

THE CHURCH—CONSERVATIVE AND AGGRESSIVE

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A SERMON
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“The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”
1 Timothy 3:15

YOU will remember it was announced last Sunday that a collection would be made today in behalf of our institution for training young men for the ministry. It has been thought desirable that I should state a few particulars relative to the institution. Some of them will appear in the course of the sermon.

It may suffice for me to say now, that some five or six years ago one of the young men of the church gave promise of being a successful minister if he could but have a good education. With the assistance of a friend in the church, I undertook to take him under my charge, put him under a suitable tutor, and train him for the ministry.

So successful was that work, that I was induced to take another, and another, and another. Hitherto, I have been myself committee, secretary, treasurer, and subscriber. I have not, except in one or two instances, even mentioned the matter to any one, but have been content to spare everything that I could out of my own income, besides that which is necessary for the support of my household, in order to educate any young men who came in my way that they might become ministers of the cross of Christ.

There are now seven settled out, all of whom have been eminently successful. They are not men probably who will become great or brilliant, but they have been good and useful preachers. I think there are not other seven in the whole Baptist denomination who have had so many converts during the years that they have been settled.

They have been the means most of them in the hands of God of adding a very considerable number every year to the churches where they have settled, and those are churches not in provincial towns but in villages. I have therefore been led still further to increase my number, and I think I have now about sixteen young men wholly to support and maintain.

Besides these, there is a very considerable number who receive their education in the evening, though they still remain in their own callings. With the enlarged sphere we now occupy as a church, I have proposed so to enlarge my scheme that all the members of this church and congregation who happen to be deficient in the plain rudiments of knowledge, can get an education—a common English education for themselves.

Then, if they display any ability for speaking—without giving up their daily avocations—they shall have classes provided for higher branches of instruction. But should they feel that God has called them to the ministry, I am then prepared, after the use of my own judgment and the judgment of my friends, as to whether they are fit persons, to give them two years' special tutorship, that they may go forth to the work of the cross, thoroughly trained so far as we can effect it in so short a time. I know I am called to this work, and I have had some most singular interpositions of Providence in providing funds for it hitherto.

At the day of judgment the world shall know that there has never lived a man upon the face of the earth who has less deserved the calumny of seeking to enrich himself than I have. I shall say no more upon that. Let the world scandalize me if it will. I want the money today, not for myself in any respect. I give my services and my work freely, and of my own income all that I can spare.

I only want my friends who feel interested in this work to assist me that we may provide men who shall preach the Gospel to multitudes who are longing to hear it fully and faithfully proclaimed. Permit

me to say there was held in Westminster Abbey last Thursday a grand choral festival, at which there were singers from the various choirs of London—St. Paul, the Abbey, the Temple, and the Foundling, and some from Windsor. Several ecclesiastical dignitaries graced the assembly.

Anthem and cantatas, and I know not what else, were performed on a most classic scale. The sermon was preached by a Provost of some college in which the claims of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts were eloquently advocated, and the whole collection amounted to seventy pounds—“A very poor result for so sublime a service,” said the *Times* report.

Last Friday evening there was held a little meeting in one of the rooms here of about forty or fifty of the seat holders in this congregation. There were no bishops present. There were only a few street preachers and my poor students. They addressed that little meeting, and though no collection was called for or even contemplated, those friends spontaneously subscribed one hundred and eighty pounds as an earnest of what they were sure the congregation would give to this work today.

I think this just shows that when people have a mind for Christ’s cause, they do not need to have the State to support their religion, but can support it out of the generosity of loving hearts without the elaborate parade of gorgeous rituals.

I shall now invite your attention to the subject of this morning’s discourse, which has a very strong bearing upon this point.

“The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”—1 Timothy 3:15

The word “church” has suffered very much from the hands of men. Strangely, but frequently, has it been used to designate a mass of bricks and mortar. *Ecclesia*, a chosen assembly, has actually by the natural debasement of the tongue of priests, come down to mean a building. By no possible construction can it mean any such a thing. A more debasing use of a divine word than that can scarcely be found.

The word “church” has also been used by many to signify the clergy. A young man is to enter the church—that is, he is to take holy orders, to become a preacher, and an authorized dispenser of the sacraments, as they are called. He is to aspire after an incumbency and is to be recognized as an ordained minister of the Word of God.

Now, the word “church” in Scripture means nothing like that. Such a use of terms is but confusion. It is taking God’s words, mauling and destroying their sense, and then using them for our own purpose. The “church of Christ” according to the Scripture, is an assembly of faithful men. *Ecclesia* originally signified assembly—not a mob, but an assembly of persons who were called together on account of their special right to meet for the discussion of certain subjects. They were a called-out assembly.

The “church of God” itself, in its full sense, is a company of persons called out by the Holy Spirit from among the rest of mankind, banded together for the holy purpose of the defense and the propagation of the truth. If there are but three or four, yet if they be so banded together in the fear of God, they are to all intents and purposes a church. And if they should happen to number thousands, they are no more a church on account of their numbers—a church being a company of faithful men.

To our minds, the Scripture seems very explicit as to how this church should be ordered. We believe that every church member should have equal rights and privileges. That there is no power in church officers to execute anything unless they have the full authorization of the members of the church. We believe, however, that the church should choose its pastor, and having chosen him, they should love him and respect him for his work’s sake.

That with him should be associated the deacons of the church to take the oversight of pecuniary matters, and the elders of the church to assist in all the works of the pastorate in the fear of God, being overseers of the flock. Such a church we believe to be Scripturally ordered, and if it abide in the faith—rooted, grounded, and settled—such a church may expect the benediction of heaven, and so it shall become the pillar and ground of the truth.

But what is intended in our text by saying that the church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth? When you go outside this building you may observe the use of a pillar. And that part of it which forms a basement upon which the circular stone rests, exactly answers to what the apostle means by the ground of the truth.

It is the business of the church, of course, to uphold the truth in its deep foundations, to conserve and preserve it intact—thus it is the ground. To lift it up and bear it aloft in beauty and in all its fair proportions, in this the church, of course, is the pillar of the truth. Some commentators say that as pillars were used of old to bear inscriptions, as upon pillars even the brazen decrees of the Roman Senate were exhibited to the people, so the church of Christ is intended to be a pillar bearing the inscription of the truth, so that it not only maintains it, and upholds it, but sets it forth.

At any rate, I think you will perceive in a moment that the simple meaning of my text is just this—it is the business of the church of God to maintain, to propagate, to uphold, to spread, and to defend the truth as it is in Jesus—wherever that church may be placed.

I shall use the text, this morning, in four ways. First, *to correct certain mistakes*. Secondly, *to convince judgments of the excellency of God's ordinance in this matter*. Thirdly, *to awake reflections upon the subject*. And fourthly, *to suggest some ways of making this church, and every church, the pillar and ground of the truth*.

I. First, then, my brethren, LET US CORRECT SOME FEW MISTAKES.

We are all deeply impressed with the importance of maintaining the doctrines of the Gospel, and the truths of Christ, pure and simple as we find them in the New Testament. There are brethren who, in their extreme anxiety to accomplish this end, suggest methods which are not warranted by the text. For the rule here laid down is that the church is itself to maintain and to be the guardian of the truth.

But these brethren, in their great anxiety to maintain it, have suggested other ways. One of the first has been the drawing up of a creed. The articles of the faith shall be written out clearly and unmistakably. At a general synod every word of these articles shall be argued—any discrepancy shall be removed—and the articles shall, as nearly as possible, express the orthodox creed. It is done.

The ministers assembled go home, and say that creed will be the pillar and ground of the truth. As long as ever the name of the Westminster Assembly Confession shall be known, the truth will be safe. As long as the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England shall stand, that church must be free from error.

Ah, how signally they have failed! Especially let us take the glaring instance of the Church of England. The articles of the Church of England are Calvinistic. No person who is not deluded, or dishonest, can read them without seeing that the pen was dipped in Geneva ink which wrote those articles.

And yet how many Church of England clergy are as wide from anything like Calvinism, as the wildest Pelagian could be supposed to be. There are, it is true, and God be glorified for it, many brethren who do believe these articles and preach them faithfully too. We love them, and honor them for the truth's sake. But is there one in ten, nay, is there one in twenty who really receives those articles in their pure and simple meaning?

If this were all, it were not so bad, but men have had the impudence to subscribe to those articles of the Church, when they have not believed a single one of them—and have been infidels. You have had of late, and it is not necessary for me to allude to the matter, a glaring proof that no articles whatever can conserve and maintain the truth, for men will sign them when they do not believe a word they set forth.

We have been led to think we have grown a little wiser and we have tried to maintain the truth by our trust deeds. Our friends have, as they thought, put the truth in the trust deeds. And it is enacted that if a minister does not preach the doctrines, the trustees shall see that he is dismissed. Ah, a very poor pillar and ground of truth this is.

Our strict Baptist brethren—I am not now about to enter into the question whether they are right or wrong, but supposing they are right for the moment—they have been exceedingly wise in putting the

strict Baptist clause into their trust deed. I am not now about to dispute the verdicts of the judges, but their clauses have been broken, and their bands have been like green withes.

I know a chapel now in Norfolk, which has on the forefront over the door, these words printed in stone, “For the strict Baptists forever.” Really there is something fine and heroic in that—but equally ridiculous and absurd. The place will not be for the strict Baptists forever, nor will any trust deed ever be so written but that you may drive a coach and horses through, just as surely as you can through an Act of Parliament. That never was and never will be the way to maintain the truth. Let it be done if you like, but do not imagine that your trust deed is a pillar and ground of the truth.

We have fallen into a similar mistake with regard to the diffusion of the truth. In order to spread the doctrines of the Gospel, we have formed societies. There are missionary societies appended to every denomination. These societies are to be pillars and grounds of the truth, not so much in the maintenance of the truth as in the spreading of it.

To become a member of a missionary society, you have only to subscribe to it. If you were a very infidel and subscribed, you would become a member. Nothing whatever is required of you, but that you should simply give a money qualification, and you become a member of that society.

We have been wondering why our societies have not greater success. I believe the reason is because there is not a single word in the Book of God about anything of the kind. The church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth—not a society. The church of God never ought to have delegated to any society whatever, a work which it behooved her to have done herself.

Instead of sending our subscriptions to associations, we ought to have picked our own men out of our own midst, and found the means to send them forth to preach the truth as it is in Jesus, ourselves. We have given up the work of the education of our young men to our colleges. I will not say they have done it ill. But I do dare say they have not done it well.

The reason, I think, has been because there is nothing in the Word of God that could warrant their accepting the trust. The church of God, not a college, is the pillar and ground of the truth. Every church should, itself, see to the education of its own young men. It should look out for its own evangelists—should train its own soldiers and send them forth to the fight.

The church of God will never see things done rightly, if shirking her own responsibility, she try to cast it upon other men. Yea, if those men could be the best of men, if they were angelic, if you could find superhuman beings—yet God never called them to the work and He will not therefore honor them in it. The church, the church, the church of God, the assembly of believers is, according to God’s Word, to hold forth His truth, and to be the pillar and ground of the truth.

Many have thought, however, that the truth would be quite safe in the hands of ministers. If we could not leave its preaching to the society, at least let the minister, so intimately connected with the church, become the pillar and ground of the truth. It is a melancholy fact that heresy never began with the people yet—but with the minister.

And I speak what I do know—the hearts of the people of our denomination are sounder in the truth than the hearts of the preachers. There is not a denomination under heaven which has a sincerer love to all Calvinistic doctrines than our own. Yet how many of our ministers there are who, while they do not preach against them, and I hope secretly believe them, are, nevertheless silent upon the subject. They keep it back, perhaps imagining it would not be profitable to their hearers.

But there is scarcely a church in London in which there are not men and women grumbling, groaning, and murmuring, because the full truth is not preached to them and they do not hear the Word by which alone they live. There are churches in London where the truth is fully preached, blessed be God, and there you will find none who are groaning because they are famished.

But there is not a church of the other sort in which there are not many disaffected persons, who are thoroughly ready to come out at any moment, and leave their minister if he will not give them the whole truth, instead of keeping part of it back. You must not trust the ministry, brethren. If you rely upon us, you will rely upon broken reeds.

However honest we may be, yet we have not to deal so much with the world, and with its cares, and troubles as you. And I think your dealing with the world casts you back very often upon the old, solid realities, because in the hard daily struggle which you have to carry on, you need to have the finest of the wheat to sustain your strength.

Let us uplift, this morning, as a great truth which the church has too much forgotten, the words of the text, “The church of the living God is the pillar and ground to maintain the truth.” Not trust deeds, nor church articles. And the church of the living God is the pillar to set forth and proclaim the truth. Not the ministry, not societies, not authors, not any set of men to whom it can be delegated, but the church of God—and the church of God alone.

Now do not misunderstand me. I would not say a single word against any society for the spread of God’s truth. But I must repeat yet again, that all societies of that sort spring from an irregular and unscriptural position of the church. THE church, if she were in her right state, would do the whole of the work herself.

The city missionary would be a member of the church, sent out and supported by the church itself. The missionary to foreign lands would have the church at his back, to whom he would look for support both in prayers and in subscriptions. Every work would be performed—not through this secretary or that—but through the church itself.

This, I believe, is the principle which will work a radical cure in all the errors that have been made, and bring back the state and system of evangelization into a proper and healthy condition. I may be wrong, but this has deeply laid upon my soul, and I shall never be satisfied till I see in this church an organization so complete that it does not need a supplement—able to do every good work, and fulfill every needful office of itself, and by itself—welcoming ever the cooperation of others, but never needing to depend upon a society for the accomplishment of any purpose to which the Lord God has been pleased to call it.

II. I shall now pass on to my second point. Let us note THE WISDOM OF GOD IN MAKING THIS MATTER SO—presuming, of course, that we have thus far rightly interpreted the will of God concerning us.

The church of God in Scripture is called a mother. What is a mother’s business? What is a mother’s duty? A mother’s duty is to feed her own child from her own bosom. She loses a joy herself, and inflicts a serious injury upon her offspring when, if having the ability, she lacks the affection which would constrain her to support her own child from the fountains which God Himself has opened.

And as the church of Christ is a mother, she shall lack the greatest joy, and lose the sweetest privilege, unless she herself train her own children, and gives them the unadulterated milk of the Word. She has no right to put her children out to nurse. How shall they love her? What affection shall they bear towards her? No, let her do as she should, and keep her children at home, and supply them herself.

It is a mother’s business, as that child grows up, to train and teach it. Let her teach it the first letters of the alphabet. Let it gather its first knowledge of Christ from a mother’s lips. Who so fit to teach as she that brought it forth? None can teach so sweetly and none so effectually as she. Let her not give up the training of her child to another.

And why should we, the church of Christ, give up our children when we first taught them to speak in Christ’s name, to be trained and to be taught by others? No, by every motherly feeling that remains within the bosom of Christ’s church, let us see her children brought up at her own knees, dandled there in her own lap, and not give up the work of training her sons and daughters to others.

And who so fit as the mother of the family to inspire her son with holy ardor when at last he goes forward to the battle of life? Who shall give him the affectionate advice? Who shall give him the cheering word which shall sustain him in the hour of difficulty, so well as a mother whom he loves?

And let the church of God, when her young men go forth to her battles, put her hand upon their shoulders and say, “Be strong, young man, be strong. Dishonor not the mother that bare you, but go

forth, and like the son of a Spartan mother, return not but in glory. Go forth to conquer or to die. Come back on your shield, or with it—a hero or a martyr.”

Who can speak the words so well, and sing at home so powerfully, as the mother to her son, or the church to her child? The church, then, has no right to delegate to another her own work. Let her bring forth her own children. Let her give them nourishment. Let her train them up. Let her send them forth to do the Master’s work.

But then, my brethren, the church is often compared to a city. Christians are the citizens. Who so fit to fight the battles of a country as the countrymen themselves? Shall we give up to a tribe of mercenaries the defense of this stalwart island? Shall we hire foreigners from afar, and say to them, “Dash the invader from our own shores”?

No, my brethren, Britain’s true hearts would wake up, and Britain’s strong arms would wield the weapon, if invasion should ever take place. The liberties of a country are not safe with an army, but with the citizens themselves. We must be our own defenders if the land is to be preserved. No body of troops more fit than those who fight for their own children, their own wives, their own hearths, and the altars of their own land.

Shall we, then, the church of God, seek out others besides our own citizens? Shall we give the command of our armies to those who belong not to us? Shall we send our sons and daughters out to be enrolled in other armies? No. In the name of the living God, let the church of Christ train her own citizens for the battle of Christ. Let her bring up her own young warriors for the defense and maintenance of the truth. Besides, who is there who will naturally care for this matter like the church?

My dear brethren, if I were the minister of a society, I would be in a miserable plight. What would the society care for me? What would they care about what I did if there could be but a smart report sent in at the end of the year to be read at the public meeting, amid the clapping of hands, and so forth? The secretary would smile upon me, but what would they care for me?

What prayers should I have from the subscribers? How should I be likely to be carried on the heart of the secretary? Good man, he has twenty other agents to think of—how should he be thinking of me? But I am a minister of a church, and there is not one member of this church but what prays for me. I know that as often as you bow your knee at the family altar, you mention my name as you mention the name of your son and your daughter.

Many a proof have I had from you that I am as much loved by you as if I were your brother according to the flesh. Your prayers make me strong. Your sympathies make me blest. They cheer my heart and bear me up amidst the waves of slander. And who shall care for anything when God and the church are with him?

So, then, if it be so with a minister, it must be very much more so with a missionary in the foreign land. “Why,” says he, “who will pray for me? The Missionary Society has sent me out. The secretary knows about me. He reads my letters when I send them to him. They are put in the magazine.”

But suppose some young man from these galleries was sent out to preach the Word—why we should all notice him. When the letter came from John So and So at Canton, and we read it at the prayer meeting, how should we pray for him! We should feel he was one of ourselves. And when we made the collection for his support, we should give far more liberally than for another whom we never saw, who had no connection with us and—however good the man might be—was not a personal friend of ours.

The church of God can naturally care for the state of her own ministers and her own missionaries—and a minister, a missionary, cannot hope to be greatly blest till they are under the church—and not under a society.

Just so with the young men for the ministry. When they go to college, they do not, I suppose, expect many people to care about them there. But with regard to those we have in our midst, why there is nothing that any of you would not cheerfully do for them. As soon as there is a new face seen among them, some of the elders of the church are sure to get him into their houses—are sure to speak kindly with him till I fall into another difficulty.

Sometimes my friends take them away too much, are too kind to them, get them away from their studies in order to be with them—when they ought rather to be sticking fast by their books. I find no lack of sympathy, and I know the men are happier, and I believe they have greater motives to be holy, because they are more watched, more observed by the members of the church.

Anything which they do ill would reflect discredit upon the whole of us, and when they do that which is right and honorable, there is a sort of *esprit de corps* which makes them long to distinguish themselves—that the whole church may share in the honor of their connection.

I am persuaded that this is a right principle, and I shall not cease to advocate it, unless I find arguments by which it can be disproved. And after all, my brethren and sisters, who should care for the cause of Christ like the church? Oh, what reason you and I have for loving Christ's cause! Dear have been the places where we have worshipped to some of us, for there we first found a Savior.

Some of you, not long ago, were the servants of sin and Satan—you were at a distance from God—and you loved that distance well. Could we not cast our eyes around, and remember how some of you were drunkards, and swearers, and such like? But you are washed, you are sanctified. And now you rejoice in Him that loved you, for He has washed you in His own blood. Now you can sing of pardoning grace and dying love.

Who, like you, my brethren, to propagate the Gospel? Who makes such preachers as these Pauls, who preach the faith which they once destroyed? Who will stand so well at the back of every agent for Christ, as those who have themselves tasted, and felt, and handled the good Word of Life? Truly the Word of God is safe in the hands of the church, when the church lives near to God.

When you are sensible of your gratitude to Christ, when you are conscious of your obligations to eternal and sovereign mercy, then it is that you will be pillars of the truth, and you will maintain and uphold it, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, not hesitating to support those who endeavor to do it in your names.

Thus the church is made the salt of the earth, and the light of the world—irrespective of any society whatever—"The church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth."

III. Thirdly, this topic AWAKENS REFLECTION.

"Well," says one, "I am afraid it would not work." That is it, my brethren, that is just the hitch in the whole matter—it would not work. "We have got a machinery," said a brother to me once, "we have got a machinery in our church which will go on just as well, whatever the characters of the members may be."

"Then," I said to him, "depend upon it, yours is not that which God has ordained." For it seems to me that the most Scriptural system of church government is that which requires the most prayer, the most faith, and the most piety to keep it going. The church of God was never meant to be an automaton. If it were, the wheels would all act of themselves.

The church was meant to be a living thing, a living person, and as the person cannot be supported if life be absent, or if food be kept back, or if breath be suspended—so should it be with the church. There should be certain solemn necessities without which she ceases to be a church—certain things which she must have and without which she cannot do her work. I am glad that this difficulty is suggested at all, for it seems to me that if there were not this difficulty, it would not be God's plan.

"Well," says one, "if you believe the church is to do all this work, then the churches cannot yet be what they should!" I am glad you draw that inference, my brethren, I am glad you do. "Why," says one, "our churches could not support a missionary, some of them hardly support their minister." Just so, brethren, but that is just because they are in a wrong state.

There is hardly a church anywhere, but what if the Spirit of God were poured upon it, might do ten times as much for Christ as it is now doing. The fact is there may be some few churches that are walking in the right road, but they are very few indeed, and the objection which you bring ought to be an objection against the state of the church, and not against the plan itself—for it is possible for the churches to maintain missionaries and minister—if they like to do it.

“Well,” says one, “but a church must be very watchful to find out young men for the ministry.” Just so, I am glad you say that, for a church ought to be very watchful. “But the minister must have a good deal to do,” say you. Just so, and he ought to have a great deal to do.

What is the use of a lazy minister? He is no good either to the world, to the church, or to himself. He is a dishonor to the noblest profession that can be bestowed upon the sons of men. Let him have plenty to do, it will keep him out of mischief, and it would do him good. Too much to do may be an evil, but too little to do is a curse. Let him have much to do.

“But” says another, “the minister ought to be a holy man, because if the young persons who associate with him learn ill manners, what then?” Just so, I am glad you say that. And so he should be a holy man. Amongst the Swiss, the Vaudois, and the Waldenses, every minister trains one young man. Those pastors or shepherds always have a younger brother to travel with them wherever they go.

He watches the elder pastor, observes his ways, listens to his holy prayers, is inspired with his spirit, learns to tread the craggy mountains with him, learns to defy the enemy through the courage which he sees in his elder brother. He learns lessons of wisdom which are not to be learnt from books, lessons of practical pastoral training which are not to be gathered from the best professors of the best colleges in the world.

And thus the Swiss have ever maintained a succession of men, perhaps not brilliant, but always useful—perhaps not popular, but always sound and valiant in their defense of the truth. And should it not be so with the church? If to carry it out it need a laborious ministry, so much the better. If it need a holy and wise ministry, so much the better. No other man should be a minister at all. If it need a watchful church, and a prayerful church, and a church which consecrates liberally of its substance to the Lord, I say so much the better—for so ought every church to be.

The only question is, are we in the right state, now, to accomplish all the Lord’s purposes? If we be not, let us make it a matter of prayer that we may be brought into this state—for we are never healthy unless we are prepared to do whatever God calls us to do. We will be losing in our own spiritual enjoyment if we fail to have strength to carry out all the work which the Lord imposes upon us.

The Lord never gives us more to do than we can do. We had the work of building this place, and many thought we could not do it—at last we thought we could—and we did it. If we had fifty more such places to build, and the Lord laid it to our heart to build them, we could do it if we were in a right state. Our only want of power is want of grace.

Give the church, grace, and she does not need a new banker. Give her grace, she does not need then to have new ministers. Give her more grace, she will not want the world’s pitiful gold to endow her and make her rich. Give her grace, and you have given her all she wants. In that one word, you shall have successful ministers, you shall have laborious agencies, you shall have benevolence pouring out its floods, and piety consecrating all its activities for Christ.

IV. Now I shall come to my last point. The last point is BY WAY OF SUGGESTION.

What can we do practically to carry out this plan? Brethren, before I answer that question, let me say there are some things we must take care of or else we cannot carry it out at all. We must watch lest the church be adulterated by additions which are not an increase to her strength. We must be very careful that no thought of strife, no symptom of envy, no feeling of jealousy creep in.

Hitherto you have been as one man—undivided and indivisible. This is absolutely necessary in the church for the carrying out of any of her purposes. Divided we should utterly fail. I remember a somewhat ludicrous incident which occurred to a church in which there were great quarreling and bickerings.

The minister and the deacons, and his people, were all at arm’s length and daggers drawn. It was determined at last that the matter should come to a settlement, and it was by mutual consent given up to the judgment of a good Christian farmer, who lived in the neighborhood. He was to hear the case, and write an answer to be read at the next church meeting.

Our friend, the farmer, sat down to write his letter—at the same time he had a letter from a steward or tenant asking advice about his farm—and by a mistake, or rather by a blessed Providence as God would have it, he put the wrong letters into the envelopes, so that the letter which was intended for the church went to the steward, and that which was intended for the steward went to the church.

At the church meeting, when they were all assembled, this letter was read to the church. It ran thus—“Dear friend, mind you see to the hedges well. Keep them up as best you can, and take special care of the old black bull.” Now that was a most extraordinary letter to write to a church. It had been sent by mistake, but the minister thinking it was a *bona fide* piece of advice, said he could not understand it.

Some brother got up and said it was plain enough—it was meant that they must be very watchful as to whom they should receive into the church. They must keep their hedges up, and see there were no gaps. “And” said he, “by the ‘old black bull’ I have no doubt he means that spirit of Satan that would get in and trouble and divide us.”

So understanding it in that sense, they made up their differences, repaired their hedges, and were careful of “the old black bull.” Every church must do the same, for before we can do anything for Christ, we must first be right at home. We must have peace within our borders. We must be filled with the finest wheat, or else He will not send forth His Word, and make it to run very swiftly. This, I hope, will be well seen to.

What, then, are *we* to do? If the church is to do all this, brethren and sisters, what are you and I to do? As for *me*, I must take heed unto myself. I am to be the leader of this people, constantly ministering to them in the Word of Life. I must take care that my dedication of myself, and all I have to my Lord, be so perfectly complete that I would not have an objection to them knowing what I do with all I have. I must so live that they can see right through me that I desire to serve my Master and serve Him alone.

Then one and all of you must say, “What must I do?” Let each man finding his own proper niche, each seaman on board the vessel finding which rope he can best handle, or what part of the tackling he best understands, take his place. Then, come rocking tempests, let the ship reel. She is safe, for she is in the hand of God and in the hand of faithful men, who know how to manage her right well.

The battle is to be fought, brethren. It is to be fought by Christ’s army, not by hirelings. What are you and I to do? I must stand at the front of the line, and wave my sword, and say, “Come on, comrades!” And you, with steady step advancing, with firm bold front maintaining every inch of the ground you take, and at last—rushing in one tremendous army straightway to the thick of the fight—you must carry everything before you, and win the crown for King Jesus.

England expects every man to do his duty, but the church of God expects it more, and must and shall have it. By Him who shall judge the quick and the dead, by Him who bought you with His blood, I adjure you, Christian men and women, see to it that you stand each of you in your place. Do, each of you, your own appointed work. And so shall Christ’s kingdom come, and His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

I think I hear a little murmuring going round the gallery, and especially stopping at some few of the pews. I will not indicate the brethren. They are saying, “I do not belong to the church—what am I to do?” My brethren, the first thing you ought to do is to join the church. You say you love the Lord Jesus Christ. Very well. If you neglect one duty, that does not excuse you from another.

You are living in a state of sin, as a Christian man, if you omit the duty of joining yourself with the people of God. May I ask you, when the church goes to the fight, will you tarry at home? “No,” say you, “I will follow with you. I will do my work. I will go as one of the camp-followers.” Yes, but somehow or other, those camp-followers are in a very unsatisfactory state, because they are not under the discipline of the officers. And though some of them can fight well, a sort of guerilla warfare, yet we would be much stronger if we could have them in the ranks.

Brethren, don’t you think sometimes that the world may imagine that you mean to hold hard till you see which will win? Had you not better cast in your lot with us while the battle rages? Besides, what does the Master say?—“He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess.” And what does He say

to those who do not confess? “He that denieth me before men, him shall be denied of my Father which is in heaven.” You do not wish for that, surely.

Enlist, then. Put on your Lord’s regimentals. True, you can fight His battle without them, but methinks you will be more in the path of obedience, and the path of safety, if you put on the garments of Christ, and the garments of His salvation. Come! Whosoever is on the Lord’s side, let him join with the Lord’s hosts.

If you be not, stand back and do not dare to come. But if you be, the standard is lifted up, the trumpets sound. Come, comrades! who is for Christ? Soldiers, who is for the Lord God Omnipotent? Unfurl the standard afresh today. JEHOVAH-Nissi, the Lord is our banner, and who will stand back? Let us enroll ourselves beneath Him and say, “O Lord, go forth with our armies, and grant success, for the battle is great, and without You we shall utterly fail, but with You we shall surely get the victory.”

I have preached, as you will perceive, then, to the church only. I have said nothing to the unconverted. We cannot do twenty things at a time. But I would say this word before I sit down. Remember, my dear hearers, if you are not numbered with the friends of Christ, you are numbered with His enemies. Will you remember that I do not mean, if you are not numbered with the visible church—I mean this—if you do not love and serve Christ.

He that is not with Him is against Him—he who gathers not with Him, scatters abroad. You say you take neither side—it is impossible—you must be on one side or the other. Clear the field! There is no room here except for the two armies. Whosoever is not with Christ is with Satan, and shall surely be trod down when the enemies of God are trodden like straw for the dunghill.

Sinner, be you aware of this—that God is against you—and the hosts of God are against you. The Lord give you repentance! The Lord give you faith! And come you to the Captain of salvation and ask Him to have mercy on you! Run down the old flag! Thank God it is not nailed to the mast! Let the black flag come down, and let the blood-red flag run up!

Spirit of God, constrain them to change masters! May they no more serve the black prince, Satan, but serve under His banner whose service is perfect freedom, and whose reward is everlasting life!

May the Lord bless each one of you, for Christ’s sake!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.