite as much a defender of the faith as an archbishop, and perhaps more. The unlettered peasant, who knows the doctrines of grace by deep experience, and therefore will never let them go, is as true a guardian of the gospel treasure as the most profound scholar, and perhaps far more so. The whole of you who really love God are set for the maintenance of the truth in the world. Under God the Holy Spirit, the cause of truth depends upon you, you are its pillar and its basement.

What does the expression mean—the pillar and basement? I think it means, first, that *in the church, the truth should abide*. In the church of the living God it always does abide, even as a pillar stirs not from its place. In the confession of the church made by each one of her members, in the teaching of her ministers, and in the witness of the whole body, truth will be found at all times. The church of God is not the quicksand of the truth, but the pillar and pedestal of it. She is not the floating island of the truth, but the eternal column of it. The church stands steadfast and unmovable as a pillar of truth fixed on its base.

If you find not the truth anywhere else, you will find it in the church of the living God, which is truth's castle and stronghold. "In which church?" you ask. I said in the church of the living God. I did not say in the Church of England, or in the Church of Scotland, or in the Wesleyan church, or in the Baptist church, or even in the assembly of Exclusive Brethren. But I did say that the truth of God is as a treasure in the church of the living God, and it is never removed from her keeping. Therefore, if the truth is not maintained by any so-called church, it is not the church of God. When the truth is given up, everything is given up. The very idea of a church involves the retaining of the truth with constant steadfastness, and if this is neglected, the so-called church has nothing left in it but the name. As a pillar and its base are always in one place, so must the church be a fixed, permanent and unalterable column of gospel truth, and woe to her if she is not.

Secondly, it means that in the true church the truth is lifted up as upon a pillar. Truth not only rests there as on a pedestal, but it stands upright as a pillar. It is the duty and the privilege of the church of God to exalt the truth into the open view of all mankind. Possibly you may have seen the column of Trajan, or the column in the Place Vendome in Paris, these may serve as illustrations. Around these shafts you see the victories of the conqueror pictured in relief and lifted into the air, that all may see them. Now, the church of God is a pillar which lifts up and publishes, far and wide, the achievements of our conquering Lord, saying to all mankind, "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." I may give an illustration of a pillar being said to speak from our own column commemorating the great fire of London which is popularly called the Monument. It used to bear an inscription to the effect that the papists burned the city, a charge which no one now believes. The poet Pope said of it—

*"Where London's column, pointing to the skies,
Like a tall bully, lifts its head and lies."*

Now I shall venture to alter the lines, and say—

*"See Christ's own church, still pointing to the sky,
Like a tall champion, lift the truth on high."*

Our Lord never taught us to hide the gospel in little rooms down back alleys. He would have us come to the front as much as we can. The church is not a cellar to conceal the truth, but a pillar to display it. "A city set on a hill cannot be hid." What is there to be ashamed of? We may ourselves remain unknown, but we must make the truth known at all costs. The church should be like a lighthouse, which is often built as a tall pillar to bear the light at its summit, and like a memorial column which bears a statue upon the top of it, she should lift up the truth of God before the gaze of all men.

Again, a church is intended by God *to set forth the truth with beauty*, for in a temple, pillars and columns are meant for ornaments as well as for service. The fluted and richly carved pillars of Diana's temple were the admiration of all who saw them, and in later days they were so esteemed that they were carried to other lands to adorn other edifices. The dome of Santa Sophia, in Constantinople, now rises from columns of green jasper originally placed in the temple of Diana. The church should adorn the doctrine of God her Savior in all things. His truth should be emblazoned upon her like an inscription upon a column, so stately, as to secure attention and command respect. A living Christian is the best ornament of Christianity. God's service should be performed in the beauty of holiness.

Once more, it is the Church's business *to maintain the truth* with all her might. She is set as a bronze wall and an iron pillar against all error. However men may cringe or bow, there stands the column fast and firm, fixed on its pedestal, set on its base. So should the church in all ages stand fast to truth and yield to no error, nor concealment of doctrine, nor change of ordinance. The church of the apostles is the model of the church of today. The pattern of the church of Christ is not to be found in the popish synagogues of the middle ages, but in the first age when Jesus Christ spoke and said, "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The business of the church is to uphold, defend, maintain, and propagate the pure doctrine of Christ and His apostles, and if she fails in this, if in her midst the truth is not prized, if it is not adorned, if it is not vindicated and proclaimed, the church, so-called, is no longer the pillar of the truth, but a bowing wall and a tottering fence.

Now, I must occupy your time a little longer while I try to *enforce a truth* which lies very near my own heart. And I pray God it may lie near the hearts of all His people at this perilous hour. The truths which may be derived from the text are of one order. The first is that *the whole church is to maintain the truth*. Dear brothers and sisters be very zealous for the gospel, the old, old gospel of the grace of God, the doctrine of justification by faith and forgiveness by the atonement. I speak to you who know the truth, for you alone make up the church of God. Do not, I beseech you, allow in yourselves an ignorance of God's Word, but study it and seek to know more and more of it. But what you do know, by the teachings of God's Spirit, bind about yourselves as a belt never to be loosened. There are seducing spirits abroad that would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. Therefore I entreat you to not be beguiled by their exceeding craftiness. Turn not aside from your steadfastness, but abide in the faith. They will tell you that you are bigoted. Never mind them, for in their mouths bigotry is another name for decision of character. The gospel of salvation is the hope of men; therefore do all you can to make it known. Do not cast in your lot with those who are given to change, but stand in the old paths. It may happen that the wealthier people of the town are in error and it may be for your temporal advantage to join their community, but make no confederacy with false doctrine. Better go to the meanest conventicle and help to maintain the truth than attend the wealthiest congregation where the gospel is thrown into the background. I charge you by the living God, in these evil days, to keep yourselves pure from error. A true church is appointed of God for the conservation of the truth, and before the Lord, at the foot of the cross, in the power of the eternal Spirit, we would pray that even unto death we may be faithful to our charge.

Next, remember that *a church is unchurched which is not faithful to the truth*. The church of Rome, when she forbade to marry and commanded to abstain from meats, set up also the "mass" in the place of the sacrifice of Christ and her priests in the place of the one Great High Priest. Then she taught and encouraged idolatry in the worship of images, relics and the like. By all this she unchurched herself and is now described in Scripture, not as the bride of Christ, but as the harlot of Babylon. She is not the pillar of the truth, but the grave of it. She was moved by error. She fell from her uprightness. She lies prone in utter ruin, never to be restored. Alas, any church may thus perish. The apostasy of Rome should be a warning to all other churches, lest they also by little and little become defiled, and cease to answer to the divine design and are cast away forever.

Next, remember that *any church fails in her design as being the pillar and pedestal of the truth in proportion as she departs from the truth*. I therefore do, with all my soul, condemn what I see around me everywhere of disregard to the truth. It is not merely that men change their views, but that they are becoming indifferent to truth altogether and seem to think they do God a service when they unsettle the youthful mind. First, we deplore all *tampering with inspiration*. The sacred volume is scarcely admitted to be inspired at all, or at best it is said to be inspired in some such moderated sense as Milton or Shakespeare may have been inspired. Then *this* book is torn away from Scripture and then the other, and some who ought to know better say, "That portion of the Bible is written for the Jews, and not for us." And so, by degrees, all the precious volume is torn from us. Could the saints in heaven who used to feed on the word of God, return to this lower world, they would be surprised to find that our wise men have questioned almost every prophet and evangelist, psalm and epistle. Every portion of the word is challenged, and the whole of Scripture is assailed, *and that by men who continue in what professes to be a church*. We still hold that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of the Christian, and we intend to hold to it all the more because others fall from their steadfastness.

Alas, *the grand old doctrines of the gospel are also despoiled!* Do you notice nowadays, how all the great truths are being spirited away? Men use the words, but they mock the ear, for they reject the sense, they hand us nuts, we crack them and we find that the worm of modern thought has eaten out the meat. The doctrine of the atonement has in some cases been the chief object of assault. Take that away and what is left? For what purpose is there a Church at all, if the atonement of Jesus Christ is not to be proclaimed by it? Let her die! Why should she live if she has no testimony to bear! If she has no divine infallible message of pardon for the guilty and rest for the weary, let her perish. Listen to the detestable talk of modern ecclesiastics and you will hear them say, "Brethren, your own thoughts are your best guide. The enlightened consciousness of this age will best instruct you. The Bible is our sacred book, but cut out whatever you like, and alter whatever you please. We will yield anything sooner than be in oppo-

sition to the philosophers. Our illiterate predecessors, the fishermen, together with Paul and others, were raw hands at teaching, and very unwisely thrust themselves into conflict with the best thought and culture of the period, so that their teaching was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. But we know a great deal better. We adapt ourselves to the times and entertain great sympathy for honest doubt. We also know on which side our bread is buttered and we are ready to alter and amend to please the fashion of the hour.” Where this is the talk, there remains no longer a church. It is nothing but the name of a church when the doctrines of God’s infallible word are trod in the dust.

A church ceases to be a church of Christ in proportion also, as she *alters the ordinances of God*. These must be practiced as they were delivered. When a church rejects the ancient ordinances of Believers’ Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, her next step is to make new ones. Thus forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meat are brought in. The first is much vaunted as a means for the production of purity, but how much the priests and monks and nuns have done for purity I leave history to record. Believers’ baptism was thrown to the winds and then baptismal regeneration must be brought in. The Lord’s Supper was by far too common and so the unbloody sacrifice of the mass was devised. O church of God, when will you come back to the law and to the testimony, and follow the mind of Christ and the doings of His apostles?

Churches also get wrong when they *neglect discipline*, when they admit into their membership persons who do not even profess to be converted, and I add, when because of pleasing men, they tolerate in their midst ministers whose teaching is corrupt and full of infidelity. There are preachers nowadays, who are studiously undermining the faith once delivered to the saints. The Church should separate itself both from wicked persons and from false teachers. She should no more tolerate evil teachers in her pulpits than you would allow a poisoner in your nursery or a wolf in your sheepfold. God grant that our churches may rise to their duty, however painful it may be. Yes, may they keep close to the faith, for they cannot otherwise be the pillar and ground of the truth. An unholy, unregenerated church can never be the pillar of the truth. If there is a failure in vital godliness, if humble walking with God is neglected, the church cannot long remain a healthy church of God.

Now, brethren, you see how each one of you ought to behave in the church of God. One part of your behavior is that you abide firm as a pillar. Stand fast. Behave yourselves like men. Be strong. You ought to be pillars, especially you who have known the Lord 30 or 40 years. You should stand fast to the truth and I pray that you may. May the church in Scotland, which of old witnessed to the gospel, be kept steadfast. Her Covenanting fathers loved the truth and shed their blood for it. May the Lord help their sons to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. May the churches of our own England also be recovered from their declension and then maintained by the Spirit of God in stern fidelity to the gospel. I cannot finish my sermon better than by commending to you the verse which was sung just now by your 5,000 voices—

*“Should all the forms that men devise
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I’ll call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart.”*

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16, 4
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—122, 900, 486.**

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