

### **THE CHURCH—GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH**

If I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:15-16)

There are three aspects of the church mentioned in verse 15: the house of God, the church of the living God, and the pillar and base of the truth. Verse 16 continues with the great mystery of godliness, which is God manifested in the flesh. How are these two verses related? Some, with reason, insist that a semi-colon at the end of verse 15 is better than a period indicating a full stop: “The pillar and base of the truth; and confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh...”

### **THE CHURCH—THE HOUSE OF GOD**

Why is the church mentioned together with the manifestation of God in the flesh? It is because the church is the house of God. What does the term *the house of God* mean? When you refer to “your house,” you mean the place where you dwell, where you live, where you work out your life, and that is the meaning of the house of God. It is not a light or loose term. *The house of God* is the place where God dwells, where He lives, and where He works out His life.

This house is none other than the church of the living God. Notice that the term here is not merely *God* but *the living God*. He is living, and He now dwells in the church, moves in the church, lives in the church, and works out His whole life in the church. When we say that the church is the house of God, we must have a very deep realization that God dwells, lives, and works out His life in this house. Do we have such a deep understanding concerning the house of God?

### **THE CHURCH—THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH**

This church is not only the house of God, in which God dwells, lives, and works out His life, but it is also the pillar and base of the truth. What is truth? Do not think that truth means doctrine. The word *truth* in such a passage means “reality.” Nothing is real in the whole universe, and nothing is truth; everything is but a shadow. Everything that can be seen, everything that can be touched, everything that can be possessed and enjoyed is not real but is at best a shadow. Whatever exists in this universe is but a shadow, not the real thing.

What is the real thing? It is Christ as the reality of everything. The food that you take is not the real food but only a shadow of the real food. The real food is Christ. If you do not have Christ, you do not have the reality of food. You may think that the human life that you have is real, but it is not; it too is only a shadow. Real life is Christ. If you have the Son of God, you have life; if you do not have the Son of God, you do not have life (1 John 5:12).

If a brother sends you a photo of himself, you would say, “This is Brother So-and-so.” But in truth, that is not Brother So-and-so. It is only a picture, and it is a false picture at that. In fact, all pictures are false, for real things are not found in pictures. The whole universe is nothing but a picture. All the types, all the figures, all the shadows in the Old Testament are but pictures of the reality to come, which is Christ Himself. Christ is the truth; Christ is the reality of the whole universe; Christ is the reality of the Old Testament and also of the New Testament. If you have only the teaching about Christ, you do not have the reality of Christ. Christ Himself is the truth, and His Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6). He Himself is the reality, and His Spirit is the Spirit of reality.

The church, in which this living God dwells, lives, and moves, is the pillar and base upon which the reality stands. It bears the reality. Within this church the living God dwells, and upon this church the truth, the reality, stands. We are not standing for doctrine, but we are standing for Christ, the reality, the truth. We should be able to say,

“Friends, come and see; come to the church and see the reality of the universe. Come and see the reality of life, the reality of love, the reality of patience, and the reality of many other things.”

One afternoon in 1933 while I was visiting Brother Watchman Nee, he suddenly asked, “Brother, what is patience?” At first, I thought this was a childish question. I was taught what patience is when I was a small child. But since the question came from his mouth, I felt that I should not take it lightly, so I considered further: “What does he mean ‘What is patience?’” I dared not answer. He was sitting in a rocking chair, rocking back and forth. Finally I ventured, “Patience is something by which one suffers and endures the ill treatment of others. That is patience.” Then he said, “No.” I asked, “Well, brother, if patience is not endurance, please tell me what it is.” As he continued to rock in his chair, he continued asking, “What is patience? What is patience?”

After a long period he suddenly answered, “Patience is Christ.” It was very short and very simple. “Patience is Christ.” I simply could not understand this kind of “foreign” language. I said, “Brother, that sounds strange to me. I do not understand. Please tell me what you mean.” He would not say anything else but kept repeating, “Patience is Christ; patience is Christ.” For the whole afternoon we did not talk about anything else. I was more than puzzled.

After three or four hours I left him, very much disappointed. Returning to my room, I knelt down and prayed, “Lord, tell me what it means that ‘patience is Christ.’ I cannot understand.” Finally the Lord showed me that our patience must be Christ Himself. Patience is Christ living within me and through me. When I saw this, it was a real revelation. I was so happy.

We must realize that human patience, which we can attain by ourselves, is not the real patience. Human patience is only a form and a shadow; the real patience is Christ. Everything that we need—patience, humility, kindness, love for others, and even love for God—must be found in Christ Himself. Even the Ten Commandments are only a shadow; Christ is the reality. If we have Christ living out through us, we have the reality and fulfillment of all the requirements of the Ten Commandments.

The church must bear the truth, the reality. The church must be the pillar and base of this universal reality, which is Christ Himself. We must be able to tell others, “Come to the church and see the real patience and the real humility. Come to us and see the real faithfulness and the reality of being honest.”

In the church God dwells, because the church is the house of God. God lives, God moves, and God works out His life in the church, and the testimony and the reality stand upon the church. We must consider these two aspects: inwardly, God dwelling in the church, and outwardly, the church bearing the testimony and the reality. These two aspects show the real mingling of God with man. Within the church—this group of redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people—God dwells; and upon this group of people, there is the reality of the universe. All the reality of the universe is centered in this group. If anyone wants to know what life is, he must come to the church and see. If some would like to know what love is, they too must come and see. If the reality of humility and kindness is to be known, the church is the place to see it. Upon this group of people is seen the reality of the all-inclusive Christ. The testimony of the church is not in doctrine but in bearing Christ as the reality. The more we exclaim “Christ” yet do not have the inner reality, the more Christ is gone. We have Christ only in shouting, in talking, and in teaching. We do not have Him in our inner life, nor do we experience Him in our outer living, our daily walk. The church must be the pillar and base, bearing Christ as the only reality of everything. If we do not know the real meaning of life, we must be able to come to the church to find it.