**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 01 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE CHURCH THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

*1 Timothy 3:15*

THIS IS A TEXT. IT IS NOT A STATEMENT. IT MAKES NO DEFINITE declaration. It is, nevertheless, full of light and suggestiveness. The words constitute an arresting figure of speech, setting forth inclusively the function of the Christian Church in the world. Paul was writing to Timothy concerning his responsibilities in the city of Ephesus. He had exhorted Timothy to tarry there for a very definite purpose. This purpose is found in the opening of the letter in these words: "As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine, neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, the which minister questionings rather than a dispensation of God which is in faith."

The passage from which the text is taken contains Paul's statement of the reason of his writing yet more particularly: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

Let us glance at that paragraph in reverse order. It concludes with a declaration of the whole content of Christian truth: "Great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

The mystery of godliness is the truth of which the Church is the pillar and the ground.

I have said that this is an arresting figure. Let us, first, then, briefly but carefully consider the figure in itself, in order that we may proceed to examine the function of the Church as it is set forth by the figure.

It may be that when Paul wrote these words, he was looking out on the monuments of some city. It is almost certain that when Timothy read it, it would be easy for him to look out on Ephesus. Here and there in the city in the day of its wealth, great memorial columns were to be seen. Let us have the structure clearly in mind. The word "pillar" describes an elevated column, sometimes one solid block of masonry, as for instance, Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment; very often one column built of many parts, of different stones or bricks. The idea is that of an upright column giving elevation.

The word "ground" simply refers to that on which the column rests - what an architect would probably describe as the plinth. It may be well to say that the foundation is never the final thing in a building. The Church is not built on a rock foundation, in spite of all our hymns and our expositions. The Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, and that foundation is based on rock, which is the eternal underlying strength. Paul was dealing here with the foundation, and not with that on which the foundation rests. Such is the structure.

Given any such structure, what is its purpose? It is always the instrument by which some object or truth is elevated in order that it may be clearly seen, in order that the attention of men may be drawn to it. Sometimes what is to be seen is a statue, as, for instance, in Trafalgar Square, where the great column is the pillar and the plinth, elevating Nelson.

Sometimes it is not the statue of a person that is to be seen, but a light. Those of you who have passed along our southern shores in the dark and seen the flashing light of Eddystone will have an illustration. The building is a pillar, erected on a foundation, resting finally on the rock; but the purpose of elevation is the flashing of a light. Sometimes both ideas are combined. Those who have sailed up the Hudson into New York City have looked at the Statue of Liberty facing out toward the ocean. It was some very unkind Englishman who said that Liberty had turned its back on America and was looking homeward again. As you looked at that statue, two things arrested your attention. First, the figure of Liberty; and when the night came, lo, from the brow flashed an electric light. There we have the two things, the elevation of a person, the flashing of a light. Sometimes the purpose is the proclamation of a truth, a historic truth, as in the weird and wonderful Cleopatra's Needle to which I have already made reference, whereupon is written the history of ancient kings and dynasties and deeds of prowess. The idea is always that of the elevation of a person, of a light, of a truth, that these things may be seen.

Mark, then, I pray you, still thinking of the structure in all simplicity, the interrelationship. First, the pillar and the ground are of no value apart from what they reveal. Second, the statue, the light, the word, need the pillar, the ground, in order that they may be seen. A column built for a statue is a laughingstock if the statue is not placed on it, and seen. When Eddystone ceases to flash its light across the waters for the sake of mariners it may be destroyed. When the writing of the pillar is obliterated, though out of sentiment we may still keep it there, it will have no real value. But it is also true that the statue cannot be seen unless it be elevated. Place it on the level, and only a few can see it. It must be lifted up, if it is to utter its message. The light on the ground flings no radiance to the distance, and the mariner will not be helped. It must be elevated, if the light is to be seen. The word simply written is of no value. It must be proclaimed, published.

Such is the figure in itself, and I am inclined to think that this simple and childlike examination of the figure has already preached the sermon. "The Church of the Living God, which is the pillar and the ground of the truth." Immediately, we see how the figure illustrates, in consonance with other Scriptures, one phase of the function of the Church.

The first mention of the Church in the New Testament is found in those inclusive words of Jesus, so brief and yet so full of meaning, spoken at Caesarea Philippi: "I will build My Church." A structure which the Lord Himself builds is suggested. When, later on, Paul came to write of the Church he made use of the same figure: "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Chief Corner Stone." Here he speaks of that structure, as the pillar and the ground of the truth. The Church is the medium by which the truth is to be proclaimed, to be elevated to a height that men may see it, to be published to the city, to the nation, to the world at large. In the Christian Faith we have centrally a Person, resultantly a Light, finally a Word. If the Person is to be seen He must be lifted up; if the light is to flash across the darkness it must have height; if the word is to be proclaimed it must have an instrument for its proclamation; and the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth; its one business is to reveal the Person, to flash the light, to proclaim the word.

Passing from the figure to the fact, mark the interrelation between these matters. The Church of God apart from the Person of Christ is a useless structure. However ornate it may be in its organization, however perfect in all its arrangements, however rich and increased with goods, if the Church is not revealing the Person, lifting Him to the height where all men can see Him, then the Church becomes an impertinence and a sham, a blasphemy and a fraud, and the sooner the world is rid of it, the better. The Church, apart from the shining of a light, is a lamp stand, dark, valueless, effete. The Church that fails to proclaim the Word is a sound, a voice without articulation, sounding brass and a clanging cymbal; of no value.

With all reverence, let me state the other side, which is to my own heart full of grave solemnity. That supernal Person, apart from the Church, is hidden. Jesus Christ has no means of showing Himself save through His Church. The light that flashes from His eyes cannot be seen save as it beams and shines and burns and flashes and flames from the eyes of His people. The tenderness and strength of His teaching can be felt only as the Church becomes the instrument through which He speaks to humanity to direct, instruct, and bless it. The great central Person is hidden unless the Church reveals Him. The Light that lighteth every man, and which came into the world, and was focused, centralized for a brief period in a Person, has passed out of human sight, and is no longer shining save through the Church. The Word of God today has no voice apart from the Christian Church.

Now, from these more general statements let us come to particular considerations. The moment we do so it is necessary that we remember that, finally, the figure must be interpreted by the fact. A fact is always greater than the figure that represents it. We may take it as an axiom that whenever we have a figure it is because a fact is so fine that there is no apprehending it apart from the figure. Consequently, the figure presently must vanish away in the presence of the fact.

In this case it is pre-eminently so. This is seen in Paul's use of the figure. He had already defined what is the pillar and the ground of the Truth by two words: "House" and "Church." In each case, moreover, he had qualified his definition: "The House of God," "the Church of the living God."

Paul first called it "The House of God." This word "House" means, first, a dwelling place; then, a family; then, a householder; and, finally, a dynasty; the word is employed in all these senses in the New Testament. It is God's dwelling place, family, household, and Kingdom. That is the pillar and ground of the Truth. Paul also called it the Church of the living God. The Church is the theocracy, the whole company of souls governed by God; and, consequently, it is God's governing body in the midst of human history, that through which He makes known His will, enunciates His law, reveals His purpose, communicates His life, marches ever onward toward the ultimate goal of His determined purpose. Paul, in his last letter concerning the Church, the letter to the Colossians, speaks of a mystery, the Church; and, a few sentences later, refers to "the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory"; and yet a few sentences later, speaks of "the mystery which is Christ." To reverse the order. First, there is the unfathomable and infinite mystery of Christ Himself, God manifest in the flesh, the One in Whom all the fulness of Godhead dwelt corporeally. Then follows the mystery of Christ formed in the heart of individual souls. Multiply the number of such units and we have the mystery of the Church; and that is the pillar and ground of the truth. The Person can be seen only through that company of men and women; the light can flash only through them; the Word of God can be proclaimed only through them. Their one responsibility in the world, then - individually and in their corporate capacity - is the revelation of the Person, the shining of the Light, the proclamation of the Word. When we pass into our New Testament and breathe its rare and spacious atmosphere, the trivialities that divide us perish, and we gain the sense of God's great Church of all souls that are born anew, that share the Life Divine, in whom Christ is formed, the very hope of glory; upon that multitude of every tongue and kindred and nation rests one supreme responsibility; that Church of the Living God is the pillar and the ground of the Truth.

How is the Church to fulfil that responsibility? The Church is to fulfil the responsibility of revealing a Person, flashing a light, proclaiming a word, by Incarnation, and by proclamation. In considering these we must remember the Divine order: that the whole Church is called to the ministry; and that within the Church there is a ministry, the business of which is to perfect the whole Church that it may fulfil its ministry.

First, the Church of God is to fulfil its obligation by Incarnation. In one of the very last conversations I had with D. L. Moody, in his own beautiful home in the Connecticut Valley, we were talking of the Bible, of its importance in the life of the nation, and in the life of the world; and with that short, sharp, quick manner in which he often said great things, he said this: "Never forget that the Christian man is the world's Bible, and in the majority of cases a Revised Version is needed." I am not proposing now to discuss the second part of his declaration. I am afraid it is too true, but I leave it. I am interested in the first part of his declaration. The Christian man is the world's Bible. How is this nation of ours to know this Bible? The printing of it, and the scattering of it is not enough. That is most important, most valuable; but the letter killeth; it is the spirit that maketh alive. The spirit of the Bible is never revealed to the unregenerate man until it is incarnate in the lives of men and women who believe it. That is the perpetual principle of God's methods with men. God might have adopted some other method; but God has chosen this method, and I believe that His choice is based upon infinite wisdom. Man hears the Word of God through man. That tremendous truth underlies the central mystery of our holy faith, that of the Incarnation. God had spoken to the fathers in times past through their prophets in divers portions, by divers methods; but there was no final, prevailing and pervasive power in the Word of God until He spoke in His Son. It was when the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men, and men beheld His glory, that the Word of God became prevailing. There is a sense in which that great Incarnation of God and of the Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth was central and final and inclusive; but the principle obtains, and persists. Ere He left the little group of men that had gathered about Him, He said to them, Ye shall be My witnesses. By this, He did not mean merely, Ye shall be men who talk about Me; but ye shall be My evidences, My credentials, My examples. The early victories of the Church were won by men who believed the story of Jesus, by men telling the story of Jesus; but also by men illustrating the story that they told in what they were in themselves. In proportion as the Word was incarnate, the Word ran and had free course and was glorified. This is persistently so. It is so today. The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Through her, the Person is to be seen, the Light is to shine, the Word is to be proclaimed; but she can fulfil her sacred duty only as the word which she hears, the light which is granted her, the Person known to her, is revealed in her individual members. The Church is in the world to proclaim a great Evangel. The Church is in the world to make protest against all things that are unlike God. The Church is in the world to be the instrument of the Divine philanthropy. The Church is in the world to pronounce the ethic of heaven and to insist that men shall hear it and obey it.

How is the Church to proclaim her evangel? She will send her evangelists; but the evangelists have no power in their message save as that message is backed by the testimony of men and women who are pardoned. It is the pardoned man who preaches the Gospel, the man who lives in the power of God's forgiveness; the man who is forever humble, never forgetting the hole of the pit from which he was digged, marching to the end of life's journey with the subdued and reverent demeanor of a man who owes every-thing to the Divine grace; and yet, marching with his head erect, knowing the forgiveness of his own sins. That man is proclaiming the Word, is flashing the Light, is revealing the Saviour. That man is preaching the Gospel, and it is by that preaching that the evangel is to be proclaimed.

The church is in the world to make eternal protest against all the things that spoil humanity. How is she to do it? By preaching? God has chosen the foolishness of preaching for the accomplishment of His great and infinite purpose; but preaching is powerless save as it is reinforced by the lives of men and women whose lives are a perpetual protest against evil things. God's Church sends out to every Pool of Bethesda where are gathered the withered and the maimed, men and women who are against the things that wither, that maim, that spoil; Crusaders that have lifted their hands in the sight of heaven, and sworn beneath the Cross of Calvary, that they will make no truce with evil. As the Church sends these men and women out, she is making her protest.

The Church is in the world, a great instrument of Divine Philanthropy. There is a great word of the Church that we Protestants have nearly lost: Mother Church! She is, or ought to be, the great Mother, picking up the crippled child and nursing it back to life, finding the starved and feeding. them, taking hold of the imbecile and saying: We will see to it that you are guarded while life's lamp still burns. That is the Church's business, and, thank God, she has done wonderful work. All the great philanthropies that care for the unfit have resulted from the incarnation of the Love of God in the Christian Church.

The Church is in the world to proclaim the great ethic of God. How shall she do it? By enunciating moral codes? No, they have been enunciated once and forever, and we can add nothing to the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount. The Church is to proclaim the ethic by sending into the high-ways and byways, into the places of commerce, and the places of professional life, men and women who themselves observe the Divine Law, and reveal to men the infinite love that has inspired it.

But there is also a corporate revelation by incarnation. By her fellowship with God and by the consequent fellowship within her borders the Church of God ought to speak to the whole world of the realization of the Divine ideal. The Church ought to be revealing to the world the Kingdom of God and the will of God for humanity. In order to do this, the Christian Church has a ministry, a ministry of those on whom God has bestowed His great gifts. "He gave some apostles, … some pastors and teachers." The business of those within the Church is to teach the word of truth in such form and fashion that the Church will be able to incarnate the Word, and flash the light on the world's darkness. The apostolic function, which, technically is expressing truth in its balanced form and proportion, is always to that end. The pastoral function is breaking the Bread of Life, feeding the flock of God, leading individual souls to new appreciation, in order that by obedience there to they may proclaim the truth. These gifts within the Church are bestowed in order that the Church may fulfil her function of being the pillar and the ground of the truth.

The Church must not only fulfil its function by incarnation, she must do it also by proclamation. In order to do this, she has her prophets and evangelists. The function of the prophet is to proclaim the evangel, call men to repentance and faith. The prophet and the evangelist must speak on behalf of the Church, explaining the secrets of the Church's experience. If there be no experience to explain, the declaration of a theory is of no avail. For one brief moment let us go back to the Day of Pentecost. Think of the significant and important fact, that Peter's preaching was made possible by the Church's enthusiasm. What attracted the crowd? A Church with its eyes aflame with light and its lips filled with song! All Jerusalem gathered together, and they were amazed, and they were perplexed, and they said, What meaneth this? The Church attracted the crowd by its enthusiasm, and so the opportunity of the preacher was created. This is the supreme work of the Christian Church, and it is only as she does her work that men and nations and the world will live by the Bible.

In the midst of the chaos and the uncertainty and the perplexity there is nothing at this moment more important, than that the Church of God should proclaim the Word of God to the nation. This she must do by life in harmony with the Word, by the messages of her apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. The message lacks all force, unless it have behind it the witness of the souls that have proved its power. The Church of the Living God is the pillar and ground of the truth. If the Church is to do this work she must know the Word of God for herself. If the men appointed to minister within her borders are to assist the Church to the fulfilment of her function, they must know the Word of God themselves.

There is a Person the world needs to see. Am I helping to show Him to the world? There are dark and troubled and storm-tossed waters on which mariners are being wrecked, and there is a Light for them. Am I helping to flash the light across the dark waters? There is famine for the Word of God everywhere, and men are wandering away and dying, and there is a Word of God that meets the need of such hungry souls. Am I doing anything to make it known?