

# The Message of Titus

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Church being the pillar and ground of the truth, with its order, method, and might being revealed in its true spiritual power.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 3:15, 2 Timothy 2:15, Titus 1:1-2, 1 Peter 2:9

**Topics:** "The Church's Responsibility", "Truth and Oversight"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of the true Church of Jesus Christ as a pillar and ground of truth, highlighting the importance of order, oversight, and the church's responsibility to reveal God's truth in a world filled with challenges. He discusses the church's motive, method, and might, urging believers to live godly lives that adorn the doctrine of God. Morgan also stresses the role of overseers in maintaining this order and the necessity for them to be under the dominion of truth, ensuring that their leadership reflects the grace and glory of God. The sermon calls for both the church and individual Christians to actively participate in good works and confidently affirm the truth of the Gospel.

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## Transcript

### A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

#### I. The Central Teaching. The true Church of Jesus Christ

##### i. The Motive of its Order.

a. General. "The Truth which is according to Godliness." i. 1. (Cf. 1 Tim. iii. 16.)

b. Negative. "To convict the Gainsayers " i. 9.

Liars

Evil Beasts'

Slow Bellies.

c. Positive. "Instructing. .. live. ii. 12.

Soberly.

Righteously.

Godly.

ii The Method of its Order.

a. General. Oversight. Bishops. i. 7.

b. Passive. Clear Vision.

Of Truth.

Of prevailing Conditions.

Of true Method.

c. Active. Authority. ii. 15.

"Speak." Enunciation of Truth.

"Exhort." Application to Need.

"Reprove." Insistence upon Obedience.

iii. The Might of its Order. The Facts and Forces of the Epiphanies. ii. 11-14.

"Grace hath appeared."

"The . . . appearing of the Glory."

II. The Abiding Appeal. The Church true to Jesus Christ

i The inclusive Church Responsibility. "To adorn the Doctrine." ii. 10. (See "Trimmed," Matt. xxv. 7.)

ii. The individual Christian Responsibility. "Careful to maintain good works." iii. 8.

iii. The consequent Responsibility of those in Oversight. "To affirm confidently." iii. 8.

## B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

i. The Power of the Church in the World is that of her Revelation of Truth.

ii. All her Overseers must be Men themselves under the Dominion of Truth.

II. To the Overseers

i The Power of the Overseer is that of the Truth to be revealed.

ii. The Measure of the Success of Oversight is the Measure in which the Church exercises the Power of Truth.

In considering this letter we need again to remind ourselves of the inter-relation between the two letters to Timothy and this one to Titus.

In the first letter to Timothy we saw that the true function of the Church is that it should be the pillar and ground of the truth. In order that this function may be fulfilled, it is necessary that every local church should be properly organized.

As in the second letter to Timothy we saw the perfect equipment of the minister, his prevailing method, and his special work; in this letter we see the true Church of Jesus Christ so far as her ecclesiastical order is concerned. It is a very remarkable thing that this letter has to do with a church of Jesus Christ in a most difficult place. Paul described the Cretans by quotation from one of their own poets as "liars, evil beasts, slow bellies." In this letter also the most startling and amazing thing as to the possibility of Christian life is said concerning those who are in this most difficult position, and of those who are in the most trying circumstances, the bond-slaves. The apostle declared that they were to "adorn the doctrine of God."

Thus in order to show the true spiritual power of the Church, and the possibility of the lowest exercising it, the most difficult soil was selected, the most difficult circumstances were employed; and of those in the midst of trying and impossible conditions of life the finest possibilities were postulated. Thus the Spirit of God teaches us that the Church of God can be the pillar and ground of the truth in the most dark, desolate, and difficult places of the earth; and that men and women whose circumstances are most trying and difficult, can fulfill the highest function of Christianity, that of "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

The central teaching of this letter is that of its revelation of the true Church of Jesus Christ; and its abiding appeal that the Church be true to Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ is revealed in its true order; as to motive, method, and might. We could appropriately write as a motto over this letter the words, "Let everything be done decently and in order."

The motive of church order is revealed in a phrase at the very beginning of the letter; "The truth which is according to godliness." That word "godliness" we found in the first letter to Timothy, "great is the mystery of godliness." That is the truth of which the Church is to be the pillar and ground. More than half our disputes within the one catholic Church are disputes about order; whereas if we were more occupied with the reason for order, there would be very much less division about it. The passion of the apostle when he sent Titus to Crete and wrote to him there, was a passion for the truth which is according so godliness, that godliness of which the mystery is great.

The motive of the order is further explained, first negatively as the apostle shows that the result of the setting in order of the church will be that of convicting the gainsayers. In that connection we have the threefold description of the Cretans already referred to, "Liars, evil beasts, slow bellies." These are the things of animalism; and the business of the church, by its revelation of truth is to correct and convict the gainsayers, those who by their animalism speak against godliness.

Secondly, there is a positive value. That we find stated in the second chapter in the midst of the great passage on grace, in which the apostle declared that "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." The Cretans were liars; Christians were to live soberly. The Cretans were evil beasts, sensual, animal, and fierce in their passions as against one another; Christians were to live righteously, that is, in right relationships with the world around them. The Cretans

were slow bellies; Christians were to live godly.

That is the motive for setting the church in order. The saints who constitute it are to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts in their own lives, and so become God's negatory forces, in the midst of the cities in which they live and move and have their being. To set our church in order so that we may worship as we desire to worship, is to act from a low motive. That the church may be the pillar and ground of the Truth: upon which and from which shall flash the light .of truth; in order that the forces of death and darkness and devilry may be rebuked; ought to be the motive behind all church organization.

The method of church order is that of oversight. Elders were to be appointed, and the apostle explains the office by the use of the word "bishop." A bishop is one in oversight, one who watches, one who sees clearly. I am not now discussing as to whether the bishop is to be a pastor of one flock, or whether there are to be two or three bishops for one flock or whether one bishop is to have a diocese. I do not believe that there is any final word in the New Testament as to ecclesiastical government. The matter of supreme importance is that we understand that the office of a bishop is that of oversight. Ruskin draws attention to this fact, and in his caustic way he asks whether the bishop is aware that down yonder alley Bill has been knocking Nancy's teeth out, and if not, he declares that he is not a bishop, though his mitre be as high as a steeple. The function of the office may be described as first, active; and then, passive. The one placed in oversight by the Holy Spirit through the gift bestowed and. through grace abounding, must have a clear vision of the truth of God of which the Church is to be the pillar and ground; he must also have a clear vision of the prevailing conditions in the midst of which the Church is to flash and shine ; he must finally have a clear vision of the true method in oversight.

The bishop is to speak, exhort, reprove; and these words are not idly chosen. He is to speak, that is, to enunciate truth. That is his first business, but it is not his last business. He is to exhort, that is, he is to apply the truth to local conditions. That is his second business, but it is not his last business. He is to reprove, that is, he is to insist upon obedience to the truth. That is the threefold activity of the man in oversight. He is placed in oversight by the Holy Spirit of God, or he has no claim to oversight. The method of the order of the Church is that of oversight by men appointed by the Spirit of God.

The might of the Church's order is revealed in that great passage already quoted, the recitation of which is always a revelation and interpretation. How does the passage open? "The grace of God hath appeared." How does it end?

"The appearing of the glory." The facts and forces of the two epiphanies constitute the true strength of church government, and church order, and church service. "The grace of God hath appeared . . . looking for the appearing of the glory." I have sometimes said that if I were to build a new church I should like to call it the church of the two Epiphanies; the epiphany of grace; and the epiphany of glory. When was the first? When He came. When will be the second? When He comes. The first was the Advent of grace; the second will be the Advent of glory. When we see the first Advent we see " Glory as of the only begotten from the Father." That was the Advent of grace. When we see the second Advent, we shall see the final unveiling of grace. The one catholic Church of God ; the assembly of believers by whatever human name it is called ; lives between the light of the first Advent and the light of the second; the first advent, which was the setting of the Sun in blood, and the second, which shall be the rising of the Sun in glory. Between these we live, and the forces of the first and the forces of the second, the dynamic that came from the Cross, the inspiration which comes from the Crowning, constitute the might of church order, both for the overseer and for the flock in order that the Church may be the pillar and ground of the Truth.

The abiding appeal of this letter is that the Church shall be true to Jesus Christ Who is the Truth. The inclusive church responsibility is to adorn the doctrine. The individual Christian responsibility is to be careful to maintain good works. The consequent responsibility of those in oversight is to affirm confidently these things.

The inclusive responsibility of the Christian Church is to adorn the doctrine. Paul says this of the bond-slave, a servant in the most difficult situation and condition of life, and certainly if such can adorn the doctrine all others can. The word translated "adorn" is Kosmeo, and is derived from the Greek word Kosmos, a word suggesting order and beauty. When our Lord spoke of the virgins wise and foolish, and declared that at midnight the cry went out, Behold the bridegroom cometh; He said that they trimmed their lamps. "Trimmed" is the same word as here is translated "adorn." To trim the lamp was to snuff the wick. That is the way to adorn the doctrine. A wick is snuffed that the flame may burn the brighter; and in proportion as that poor carbon of our life knows the principle of the Cross, which is the snuffing of the wick, we adorn the doctrine. It does seem so impossible to adorn the doctrine; but it is not so. I once heard Dr. Watkinson illustrate this. He said: Here is a piece of music. I take it up and look at it. I notice that the marks upon the page are darker and thicker here, and more straggling there; I am told it is a wonderful piece of music, but I cannot comprehend it. Presently some one comes and takes the piece of music, and plays it upon an instrument; and so the player adorns the music. The player does not compose it, is quite unequal to composing it, but he plays it, interprets it, adorns it, to his fellow man who has no knowledge of it. That is the great business of the Christian Church, to adorn the doctrine. We cannot create the doctrine; the doctrine is created; but this great mystery of godliness the Church is to adorn by living it. That is the supreme responsibility of the Church.

The individual Christian responsibility is to carefully maintain good works. That phrase does not refer to charitable philanthropy. It does not mean doing meritorious things in order to win salvation. It means doing all good, true noble, beautiful things, out of the forces of salvation. Alone I cannot perfectly adorn the doctrine; but I can watch and be careful to maintain good works, and in that measure I contribute to the adorning of the doctrine. That is the individual responsibility.

The consequent responsibility of those in oversight; bishops, elders, those gifted and having grace, is that they affirm confidently. We do not help men and women to adorn the doctrine when we debate our doubts in their presence. We may have doubts; I suppose every man has them. I have them, doubts and difficulties, questioning, problems, but I never preach them. Let us wait until the light has become clearer if there be a subject on which we are in doubt, before we speak about it. We are to affirm confidently the essential, fundamental things of the Christian faith epitomized in that passage concerning the mystery of godliness.

Our general application may be briefly made. First this letter reveals to me the fact that the power of the Church in the world is that of her revelation of the truth of God. I dare not begin an exposition of that, yet ponder it well. The Church is not influential because she is able to manipulate the affairs of the State. The Church is powerful in the measure in which she is revealing the truth of God in her own life. That is the central truth of this letter. Concerning the Church this also is revealed, that all overseers must be men themselves under the dominion of the truth; and the principle of selecting a leader, a bishop, must be that of his mastery by the truth; and I am not now referring merely to those who preach; but to all those who hold office in the Christian Church. Trustees, managers, deacons, stewards, who have been appointed because of their wealth or social influence, are a hindrance and not a help. It is on the basis of spiritual life, resulting from mastery by the truth, that all must be placed in office in the Christian Church if she is to fulfill

her function.

The application of the letter to overseers therefore is; first that the power of the overseer is that of the truth and not that of his office. No man has any real power because he holds office. The only power of the overseer is that of the truth he proclaims, and confidently affirms, until it captures and masters those who hear it. The measure of success in oversight, therefore, is the measure in which the Church exercises the power of the truth. The test of success is not the crowd; but the souls transformed under the power of the Word who adorn the doctrine, and thus fulfill the holy function of being the pillar and ground of the truth.

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