

KNOTS UNTIED.

BEING
PLAIN STATEMENTS ON DISPUTED POINTS IN RELIGION
FROM THE
STANDPOINT OF AN EVANGELICAL CHURCHMAN.

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PREFACE TO THE TENTH EDITION.

IN sending forth a tenth edition of this volume, I do not think it necessary to add anything to the original preface which I drew up when it first appeared.

The general principles which I asserted and maintained when I was much younger than I am now, I firmly assert and maintain in 1885. I find nothing to retract, cancel, or withdraw in the nineteen papers which compose the volume.

I frankly admit, after careful examination of "Knots Untied," that I observe in its pages occasional sharp and strong expressions which perhaps I should not use if I wrote the book over again in the present year. But I think it better to make no change, and to leave the original language alone. I wish my readers to understand that the views which I held as a presbyter I still hold as a bishop; and I fear that any alteration might lead to misconstruction and misrepresentation.

That God may continue to bless the book and make it useful is my earnest prayer.

J. C. LIVERPOOL.

PALACE, LIVERPOOL,
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PREFACE.

THE volume now in the reader's hands requires a few words of explanation. It consists of nineteen papers on subjects which are matters of dispute among English Churchmen in the present day, systematically arranged. A moment's glance at the table of contents will show that there is hardly any point of theological controversy belonging to this era, which is not discussed, with more or less fullness, in these papers.

The doctrinal tone of the volume will be found distinctly and decidedly "Evangelical." I avow that, without hesitation, at the outset. The opinions expressed and advocated about the matters discussed, are those of an Evangelical Churchman. What THAT means every intelligent Englishman knows, and it is mere affectation to profess ignorance about the point. They are not popular opinions, I am aware, and are only held, perhaps, by a minority of the English clergy. But they are the only opinions which I can find in Holy Scripture, in the Thirty-nine Articles, in the Prayer-book fairly interpreted, in the works of the Reformers, or in the writings of the pre-Caroline divines. In the faith of these opinions I have lived for thirty-five years, and have seen no reason to be ashamed of them, however rudely they may have been assailed.

The object of sending forth this volume is to meet the wants of those who may wish to see theological questions fully discussed and examined from an "Evangelical" standpoint, and complain that they cannot find a book that does this. There are hundreds of English Churchmen who will never look at *a tract* (though St. Paul's Epistles, when first sent forth, were only tracts), but are willing

to read a *volume*. To them I offer this volume, and respectfully invite their attention to its contents. If it does nothing else, I hope it may convince some readers that in the controversies of this day the reasonings and arguments are not all on one side.

The friendly readers of the many popular tracts which God has enabled me to write in the last twenty-five years, will not find in this volume much that is new to them. They will find some of their old acquaintances, though altered, remodelled, recast, and partially divested of their direct and familiar style. But they will find the same argument, the same matter, and the same substance, though presented in a new form, and adapted to the tastes of a different order of minds. I am sure they will agree with me, that it is well to use every means of doing good and, if possible, to meet the wants of every class of readers.

Whether the volume will do any good remains to be seen. At any rate it is an honest effort to untie some theological knots, and to supply some clear statements of truth from the standpoint of an Evangelical Churchman. That God may bless the effort, and make it useful to the cause of Christ and to the Church of England, is my earnest prayer.

J. C. RYLE

STRADBROKE VICARAGE.
1877.

XVII.

THE FALLIBILITY OF MINISTERS.

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

“For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

“And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

“But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”—GALATIANS ii. 11–16.

HAVE we ever considered what the Apostle Peter once did at Antioch? It is a question that deserves serious consideration.

What the Apostle Peter did *at Rome* we are often told, although we have hardly a jot of authentic information about it. Roman Catholic writers furnish us with many stories about this. Legends, traditions, and fables abound on the subject. But unhappily for these writers, Scripture is utterly silent upon the point. There is nothing in Scripture to show that the Apostle Peter ever was at Rome at all!

But what did the Apostle Peter do *at Antioch*? This is the point to which I want to direct attention. This is the subject of the passage from the Epistle to the Galatians, which heads this paper. On this point, at any rate, the Scripture speaks clearly and unmistakably.

The six verses of the passage before us are striking on many accounts. They are striking, if we consider the *event* which they describe: here is one Apostle rebuking another!—They are striking, when we consider who the two *men* are: Paul, the younger, rebukes Peter, the elder!—They are striking, when we remark the *occasion*: this was no glaring fault, no flagrant sin, at first sight, that Peter had committed! Yet the Apostle Paul says, “I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.” He does more than this:—he reproveth Peter publicly for his error before all the Church at Antioch. He goes even further:—he writes an account of the matter, which is now read in two hundred languages all over the world.

It is my firm conviction that the Holy Ghost means us to take particular notice of this passage of Scripture. If Christianity had been an invention

of man, these things would never have been recorded. An impostor, like Mahomet, would have hushed up the difference between two Apostles. The Spirit of truth has caused these verses to be written for our learning, and we shall do well to take heed to their contents.

There are three great lessons from Antioch, which I think we ought to learn from this passage.

- I. The *first* lesson is, that *great ministers may make great mistakes.*
- II. The *second* is, that *to keep the truth of Christ in His Church is even more important than to keep peace.*
- III. The *third* is, that *there is no doctrine about which we ought to be so jealous as justification by faith without the deeds of the law.*

I. The first great lesson we learn from Antioch is, that *great ministers may make great mistakes.*

What clearer proof can we have than that which is set before us in this place; Peter, without doubt, was one of the greatest in the company of the Apostles. He was an old disciple. He was a disciple who had had peculiar advantages and privileges. He had been a constant companion of the Lord Jesus. He had heard the Lord preach, seen the Lord work miracles, enjoyed the benefit of the Lord's private teaching, been numbered among the Lord's intimate friends, and gone out and come in with Him all the time He ministered upon earth. He was the Apostle to whom the keys of the kingdom of heaven were given, and by whose hand those keys were first used. He was the first who opened the door of faith to the Jews, by preaching to them on the day of Pentecost. He was the first who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, by going to the house of Cornelius, and receiving him into the Church. He was the first to rise up in the Council of the fifteenth of Acts, and say, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" And yet here this very Peter, this same Apostle, plainly falls into a great mistake. The Apostle Paul tells us, "I withstood him to the face." He tells us "that he was to be blamed." He says "he feared them of the circumcision." He says of him and his companions, that "they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel." He speaks of their "dissimulation." He tells us that by this dissimulation even Barnabas, his old companion in missionary labours, "was carried away."

What a striking fact this is. This is Simon Peter! This is the third great error of his, which the Holy Ghost has thought fit to record! Once we find him trying to keep back our Lord, as far as he could, from the great work of the cross, and severely rebuked. Then we find him denying the Lord

three times, and with an oath. Here again we find him endangering the leading truth of Christ's Gospel. Surely we may say, "Lord, what is man?" The Church of Rome boasts that the Apostle Peter is her founder and first Bishop. Be it so: grant it for a moment. Let us only remember, that of all the Apostles there is not one, excepting, of course, Judas Iscariot, of whom we have so many proofs that he was a *fallible* man. Upon her own showing, the Church of Rome was founded by the most fallible of the Apostles.¹

But it is all meant to teach us that even the Apostles themselves, when not writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, were at times liable to err. It is meant to teach us that the best men are weak and fallible so long as they are in the body. Unless the grace of God holds them up, any one of them may go astray at any time. It is very humbling, but it is very true. True Christians are converted, justified, and sanctified. They are living members of Christ, beloved children of God, and heirs of eternal life. They are elect, chosen, called, and kept unto salvation. They have the Spirit. But they are *not infallible*.

Will not rank and dignity confer infallibility? No: they will not! It matters nothing what a man is called. He may be a Czar, an Emperor, a King, a Prince. He may be a Pope or a Cardinal, an Archbishop or a Bishop, a Dean or an Archdeacon, a Priest or a Deacon. He is still a *fallible* man. Neither the crown, nor the diadem, nor the anointing oil, nor the mitre, nor the imposition of hands, can prevent a man making mistakes.

Will not numbers confer infallibility? No: they will not! You may gather together princes by the score, and bishops by the hundred; but, when gathered together, they are still liable to err. You may call them a council, or a synod, or an assembly, or a conference, or what you please. It matters nothing. Their conclusions are still the conclusions of *fallible men*. Their collective wisdom is still capable of making enormous mistakes. Well says the Twenty-first Article of the Church of England, "General councils may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God."

The example of the Apostle Peter at Antioch is one that does not stand alone. It is only a parallel of many a case that we find written for our

¹ It is curious to observe the shifts to which some writers have been reduced in order to explain away the plain meaning of the verses which head this paper. Some have maintained that Paul did not really rebuke Peter, but only feignedly, for show and appearance sake! Others have maintained that it was not Peter the Apostle who was rebuked, but another Peter, one of the seventy! Such interpretations need no remark. They are simply absurd. The truth is that the plain honest meaning of the verses strikes a heavy blow at the favourite Roman Catholic doctrine of the primacy and superiority of Peter over the rest of the Apostles.

learning in Holy Scripture. Do we not remember Abraham, the father of the faithful, following the advice of Sarah, and taking Hagar for a wife? Do we not remember Aaron, the first high priest, listening to the children of Israel, and making a golden calf? Do we not remember Nathan the prophet telling David to build a temple? Do we not remember Solomon, the wisest of men, allowing his wives to build their high places? Do we not remember Asa, the good king of Judah, seeking not to the Lord, but to the physicians? Do we not remember Jehoshaphat, the good king, going down to help wicked Ahab? Do we not remember Hezekiah, the good king, receiving the ambassadors of Babylon? Do we not remember Josiah, the last of Judah's good kings, going forth to fight with Pharaoh? Do we not remember James and John wanting fire to come down from heaven? These things deserve to be remembered. They were not written without cause. They cry aloud, *No infallibility!*

And who does not see, when he reads the history of the Church of Christ, repeated proofs that the best of men can err? The early fathers were zealous according to their knowledge, and ready to die for Christ. But many of them countenanced monkery, and nearly all sowed the seeds of many superstitions.—The Reformers were honoured instruments in the hand of God for reviving the cause of truth on earth. Yet hardly one of them can be named who did not make some great mistake. Martin Luther held pertinaciously the doctrine of consubstantiation. Melancthon was often timid and undecided. Calvin permitted Servetus to be burned. Cranmer recanted and fell away for a time from his first faith. Jewel subscribed to Popish doctrines for fear of death. Hooper disturbed the Church of England by over-scrupulosity about vestments. The Puritans, in after times, denounced toleration as Abaddon and Apollyon. Wesley and Toplady, last century, abused each other in most shameful language. Irving, in our own day, gave way to the delusion of speaking in unknown tongues. All these things speak with a loud voice. They all lift up a beacon to the Church of Christ. They all say, “Cease ye from man;”—“Call no man master;”—“Call no man father upon earth;”—“Let no man glory in man;”—“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” They all cry, *No infallibility!*

The lesson is one that we all need. We are all naturally inclined to lean upon man whom we can see, rather than upon God whom we cannot see. We naturally love to lean upon the ministers of the visible Church, rather than upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd, and Bishop, and High Priest, who is invisible. We need to be continually warned and set upon our guard.

I see this tendency to lean on man everywhere. I know no branch of the Protestant Church of Christ which does not require to be cautioned

upon the point. It is a snare, for example, to the English Episcopalian to make idols of Bishop Pearson and the “Judicious Hooker.” It is a snare to the Scotch Presbyterian to pin his faith on John Knox, the Covenanters, and Dr. Chalmers. It is a snare to the Methodists in our day to worship the memory of John Wesley. It is a snare to the Independent to see no fault in any opinion of Owen and Doddridge. It is a snare to the Baptist to exaggerate the wisdom of Gill, and Fuller, and Robert Hall. All these are snares, and into these snares how many fall!

We all naturally love to have a Pope of our own. We are far too ready to think, that because some great minister or some learned man says a thing,—or because our own minister, whom we love, says a thing,—it must be right, without examining whether it is in Scripture or not. Most men dislike the trouble of thinking for themselves. They like following a leader. They are like sheep,—when one goes over the gap all the rest follow. Here at Antioch even Barnabas was carried away. We can well fancy that good man saying, “An old Apostle, like Peter, surely cannot be wrong. Following him, I cannot err.”

And now let us see what practical lessons we may learn from this part of our subject.

(a) For one thing, let us learn not to put implicit confidence in any man’s opinion, merely *because he lived many hundred years ago*. Peter was a man who lived in the time of Christ Himself, and yet he could err.

There are many who talk much in the present day about “the voice of the primitive Church.” They would have us believe that those who lived nearest the time of the Apostles, must of course know more about truth than we can. There is no foundation for any such opinion. It is a fact that the most ancient writers in the Church of Christ are often at variance with one another. It is a fact that they often changed their own minds, and retracted their own former opinions. It is a fact that they often wrote foolish and weak things, and often showed great ignorance in their explanations of Scripture. It is vain to expect to find them free from mistakes. *Infallibility is not to be found in the early fathers, but in the Bible.*

(b) For another thing, let us learn not to put implicit confidence in any man’s opinion, *merely because of his office as a minister*. Peter was one of the very chiefest Apostles, and yet he could err.

This is a point on which men have continually gone astray. It is the rock on which the early Church struck. Men soon took up the saying, “Do nothing contrary to the mind of the Bishop!” But what are bishops, priests, and deacons? What are the best of ministers but men,—dust, ashes, and clay,—men of like passions with ourselves, men exposed to temptations, men liable to weaknesses and infirmities? What saith the Scripture, “Who is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as

the Lord gave to every man?” (1 Cor. iii. 5.) Bishops have often driven the truth into the wilderness, and decreed that to be true which was false. The greatest errors have been begun by ministers. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of the High Priest, made religion to be abhorred by the children of Israel. Annas and Caiaphas, though in the direct line of descent from Aaron, crucified the Lord. Arius, that great heresiarch, was a minister. It is absurd to suppose that ordained men cannot go wrong. We should follow them so far as they teach according to the Bible, but no further. We should believe them so long as they can say, “Thus it is written,”—“Thus saith the Lord;” but further than this we are not to go. *Infallibility is not to be found in ordained men, but in the Bible.*

(c) For another thing, let us learn not to place implicit confidence in any man’s opinion, *merely because of his learning*. Peter was a man who had miraculous gifts, and could speak with tongues, and yet he could err.

This is a point, again, on which many go wrong. This is the rock on which men struck in the middle ages. Men looked on Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, and Peter Lombard, and many of their companions, as almost inspired. They gave epithets to some of them in token of their admiration. They talked of “the irrefragable” doctor, “the seraphic” doctor, “the incomparable” doctor,—and seemed to think that whatever these doctors said must be true! But what is the most learned of men, if he be not taught by the Holy Ghost? What is the most learned of all divines but a mere fallible child of Adam at his very best? Vast knowledge of books and great ignorance of God’s truth may go side by side. They have done so, they may do so, and they will do so, in all times. I will engage to say that the two volumes of Robert M’Cheyne’s *Memoirs and Sermons* have done more positive good to the souls of men, than any one folio that Origen or Cyprian ever wrote. I doubt not that the one volume of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, written by a man who knew hardly any book but his Bible, and was ignorant of Greek and Latin,—will prove in the last day to have done more for the benefit of the world than all the works of the schoolmen put together. Learning is a gift that ought not to be despised. It is an evil day when books are not valued in the Church. But it is amazing to observe how vast a man’s intellectual attainments may be, and yet how little he may know of the grace of God. I have no doubt the authorities of Oxford in the last century knew more of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, than Wesley, Whitefield, Berridge, or Venn. But they knew little of the Gospel of Christ. *Infallibility is not to be found among learned men, but in the Bible.*

(d) For another thing, let us take care that we do not place implicit confidence *on our own minister’s opinion*, however godly he may be. Peter was a man of mighty grace, and yet he could err.

Your minister may be a man of God indeed, and worthy of all honour

for his preaching and practice; but do not make a Pope of him. Do not place his word side by side with the Word of God. Do not spoil him by flattery. Do not let him suppose he can make no mistakes. Do not lean your whole weight on his opinion, or you may find to your cost that he can err.

It is written of Joash, King of Judah; that he “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.” (2 Chron. xxiv. 2.) Jehoiada died, and then died the religion of Joash. Just so your minister may die, and then your religion may die too;—may change, and your religion may change;—may go away, and your religion may go. Oh, be not satisfied with a religion built upon man! Be not content with saying, “I have hope, because my own minister has told me such and such things.” Seek to be able to say, “I have hope, because I find it thus and thus written in the Word of God.” If your peace is to be solid, you must go yourself to the Fountain of all Truth. If your comforts are to be lasting, you must visit the well of life yourself, and draw fresh water for your own soul. Ministers may depart from the faith. The visible Church may be broken up. But he who has the Word of God written in his heart has a foundation beneath his feet which will never fail him. Honour your minister as a faithful ambassador of Christ. Esteem him very highly in love for his work’s sake. But never forget that *infallibility is not to be found in godly ministers, but in the Bible.*

The things I have mentioned are worth remembering. Let us bear them in mind, and we shall have learned one lesson from Antioch.

II. I now pass on to the second lesson that we learn from Antioch. That lesson is, *that to keep Gospel truth in the Church is of even greater importance than to keep peace.*

I suppose no man knew better the value of peace and unity than the Apostle Paul. He was the Apostle who wrote to the Corinthians about charity. He was the Apostle who said, “Be of the same mind one toward another;”—“Be at peace among yourselves;”—“Mind the same things;”—“The servant of God must not strive;”—“There is one body and there is one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” He was the Apostle who said, “I become all things to all men, that by all means I may save some.” (Rom. xii. 16; 1 Thess. v. 13; Phil. iii. 16; Eph. iv. 5; 1 Cor. ix. 22.) Yet see how he acts here! He withstands Peter to the face. He publicly rebukes him. He runs the risk of all the consequences that might follow. He takes the chance of everything that might be said by the enemies of the Church at Antioch. Above all, he writes it down for a perpetual memorial, that it never might be forgotten,—that, wherever the Gospel is preached

throughout the world, this public rebuke of an erring Apostle might be known and read of all men.

Now, why did he do this? Because he dreaded false doctrine,—because he knew that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,—because he would teach us that we ought to contend for the truth jealously, and to fear the loss of truth more than the loss of peace.

St. Paul's example is one we shall do well to remember in the present day. Many people will put up with anything in religion, if they may only have a quiet life. They have a morbid dread of what they call "controversy." They are filled with a morbid fear of what they style, in a vague way, "party spirit," though they never define clearly what party spirit is. They are possessed with a morbid desire to keep the peace, and make all things smooth and pleasant, even though it be at the expense of truth. So long as they have outward calm, smoothness, stillness, and order, they seem content to give up everything else. I believe they would have thought with Ahab that Elijah was a troubler of Israel, and would have helped the princes of Judah when they put Jeremiah in prison, to stop his mouth. I have no doubt that many of these men of whom I speak, would have thought that Paul at Antioch was a very imprudent man, and that he went too far!

I believe this is all wrong. We have no right to expect anything but the pure Gospel of Christ, unmixed and unadulterated,—the same Gospel that was taught by the Apostles,—to do good to the souls of men. I believe that to maintain this pure truth in the Church men should be ready to make any sacrifice, to hazard peace, to risk dissension, and run the chance of division. *They should no more tolerate false doctrine than they would tolerate sin.* They should withstand any adding to or taking away from the simple message of the Gospel of Christ.

For the truth's sake, our Lord Jesus Christ denounced the Pharisees, though they sat in Moses' seat, and were the appointed and authorized teachers of men. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," He says, eight times over, in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew. And who shall dare to breathe a suspicion that our Lord was wrong?

For the truth's sake, Paul withstood and blamed Peter, though a brother. Where was the use of unity when pure doctrine was gone? And who shall dare to say he was wrong?

For the truth's sake, Athanasius stood out against the world to maintain the pure doctrine about the divinity of Christ, and waged a controversy with the great majority of the professing Church. And who shall dare to say he was wrong?

For the truth's sake, Luther broke the unity of the Church in which he was born, denounced the Pope and all his ways, and laid the foundation

of a new teaching. And who shall dare to say that Luther was wrong?

For the truth's sake, Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, the English Reformers, counselled Henry VIII. and Edward VI. to separate from Rome, and to risk the consequences of division. And who shall dare to say that they were wrong?

For the truth's sake, Whitefield and Wesley, a hundred years ago, denounced the mere barren moral preaching of the clergy of their day, and went out into the highways and byways to save souls, knowing well that they would be cast out from the Church's communion. And who shall dare to say that they were wrong?

Yes! peace without truth is a false peace; it is the very peace of the devil. Unity without the Gospel is a worthless unity; it is the very unity of hell. Let us never be ensnared by those who speak kindly of it. Let us remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Think not that I came to send peace upon earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt. x. 34.) Let us remember the praise He gives to one of the Churches in the Revelation: "Thou canst not bear them which are evil. Thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." (Rev. ii. 2.) Let us remember the blame He casts upon another: "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel to teach." (Rev. ii. 20.) Never let us be guilty of sacrificing any portion of truth upon the altar of peace. Let us rather be like the Jews, who, if they found any manuscript copy of the Old Testament Scriptures incorrect in a single letter, burned the whole copy, rather than run the risk of losing one jot or tittle of the Word of God. Let us be content with nothing short of the whole Gospel of Christ.

In what way are we to make practical use of the general principles which I have just laid down? I will give my readers one simple piece of advice. I believe it is advice which deserves serious consideration.

I warn, then, everyone who loves his soul, *to be very jealous as to the preaching he regularly hears, and the place of worship he regularly attends*. He who deliberately settles down under any ministry which is positively unsound, is a very unwise man. I will never hesitate to speak my mind on this point. I know well that many think it a shocking thing for a man to forsake his parish church. I cannot see with the eyes of such people. I draw a wide distinction between teaching which is *defective* and teaching which is thoroughly *false*,—between teaching which errs on the negative side and teaching which is positively unscriptural. But I do believe, if false doctrine is unmistakably preached in a parish church, a parishioner who loves his soul is quite right in not going to that parish church. To hear unscriptural teaching fifty-two Sundays in every year is a serious thing. It is a continual dropping of slow poison into the mind. I think it almost impossible for a man wilfully to submit himself to it,

and not take harm. I see in the New Testament we are plainly told to “prove all things,” and “hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thess. v, 21.) I see in the Book of Proverbs that we are commanded to “cease to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the paths of knowledge.” (Prov. xix. 27.) If these words do not justify a man in ceasing to worship at a church, if positively false doctrine is preached in it, I know not what words can.

Does anyone mean to tell us that to attend the parish church is absolutely needful to an Englishman’s salvation? If there is such an one, let him speak out, and give us his name.—Does anyone mean to tell us that going to the parish church will save any man’s soul, if he dies unconverted and ignorant of Christ? If there is such an one, let him speak out, and give us his name.—Does anyone mean to tell us that going to the parish church will teach a man anything about Christ, or conversion, or faith, or repentance, if these subjects are hardly ever named in the parish church, and never properly explained? If there is such an one, let him speak out, and give us his name.—Does anyone mean to say that a man who repents, believes in Christ, is converted and holy, will lose his soul, because he has forsaken his parish church and learned his religion elsewhere? If there is such an one, let him speak out, and give us his name.—For my part I abhor such monstrous and extravagant ideas. I see not a jot of foundation for them in the Word of God. I trust that the number of those who deliberately hold them is exceedingly small.

There are not a few parishes in England where the religious teaching is little better than Popery. Ought the laity of such parishes to sit still, be content, and take it quietly? They ought not. And why? Because, like St. Paul, they ought to prefer truth to peace.

There are not a few parishes in England where the religious teaching is little better than morality. The distinctive doctrines of Christianity are never clearly proclaimed. Plato, or Seneca, or Confucius, or Socinus, could have taught almost as much. Ought the laity in such parishes to sit still, be content, and take it quietly? They ought not. And why? Because, like St. Paul, they ought to prefer truth to peace.

I am using strong language in dealing with this part of my subject: I know it.—I am trenching on delicate ground: I know it. I am handling matters which are generally let alone, and passed over in silence: I know it.—I say what I say from a sense of duty to the Church of which I am a minister. I believe the state of the times, and the position of the laity in some parts of England, require plain speaking. Souls are perishing, in many parishes, in ignorance. Honest members of the Church of England, in many districts, are disgusted and perplexed. This is no time for smooth

words. I am not ignorant of those magic expressions, “the parochial system, order, division, schism, unity, controversy,” and the like. I know the cramping, silencing influence which they seem to exercise on some minds. I too have considered those expressions calmly and deliberately, and on each of them I am prepared to speak my mind.

(a) The *parochial system* of England is an admirable thing in theory. Let it only be well administered, and worked by truly spiritual ministers, and it is calculated to confer the greatest blessings on the nation. But it is useless to expect attachment to the parish church, when the minister of the parish is ignorant of the Gospel or a lover of the world. In such a case we must never be surprised if men forsake their parish church, and seek truth wherever truth is to be found. If the parochial minister does not preach the Gospel and live the Gospel, the conditions on which he claims the attention of his parishioners are *virtually violated*, and his claim to be heard is at an end. It is absurd to expect the head of a family to endanger the souls of his children, as well as his own, for the sake of “parochial order.” There is no mention of parishes in the Bible, and we have no right to require men to live and die in ignorance, in order that they may be able to say at last, “I always attended my parish church.”

(b) *Divisions and separations* are most objectionable in religion. They weaken the cause of true Christianity. They give occasion to the enemies of all godliness to blaspheme. But before we blame people for them, we must be careful that we lay the blame *where it is deserved*. False doctrine and heresy are even worse than schism. If people separate themselves from teaching which is positively false and unscriptural, they ought to be praised rather than reprov'd. In such cases separation is a virtue and not a sin. It is easy to make sneering remarks about “itching ears,” and “love of excitement;” but it is not so easy to convince a plain reader of the Bible that it is his duty to hear false doctrine every Sunday, when by a little exertion he can hear truth. The old saying must never be forgotten, “He is the schismatic who causes the schism.”

(e) *Unity, quiet, and order* among professing Christians are mighty blessings. They give strength, beauty, and efficiency to the cause of Christ. But even gold may be bought too dear. Unity which is obtained by the sacrifice of truth is worth nothing. It is not the unity which pleases God. The Church of Rome boasts loudly of a unity which does not deserve the name. It is unity which is obtained by taking away the Bible from the people, by gagging private judgment, by encouraging ignorance, by forbidding men to think for themselves. Like the exterminating warriors of old, the Church of Rome “makes a solitude and calls it peace.” There is quiet and stillness enough in the grave, but it is not the quiet of health, but of death. It was the false prophets who cried “Peace,” when

there was no peace.

(d) *Controversy* in religion is a hateful thing. It is hard enough to fight the devil, the world, and the flesh, without private differences in our own camp. But there is one thing which is even worse than controversy, and that is false doctrine tolerated, allowed, and permitted without protest or molestation. It was controversy that won the battle of Protestant Reformation. If the views that some men hold were correct, it is plain we never ought to have had any Reformation at all! For the sake of peace, we ought to have gone on worshipping the Virgin, and bowing down to images and relics to this very day! Away with such trifling! There are times when controversy is not only a duty but a benefit. Give me the mighty thunderstorm rather than the pestilential malaria. The one walks in darkness and poisons us in silence, and we are never safe. The other frightens and alarms for a little season. But it is soon over, and it clears the air. It is a plain Scriptural duty to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3.)

I am quite aware that the things I have said are exceedingly distasteful to many minds. I believe many are content with teaching which is not the whole truth, and fancy it will be “all the same” in the end. I am sorry for them. I am convinced that nothing but *the whole truth* is likely, as a general rule, to do good to souls. I am satisfied that those who wilfully put up with anything short of the whole truth, will find at last that their souls have received much damage. Three things there are which men never ought to trifle with,—a little poison, a little false doctrine, and a little sin.

I am quite aware that when a man expresses such opinions as those I have just brought forward, there are many ready to say, “He is no Churchman.” I hear such accusations unmoved. The day of judgment will show who were the true friends of the Church of England and who were not. I have learned in the last thirty-two years that if a clergyman leads a quiet life, lets alone the unconverted part of the world, and preaches so as to offend none and edify none, he will be called by many “a good Churchman.” And I have also learned that if a man studies the Articles and Homilies, labours continually for the conversion of souls, adheres closely to the great principles of the Reformation, bears a faithful testimony against Popery, and preaches as Jewel and Latimer used to preach, he will probably be thought a firebrand and “troubler of Israel,” and called no Churchman at all! But I can see plainly that they are not the best Churchmen who talk most loudly about Churchmanship. I remember that none cried “Treason” so loudly as Athaliah. (2 Kings xi. 14.) Yet she was a traitor herself. I have observed that many who once talked most about Churchmanship have ended by forsaking the Church

of England, and going over to Rome. Let men say what they will. *They are the truest friends of the Church of England who labour most for the preservation of truth.*

I lay these things before the readers of this paper, and invite their serious attention to them. I charge them never to forget that truth is of more importance to a Church than peace. I ask them to be ready to carry out the principles I have laid down, and to contend zealously, if needs be, for the truth. If we do this, we shall have learned something from Antioch.

III. But I pass on to the third lesson from Antioch. That lesson is, that *there is no doctrine about which we ought to be so jealous as justification by faith without the deeds of the law.*

The proof of this lesson stands out most prominently in the passage of Scripture which heads this paper. What one article of the faith had the Apostle Peter denied at Antioch? None.—What doctrine had he publicly preached which was false? None.—What, then, had he done? He had done this. After once keeping company with the believing Gentiles as “fellow-heirs and partakers of the promise of Christ in the Gospel” (Ephes. iii. 6), he suddenly became shy of them and withdrew himself. He seemed to think they were less holy and acceptable to God than the circumcised Jews. He seemed to imply that the believing Gentiles were in a lower state than they who had kept the ceremonies of the law of Moses. He seemed, in a word, to add something to simple *faith* as needful to give man an interest in Jesus Christ. He seemed to reply to the question, “What shall I do to be saved?” not merely “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” but “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, *and be circumcised*, and keep the ceremonies of the law.”

Such conduct as this the Apostle Paul would not endure for a moment. Nothing so moved him as the idea of adding anything to the Gospel of Christ. “I withstood him,” he says, “to the face.” He not only rebuked him, but he recorded the whole transaction fully, when by inspiration of the Spirit he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians.

I invite special attention to this point. I ask men to observe the remarkable jealousy which the Apostle Paul shows about this doctrine, and to consider the point about which such a stir was made. Let us mark in this passage of Scripture the immense importance of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. Let us learn here what mighty reasons the Reformers of the Church of England had for calling it, in our Eleventh Article, “a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort.”

(a) This is the doctrine which is *essentially necessary to our own personal comfort*. No man on earth is a real child of God, and a saved soul, till he sees and receives salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. No man will

ever have solid peace and true assurance, until he embraces with all his heart the doctrine that “we are accounted righteous before God for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works and deservings.” One reason, I believe, why so many professors in this day are tossed to and fro, enjoy little comfort, and feel little peace, is their ignorance on this point. They do not see clearly justification by faith without the deeds of the law.

(b) This is the doctrine which *the great enemy of souls hates, and labours to overthrow*. He knows that it turned the world upside down at the first beginning of the Gospel, in the days of the Apostles. He knows that it turned the work upside down again at the time of the Reformation. He is therefore always tempting men to reject it. He is always trying to seduce Churches and ministers to deny or obscure its truth. No wonder that the Council of Trent directed its chief attack against this doctrine, and pronounced it accursed and heretical. No wonder that many who think themselves learned in these days denounce the doctrine as theological jargon, and say that all “earnest-minded people” are justified by Christ, whether they have faith or not! The plain truth is that the doctrine is all gall and wormwood to unconverted hearts. It just meets the wants of the awakened soul. But the proud unhumbled man who knows not his own sin, and sees not his own weakness, cannot receive its truth.

(c) This is the doctrine, the *absence of which accounts for half the errors of the Roman Catholic Church*. The beginning of half the unscriptural doctrines of Popery may be traced up to rejection of justification by faith. No Romish teacher, if he is faithful to his Church, can say to an anxious sinner, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” He cannot do it without additions and explanations, which completely destroy the good news. He dare not give the Gospel medicine, without adding something which destroys its efficacy, and neutralizes its power. Purgatory, penance, priestly absolution, the intercession of saints, the worship of the Virgin, and many other man-made services of Popery, all spring from this source. They are all rotten props to support weary consciences. But they are rendered necessary by the denial of justification by faith.

(d) This is the doctrine which is *absolutely essential to a minister’s success among his people*. Obscurity on this point spoils all. Absence of clear statements about justification will prevent the utmost zeal doing good. There may be much that is pleasing and nice in a minister’s sermons, much about Christ and sacramental union with Him,—much about self-denial,—much about humility,—much about charity. But all this will profit little, if his trumpet gives an uncertain sound about justification by faith without the deeds of the law.

(e) This is the doctrine which is *absolutely essential to the prosperity*

of a Church. No Church is really in a healthy state, in which this doctrine is not prominently brought forward. A Church may have good forms and regularly ordained ministers, and the sacraments properly administered, but a Church will not see conversion of souls going on under its pulpits, when this doctrine is not plainly preached. Its schools may be found in every parish. Its ecclesiastical buildings may strike the eye all over the land. But there will be no blessing from God on that Church, unless justification by faith is proclaimed from its pulpits. Sooner or later its candlestick will be taken away.

Why have the Churches of Africa and the East fallen to their present state?—Had they not bishops? They had.—Had they not forms and liturgies? They had.—Had they not synods and councils? They had.—But they cast away the doctrine of justification by faith. They lost sight of that mighty truth, and so they fell.

Why did our own Church do so little in the last century, and why did the Independents, and Methodists, and Baptists do so much more?—Was it that their system was better than ours? No.—Was it that our Church was not so well adapted to meet the wants of lost souls? No.—But their ministers preached justification by faith, and our ministers, in too many cases, did not preach the doctrine at all.

Why do so many English people go to Dissenting chapels in the present day? Why do we so often see a splendid Gothic parish church as empty of worshippers as a barn in July, and a little plain brick building, called a meeting-house, filled to suffocation? Is it that people in general have an abstract dislike to Episcopacy, the Prayer-book, the surplice, and the establishment? Not at all! The simple reason is, in the vast majority of cases, that people do not like preaching in which justification by faith is not fully proclaimed. When they cannot hear it in the parish church they will seek it elsewhere. No doubt there are exceptions. No doubt there are places where a long course of neglect has thoroughly disgusted people with the Church of England, so that they will not even hear truth from its ministers. But I believe, as a general rule, when the parish church is empty and the meeting-house full, it will be found on inquiry that *there is a cause.*

If these things be so, the Apostle Paul might well be jealous for the truth, and withstand Peter to the face. He might well maintain that anything ought to be sacrificed, rather than endanger the doctrine of justification in the Church of Christ. He saw with a prophetic eye coming things. He left us all an example that we should do well to follow. Whatever we tolerate, let us never allow any injury to be done to that blessed doctrine, that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Let us always beware of any teaching which either directly or indirectly obscures justification by faith. All religious systems which put anything

between the heavy-laden sinner and Jesus Christ the Saviour, except simple faith, are dangerous and unscriptural. All systems which make out faith to be anything complicated, anything but a simple, childlike dependence,—the hand which receives the soul’s medicine from the physician,—are unsafe and poisonous systems. All systems which cast discredit on the simple Protestant doctrine which broke the power of Rome, carry about with them a plague-spot, and are dangerous to souls.

Baptism is a sacrament ordained by Christ Himself, be used with reverence and respect by all professing Christians. When it is used rightly, worthily, and with faith, it is capable of being the instrument of mighty blessings to the soul. But when people are taught that *all* who are baptized are as a matter of course born again, and that *all* baptized persons should be addressed as “children of God,” I believe their souls are in great danger. Such teaching about baptism appears to me to overthrow the doctrine of justification by faith. They only are children of God who have faith in Christ Jesus. And all men have not faith.

The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament ordained by Christ Himself, and intended for the edification and refreshment of true believers. But when people are taught that all persons ought to come to the Lord’s Table, whether they have faith or not; and that all alike receive Christ’s body and blood who receive the bread and wine, I believe their souls are in great danger. Such teaching appears to me to darken the doctrine of justification by faith. No man eats Christ’s body and drinks Christ’s blood except the justified man. And none are justified until they believe.

Membership of the Church of England is a great privilege. No visible Church on earth, in my opinion, offers so many advantages to its members, when rightly administered. But when people are taught that because they are members of the Church, they are as a matter of course members of Christ, I believe their souls are in great danger. Such teaching appears to me to overthrow the doctrine of justification by faith. They only are joined to Christ who believe. And all men do not believe.

Whenever we hear teaching which obscures or contradicts justification by faith, we may be sure there is a screw loose somewhere. We should watch against such teaching, and be upon our guard. Once let a man get wrong about justification, and he will bid a long farewell to comfort, to peace, to lively hope, to anything like assurance in his Christianity. An error here is a worm at the root.

(1) In conclusion, let me first of all ask everyone who reads this paper, to arm himself with a thorough *knowledge of the written Word of God*. Unless we do this we are at the mercy of any false teacher. We shall not see through the mistakes of an erring Peter. We shall not be able to imitate

the faithfulness of a courageous Paul. An ignorant laity will always be the bane of a Church. A Bible-reading laity may save a Church from ruin. Let us read the Bible regularly, daily, and with fervent prayer, and become familiar with its contents. Let us receive nothing, believe nothing, follow nothing, which is not in the Bible, nor can be proved by the Bible. Let our rule of faith, our touch-stone of all teaching, be the written Word of God.

(2) In the next place, let me recommend every member of the Church of England to make himself acquainted with *the Thirty-nine Articles of his own Church*. They are to be found at the end of most Prayer-books. They will abundantly repay an attentive reading. They are the true standard by which Churchmanship is to be tried, next to the Bible. They are the test by which Churchmen should prove the teaching of their ministers, if they want to know whether it is “Church teaching” or not. I deeply lament the ignorance of systematic Christianity which prevails among many who attend the services of the Church of England. It would be well if such books as Archbishop Usher’s *Body of Divinity* were more known and studied than they are. If Dean Newell’s Catechism had ever been formally accredited as a formulary of the Church of England, many of the heresies of the last twenty years could never have lived for a day.² But unhappily many persons really know no more about the true doctrines of their own communion, than the heathen or Mahometans. It is useless to expect the laity of the Church of England to be zealous for the maintenance of true doctrine, unless they know what their own Church has defined true doctrine to be.

(3) In the next place, let me entreat all who read this paper to be always *ready to contend for the faith of Christ*, if needful. I recommend no one to foster a controversial spirit. I want no man to be like Goliath, going up and down, saying, “Give me a man to fight with.” Always feeding upon controversy is poor work indeed. It is like feeding upon bones. But I do say that no love of false peace should prevent us striving jealously against false doctrine, and seeking to promote true doctrine wherever we possibly can. True Gospel in the pulpit, true Gospel in every religious society we support, true Gospel in the books we read, true Gospel in the friends we keep company with,—let this be our aim, and never let us be ashamed to let men see that it is so.

(4) In the next place, let me entreat all who read this paper *to keep a jealous watch over their own hearts* in these controversial times. There is much need of this caution. In the heat of the battle we are apt to forget our own inner man. Victory in argument is not always victory over the world

² Dean Nowell was Prolocutor of the Convocation which drew up the Thirty-nine Articles in the form in which we now have them, in the year 1562. His Catechism was approved and allowed by Convocation.

or victory over the devil. Let the meekness of St. Peter in taking a reproof, be as much our example as the boldness of St. Paul in reproof. Happy is the Christian who can call the person who rebukes him faithfully, a “beloved brother.” (2 Peter iii. 15.) Let us strive to be holy in all manner of conversation, and not least in our tempers. Let us labour to maintain an uninterrupted communion with the Father and with the Son, and to keep up constant habits of private prayer and Bible-reading. Thus we shall be armed for the battle of life, and have the sword of the Spirit well fitted to our hand when the day of temptation comes.

(5) In the last place, let me entreat all members of the Church of England who know what real praying is, *to pray daily for the Church to which they belong*. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may be poured out upon it, and that its candlestick may not be taken away. Let us pray for those parishes in which the Gospel is now not preached, that the darkness may pass away, and the true light shine in them. Let us pray for those ministers who now neither know nor preach the truth, that God may take away the veil from their hearts, and show them a more excellent way. Nothing is impossible. The Apostle Paul was once a persecuting Pharisee; Luther was once an unenlightened monk; Bishop Latimer was once a bigoted Papist; Thomas Scott was once thoroughly opposed to evangelical truth. Nothing, I repeat, is impossible. The Spirit can make clergymen preach that Gospel which they now labour to destroy. Let us therefore be instant in prayer.

I commend the matters contained in this paper to serious attention. Let us ponder them well in our hearts. Let us tarry them out in our daily practice. Let us do this, and we shall have learned something from the story of St. Peter at Antioch.