

FROM THE FIELD.

THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD
AND WHAT IT STANDS FOR.

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Text.—“The church of the living God, the pillar, and ground of the truth. 1Tim. 3:15. Among the many institutions in the world, having for their object the enhancement of the welfare of mankind, there is one that so far overshadows all others that it commands our most earnest consideration and admiration. Its purpose so far excels all others, in securing man's best interests, that it challenges investigation and comparison with every other beneficent institution in the world. Its antiquity antedates all others. I do not refer to the peculiar denomination that I represent, but to the church of God as composed of all those in every denomination who have exercised repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am glad that I believe there are faithful, loving, and obedient followers of Jesus Christ in all churches, who are worthy of recognition and fellowship; and that they are members of the church of the living God, because they are alive unto the truth. They stand for something, for they are aiding in the noblest achievements that human activity has ever accomplished. Let us lay aside this evening the narrow conception of the denominational idea, and think of the true church of the living God. It is “the house of God.” He dwells in that church. “The dwelling place of God is with men,”—living men—that church stands for something.

Everything that God has said, and everything that he has done, is a revelation to us of His will and purpose concerning the world—concerning us. When He called into exercise His omnipotent power He meant something. When He adorned this beautiful world as the abode of the creature He intended to make, He revealed His great goodness toward man. When He gave His Son to die to save the world He revealed His great love to man. God had a purpose in man's creation, He has never for a single moment repealed or annulled that purpose. God wanted man to be happy—He wanted him to live in glory and honor with Him. God wants that now, “God so loved the world,” means that he loves it still, for “he changeth not.”

The church gives God's plan for keeping in touch with man through all the ages. It is God's house—His dwelling place. The living God dwelling with living men. A properly ordered house or church is based upon the idea of organization. Duty must be recognized, authority must be respected, service must be rendered. Harmony and success cannot be maintained where such mutual responsibility is not promptly met. In the absence of the visible Christ an organized church is essential to the successful propagation of the gospel. God saw this, hence the institution of the church. Loyalty and assent to this truth furnish the only assurance that the Gospel shall be perpetuated through all ages.

The church of God is of divine appointment, and it stands for the promulgation of the great doctrines of creation, incarnation, redemption, regulation, salvation, resurrection and immortality. It stands a living expression of the infinite love of the Everlasting Father. Through its beneficent hands have come down to us the precious history of our ancestry, and of God's gracious dealings with them. Through it we get both inspiration and courage from the lives of the patriarchs and prophets.

The church stands at the very head of all sublime and august institutions, for it is the house of God. There is nothing so worthy of man's reverence seeing God dwells in it. Its antiquity commands our respect, for patriarchs and prophets labored in building it. It is “built upon the foundation of the apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Eph. 11:20. Its foundation is solid, Jesus the corner stone. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The church towers above all, for it reaches up to heaven. It is but natural that men should reverence and respect the place where this church meets to worship. Such reverence and respect should be taught the children in our homes, and yet there is a sad neglect of this matter in our land. Children are allowed to romp and play inside our church buildings. Only

a few months ago I went into a church to conduct the afternoon service at a protracted meeting. The only persons in the church were three boys, who, for a few minutes, while I was sitting in the pulpit, turned the church into a cigarette manufactory. I saw them take from their pockets a package of tissue paper and some smoking tobacco and make three cigarettes—one apiece. Whose fault was it that these boys had no more respect for a place of religious worship? A year or two ago I saw a young man come into a church on Sunday morning smoking a cigarette. The Sunday school was in session. I was near the pulpit. He walked right up to the stove and stood warming himself, while he continued to puff away at his cigarette, the smoke rolling up towards the ceiling. Be not surprised if I tell you that there was a fist and skull fight in that church one Sunday morning before the congregation had gathered, in which blows and oaths flew thick and fast; nor when I tell you that young man became an unblushing criminal against the social and civil laws a few months later. Tell me not that such things should be tolerated. We need a great moral awakening all over our land against such things. Respect for the sanctuary is woefully on the decline. Why? because Christian sentiment in the home is unsound, and Christian conduct is questionable. The church of the living God stands for the best laws in social life. “Keep thyself pure.” And yet patrons of the saloon, the gambling table, and the bawdy house are found right inside of the pale of the church. Is this the “House of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth?” I must think not. The church stands for the best laws that the world has ever known in government. “The law of the Lord is perfect.” It teaches judgment with mercy. It stands for “love without dissimulation.” The gospel minister today finds his way blocked by the brazen hypocrisy and pretense that stares every onlooker in the face as he turns towards the church. What is to be done? I venture the prediction, and feel confident that coming years will vindicate the assertion that a revision of our social code must be had. Who will lead in this reformation?

The church stands for sobriety, virtue and purity among all classes. It stands for the best home government. “Parents love your children,” and “children love and obey your parents.” By teaching these things in the home civil government finds its best ally in the church. The church stands for the “best rules in business life. “Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”

How much I felt the challenge a few years ago when speaking to a man about his soul's salvation as he replied, “Holt, there is one thing that bothers me, I have lost about twenty thousand dollars by church members and only about five thousand by people who do not belong to any church, and I don't understand it.” What answer could I make? Is this the church of the living God that is swindling a man out of his possessions?

The church stands for the most precious promises to all men. The promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. It stands for the broadest fellowship. “All ye are brethren.”

It stands for the sublimest truths that ever engaged the mind of man. The possibilities of an endless life are held up before the aspiring mind, and the invitation to seek those things which are above. The church brings comfort and consolation to the afflicted; it brings hope and triumph to the dying. “He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

I love to think of living in the very best world that God could make for my probationary home. If this is not the best world that God could make in which to work out my eternal salvation, and I should ultimately fail, then I could question the justice of my Heavenly Father, and find fault with his dealings towards me. I love to think that God governs this world by the best laws he could devise. If otherwise and I should fail to render satisfactory service, could I not defend myself by claiming, that if he had subjected me to better laws, my life would have been different.

I love to think that God gave me the very best body he could in which to spend my probationary life, and to work out my soul's salvation. If he did not, then, when I come up to judgment, should I not hear the well

done good and faithful servant, but am told to depart, I shall ask him why he did not give me a better body for his service, one more capable of doing his will acceptably. If he did not give me the best body he could for life's service here how can I love him with my whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, or believe with undoubting faith that he will give me the best he can provide in heaven? I must believe that my Father has provided the very best for me in two worlds. I love to think of Him as ever near me even closer than a brother when I need a friend. I love to think of His Spirit and grace as the very best assistance I could have in a world like this. If it is not, and I should fail, at last, to reach the mark and win the prize, could I not look my Father in the face and say Oh! my Father, why did you not give me better assistance, and I should have done better, I am proud of being a member of His church, the very best organization, or institution that He could devise to meet the necessities of an unsaved world. I love to think of the work that my Father called me to do, as the very best service I could render for my own good and the world in which I live. Let that service be faithfully rendered and I shall honor God, bless the world, and save my own soul. My brethren, it is not so much a better world that we need, as a better self—not a better church but a better filed place in it.

I love to think that just what He has accomplished for Himself—glory and honor and immortality. He could not have been consistent in principle had He done less. If our Father has not prepared for us in heaven the best home he could, then we may not be satisfied when we get there. But the Psalmist says “when I awake with thy likeness I shall be satisfied:” and we are told that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” The Christian home is the best home on earth, and it points the soul to the home in heaven, where we shall have the best companions with whom to share the joys of immortal life. There are the best robes for redeemed souls to wear. Robes of spotless purity to adorn the spirits of just men made perfect. The sweetest songs that can be produced in the whole realm of spiritual harmony. For if sweeter music can be produced elsewhere than in heaven, we might wish to catch the strains of other melodies than those produced by the ransomed of the Lord as they return and come to Zion with songs of redeeming love and everlasting joy.

The church stands for the fullest satisfaction and the powers of one endless life. It stands for God and he will own his church. It must accomplish his will. The pillar and ground of the truth, is the mission of God's church in the world. God is in the midst of her. The church must stand for legitimate use and against every form of abuse.

The Christian church, the particular branch of God's church represented by this conference, stands for the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. It stands for the unfettered individual conscience, and thus encourages investigation and discovery in the field of religious truth. No man has the right to impose restrictions upon those whom God has set free. The Christian church stands for the conversion of the world, and the union of and the recognition of all christians. It stands for the simple gospel without ritualistic forms or liturgical ceremonies. It stands for Christ as the Head of the church. It stands for the best in doctrine, the best in name, and the best in test of fellowship. It stands for missions, home and foreign, for education, as the great lubricator of mental, physical and moral activities. It teaches that man is to work out his own salvation by faith in God, and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. It accepts the commission of the only Head of the church, and is trying to carry on his work, until he shall come again. It must keep alive, for the living God cannot dwell in a dead church. As a minister and a member of the Christian church, the pertinent question comes to me, in the conclusion of this discourse, what do I stand for? My brethren both in the ministry and in the laity, what are you standing for? What answer does your work give? Are we standing for a questionable reputation, or for Christ-like spirit and work? One is our Master. Let us acquit ourselves

like brethren. The promises of God are the great bulwark of all church and individual activities. Let these promises shine out in our ministry every day wherever we may go.

God's church on earth is the anti-chamber to the church triumphant. May we always stand in readiness to enter. The church stands for the best on earth; it will receive only the best in heaven. It stands for faith here—it will stand for sight there.

OUR WORK IN GA. AND ALA.

It was my great privilege to be present at the recent session of the Alabama, and the Georgia and Alabama Conferences. Already a member of one of these Conferences has reported the work through The Sun, but I have thought that further word would not be out of place. Both Conferences held the best session in their history—each being more largely attended by the ministers, and the delegates elected, than ever before. The ministers' reports and church letters showed a marked degree of perseverance and of unselfish service on the part of the pastors, and unprecedented progress and advancement among all of the churches. The deliberations of the Conferences were broad gauged, and more harmonious in character than is usually witnessed in such bodies. I think I never saw brethren dwell together in such a sweet spirit of unity and Christian fellowship. Every member's interest was every other's. None of that biting sarcasm, or bitter cross-fire which I have seen too often in my own Conference. The debate was so smooth and pleasant, yet it lacked not of spirit and enthusiasm. Would that the brethren in our stronger Conferences could be filled with more of this Christ-like spirit. A single instance will serve to illustrate the powerful spirit of brotherly love existing among the members of these Conferences—ministers and laymen. One minister was reported absent, from the Ga. and Ala. Conference, on account of sickness in his family of small children, his wife having died a short time prior to this. One hearing the report a fellow minister rose and asked that the Conference offer a special prayer in behalf of the brother. Prayer was offered and then backed up by a generous contribution for the distressed minister—this contribution secured through the efforts of a lay-brother. I have not seen the like upon the floor of my Conference. Knowing that many of our people in Va. and N. C. are ignorant of the real conditions here, I have collected a few statistics and submit them for comparison. Seventeen years ago, in all Ga. and Ala., there were but nine Christian Churches, valued at five thousand dollars; to-day there are thirty eight churches, worth more than thirty thousand dollars. Seventeen years ago there were but seven ministers, receiving altogether less than five hundred dollars per year; today the roll of ministers numbers twenty five—four of these in school at Elon, one or two others preparing elsewhere, the rest actively engaged in pastoral work, being paid the past year more than three thousand dollars. Seventeen years ago we had about six hundred members in this part of the field; to-day there are more than three thousand. Can our stranger Conferences boast of greater progress than this in so short a time? Young ministers, fresh from our College, is the fields more inviting in other Conferences—era the prospects brighter there for you to do a grand and good work for the Master? I beg you to consider this field of work; it needs your services, and is crying to you to come. I listened, with tears in my eyes, to some of our aged ministers here when they rose to speak for the report of the Com. on Education—how they pleaded for an educated ministry in this field—when they told of how they themselves had been so greatly handicapped in the work, and had suffered so much because of the fact that they had been denied the blessings of an education. This report of the Com. on Ed. excited much discussion because of a section which proposed the establishment of a High school within the bounds of the two conferences. The report was unanimously adopted, and with so much enthusiasm that it was followed by contributions, in cash and subscriptions, amounting to more than five hundred dollars. This was in the Ala. Conference. The Georgia and Alabama Conference adopted a like report, and, together with some funds already in hand, raised about six hundred dollars in cash and