

HOME TRUTHS

BEING MISCELLANEOUS ADDRESSES AND TRACTS,

BY THE

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*ARRANGED, REVISED, AND CORRECTED SPECIALLY
FOR THIS EDITION.*

FOURTH SERIES.

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare
himself to the battle.” (*1 Cor. xiv. 8.*)

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What is the Church?

EPHESIANS V. XXXII.

“ I speak concerning Christ, and the Church.”

Reader,

There is hardly any subject in religion which is so much misunderstood as the subject of the “Church.” There is probably no misunderstanding which has done more harm to professing Christians than the misunderstanding of this subject.

There is hardly any word which is used in such a variety of meanings, as the word “Church.”¹ It is a word that we hear constantly used, and yet we cannot help observing that different people use it in different senses. The English politician in our days talks of “the Church.” What does he mean? You will generally find he means the Episcopal Church established in his own country.—The Roman Catholic talks of “the Church.” What does he mean? He means the Church of Rome, and tells you that there is no other Church in the world except his own.—The Dissenter talks of “the Church.” What does he mean? He means the communicants of that chapel of which he is a member.—The members of the Church of England talk of “the Church.” What do they mean? One means the building in which he worships on a Sunday. Another means the clergy,—and when anyone is ordained, tells you that he has gone “into the Church.” A third has some vague notions about what he is pleased to call apostolical succession, and hints mysteriously that the Church is made up of Christians who are governed by Bishops, and of none beside. There is no denying these things. They are all patent and notorious facts. And they all help to explain the assertion with which I started,—that there is no subject so much misunderstood as that of the “Church.”

Reader, I believe that to have clear ideas about the Church is of the first importance in the present day. I believe that mistakes on this point are one grand cause of the religious delusions into which so many fall. I wish to call your attention to that great primary meaning in which the word “Church” is used in the New Testament. I want to clear the subject of that misty vague-

¹ There seem to be four meanings of the word Church in the New Testament. 1.—It is applied to the whole body of the elect. (Heb. xii. 23.) 2.—It is applied to the baptized Christians of a particular place, or district. (Acts viii. 1.) 3.—It is applied to a small number of professing Christians, in a particular family. (Rom. xvi. 5.) 4.—It is applied to the whole body of baptized people throughout the world, both good and bad. (1 Cor. xii. 28.) In the fourth sense the word is used very seldom indeed. The first and second senses are the most common.

ness by which it is surrounded in so many minds. I consider it was a most true saying of Bishop Jewell the reformer, “*There never was anything yet so absurd or so wicked, but it might seem easy to be covered and defended by the name of the Church.*”² (Jewell’s Apol. Sect. xx.)

I. Let me then show you, first of all, *what is that one true Church, out of which no man can be saved.*

II. Let me show you, in the second place, *what is the position and value of all visible professing Churches.*

III. And let me, in the third place, draw from the subject *some practical counsels and cautions for the times in which we live.*

I. First of all let me show you *that one true Church, out of which no man can be saved.*

There is a Church, outside of which there is no salvation,—a Church to which a man must belong, or be lost eternally. I lay this down without hesitation or reserve. I say it as strongly and as confidently as the strongest advocate of the Church of Rome. But what is this Church? Where is this Church? What are the marks by which this Church may be known? This is the grand question.

The one true Church is well described in the communion service of the Church of England, as “the mystical body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people.” It is composed of all believers in the Lord Jesus.—It is made up of all God’s elect,—of all converted men and women,—of all true Christians. In whomsoever we can discern the election of God the Father, the sprinkling of the blood of God the Son, the sanctifying work of God the Spirit, in that person we see a member of Christ’s true Church.³

² “The adversaries of the truth defend many a false error under the name of the holy Church.

“Beware of deceit, when thou hearest the name of the Church. The verity is then assaulted. They call the Church of the devil the holy Church many times.”—*Bishop Hooper*. 1547. *Parker Edit.* p. 83, 84.

³ “The Church is the body of Christ.—It is the whole number and society of the faithful, whom God through Christ hath before the beginning of time appointed to everlasting life.”—*Dean Nowell’s Catechism, sanctioned by convocation*. 1572.

“That Church which is Christ’s body, and of which Christ is the head, standeth only of living stones, and true Christians, not only outwardly in name and title, but inwardly in heart and in truth.”—*Bishop Ridley*. 1566. *Parker Edit.* p. 126.

It is a Church of which all the members have the same marks. They are all born again of the Spirit.—They all possess “repentance towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” and holiness of life and conversation. They all hate sin, and they all love Christ. They worship differently, and after various fashions. Some worship with a form of prayer, and some with none. Some worship kneeling, and some standing. But they all worship with one heart.—They are all led by one Spirit.—They all build upon one foundation.—They all draw their religion from one single book.—They are all joined to one great centre, that is Jesus Christ. They all, even now, can say with one heart, “Hallelujah;”—and they all can respond with one heart and voice, “Amen and amen.”

It is a Church which is dependent upon no ministers upon earth, however much it values those who preach the Gospel to its members. The life of its members does not hang on Church-membership, and baptism, and the Lord’s supper, although they highly value these things, when they are to be had. But it has only one Great Head,—one Shepherd,—one chief Bishop,—and that is Jesus Christ. He alone, by His Spirit, admits the members of this Church, though ministers may show the door. Till He opens the door, no man on earth can open it,—neither bishops, nor presbyters, nor convocations, nor synods. Once let a man repent and believe the Gospel, and that moment he becomes a member of this Church. Like the penitent thief, he may have no opportunity of being baptized. But he has that which is far bet-

“Unto this Church pertain so many as from the beginning of the world until this time have unfeignedly believed in Christ, or shall believe unto the very end of the world. Against this Church the gates of hell shall not prevail.”—*Thomas Becon, Chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer. 1550. Parker Edit. Vol. i. p. 294.*

“The holy catholic Church is nothing else but a company of saints. To this Church pertain all they that since the beginning of the world have been saved, and that shall be saved unto the end thereof.”—*Bishop Coverdale. 1550. Parker Edit. p. 461.*

“The Catholic Church which is called the body of Christ, consists of such as are truly sanctified, and united to Christ by an internal alliance, so that no wicked person, or unbeliever, is a member of this body, solely by the external profession of faith and participation of the sacraments.”—*Bishop Davenant on Coloss. i. 18. 1627.*

“They who are indeed holy and obedient to Christ’s laws of faith and manners, these are truly and perfectly the Church. These are the Church of God in the eyes and heart of God. For the Church of God is the body of Christ. But the mere profession of Christianity makes no man a member of Christ,—nothing but a new creature, nothing but a faith working by love, and keeping the commandments of God.”—*Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s Dissuasive Popery, part II. B. 1. Sect. I. 1660.*

“That Church which is Christ’s mystical body consisteth of none but only true Israelites, true sons of Abraham, true servants and saints of God.”—*Hooker, Eccles. Polity. B, III. I. 1600.*

ter than any water-baptism, the baptism of the Spirit.—He may not be able to receive the bread and wine in the Lord’s supper,—but he eats Christ’s body and drinks Christ’s blood by faith every day he lives, and no minister on earth can prevent him.—He may be excommunicated by ordained men, and cut off from the outward ordinances of the professing church,—but all the ordained men in the world cannot shut him out of the true Church.⁴

It is a Church whose existence does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, chapels, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates, or any act or favour whatsoever from the hand of man. It has often lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it. It has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have been its friends. But its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and His Spirit, and so long as they are with it, the Church cannot die.

This is the Church to which the titles of present honour and privilege, and the promises of future glory especially belong.⁵ This is the body of Christ.—

⁴ “A man may be a true and visible member of the Holy Catholic Church, and yet be no actual member of any visible Church.

“Many there be, or may be, in most ages, which are no members of the visible Church, and yet better members of the true Church, than the members of the Church visible for the present are.”—*Jackson on the Church*. 1670.

⁵ “Whatsoever we read in Scripture concerning the endless love, and saving mercy which God showeth towards his Church, the only proper subject thereof is this Church, which we properly term the mystical body of Christ.”—*Hooker. Eccles. Pol. B. III* 1. 1600.

“If any will agree to call the universality of professors by the title of the Church, they may if they will. Any word by consent may signify anything. But if by a Church we mean that society which is really joined to Christ, which hath received the Holy Ghost, which is heir of the promises and of the good things of God, which is the body of which Christ is the head, then the invisible part of the visible Church, that is the true servants of Christ only are the Church.”—*Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s Dissuasive from Popery*. 1660.

“The Catholic Church in the prime sense consists only of such men as are actual and indissoluble members of Christ’s mystical body, or of such as have the catholic faith not only sown in their brains and understandings, but thoroughly rooted in their hearts.—All the glorious prerogatives, titles, or promises, annexed to the church in Scripture, are in the first place and principally meant of Christ’s live mystical body.”—*Jackson on the Church*. 1670.

“What is meant in the Creed by the Catholic Church? That whole universal company of the elect, that ever were, are, or shall be gathered together in one body, knit together in one faith, under one head, Jesus Christ.”—*Archbishop Usher*. 1650.

“In the Creed we do believe in the Church, but not in this or that Church, but the Catholic Church,—which is no particular assembly of men, much less the Roman synagogue, tied to any one place, but the body of the elect which hath existed from the beginning of the world, and shall exist unto the end.”—*Whitaker’s Disputations*. 1610. *Parker Edit., vol. I*.

This is the Bride.—This is the Lamb’s Wife.—This is the flock of Christ.—This is the household of faith and family of God.—This is God’s building, God’s foundation, and the temple of the Holy Ghost.—This is the Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.—This is the royal priesthood, the chosen generation, the peculiar people, the purchased possession, the habitation of God, the light of the world, the salt and the wheat of the earth. This is the “holy catholic Church” of the Apostles’ Creed.—This is the “one catholic and Apostolic Church” of the Nicene Creed.—This is that Church to which the Lord Jesus promises, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” and to which He says, “I am with you always even unto the end of the world.” (Matt. xvi. 18; xxviii. 20.)

This is the only Church which possesses true *unity*. Its members are entirely agreed on all the weightier matters of religion, for they are all taught by one Spirit. About God, and Christ, and the Spirit, and sin, and their own hearts, and faith, and repentance, and the necessity of holiness, and the value of the Bible, and the importance of prayer, and the resurrection, and judgment to come,—about all these points they see eye to eye. Take three or four of them, strangers to one another, from the remotest corners of the earth. Examine them separately on these points. You will find them all of one mind.⁶

This is the only Church which possesses true *sanctity*. Its members are all holy. They are not merely holy by profession, holy in name, and holy in the judgment of charity. They are all holy in act, and deed, and reality, and life, and truth. They are all more or less conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. They are all more or less like their great Head. No unholy man belongs to this Church.⁷

This is the only Church which is truly *catholic*. It is not the Church of any one nation or people. Its members are to be found in every part of the

p. 299.

“The Holy Catholic Church, a number that serve God here, and enjoy Him in eternity.—Universal, diffused through the various ages, places, and nations of the world.—Holy, washed in the blood of Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit.”—*Archbishop Leighton on the Creed*. 1680.

⁶ “To the mystical and invisible Church belongs peculiarly that unity which is often attributed unto the Church.”—“This is the society of those for whom Christ did pray that they might be one.”—*Barrow on the unity of the Church*. 1670.

⁷ “To this Holy Catholic Church, which forms the mystical body of Christ, we deny that the ungodly, hypocrites, or any, belong, who are not partakers of spiritual life, and are void of inward faith, charity, and holiness. The most learned Augustine has denied it as well, giving it as his opinion that all such should be ranked among the members of antichrist.”—*Bishop Davenant’s Determinations*. 1634. vol. ii. p. 475.

world where the Gospel is received and believed. It is not confined within the limits of any one country, nor pent up within the pale of any particular forms or outward government. In it there is no difference between Jew and Greek, black man and white, Episcopalian and Presbyterian,—but faith in Christ is all. Its members will be gathered from north, and south, and east, and west, in the last day, and will be of every name, and denomination, and kindred, and people, and tongue,—but all one in Christ Jesus.

This is the only Church which is truly *apostolic*. It is built on the foundation laid by the apostles, and holds the doctrines which they preached. The two grand objects at which its members aim, are apostolic faith and apostolic practice; and they consider the man who talks of following the apostles without possessing these two things, to be no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.⁸

This is the only Church which is *certain to endure unto the end*. Nothing can altogether overthrow and destroy it. Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, burned.—But the true Church is never altogether extinguished. It rises again from its afflictions.—It lives on through fire and water.—When crushed in one land it springs up in another. The Pharaohs, the Herods, the Neros, the Julians, the Diocletian, the bloody Marys, the Charles the Ninths, have laboured in vain to put down this Church. They slay their thousands, and then pass away and go to their own place. The true Church out-lives them all, and sees them buried each in his turn. It is an anvil that has broken many a hammer in this world, and will break many a hammer still. It is a bush which is often burning, and yet is not consumed.⁹

This is the only Church *of which no one member can perish*. Once enrolled in the lists of this Church, sinners are safe for eternity.—They are never cast away. The election of God the Father,—the continual intercession of God the Son,—the daily renewing and sanctifying power of God the Holy

⁸ “They are the successors of the Apostles, that succeed in virtue, holiness, truth, and so forth; not they that sit upon the same stool.”—*Bishop Babington*. 1615. *Folio edition*; p. 307.

⁹ “The Holy Catholic Church is built upon a rock, so that not even the gates of hell can prevail against it. This is the privilege of the elect and believers. All the ungodly and hypocrites are built upon the sand, are overcome by Satan, and are sunk at last into hell. How then can they form a part of the mystical body of Christ, which admits not condemned members? “—*Bishop Davenant 's Determinations*. 1634. *vol. ii. p. 478*.

“The preservation of the Church is a continuing miracle. It resembles Daniel’s safety among the hungry lions, but prolonged from one age to another. The ship wherein Christ is may be weather-beaten, but shall not perish.”—*Archbishop Leighton on the Creed*.” 1680.

Ghost, surround and fence them in like a garden enclosed. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall ever be broken. Not one lamb of Christ's flock shall ever be plucked out of His hand.¹⁰

This is the Church *which does the work of Christ upon earth*. Its members are a little flock, and few in number compared with the children of the world:—one or two here, and two or three there,—a few in this parish, and a few in that. But these are they who shake the universe.—These are they who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers.—These are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled.—These are the life-blood of a country,—the shield, the defence, the stay and the support of any nation to which they belong.

This is the Church *which shall be truly glorious at the end*. When all earthly glory is passed away, then shall this Church be presented without spot before God the Father's throne. Thrones, principalities, and powers upon earth shall come to nothing.—Dignities and offices and endowments, shall all pass away.—But the Church of the first-born shall shine as the stars at the last, and be presented with joy before the Father's throne, in the day of Christ's appearing. When the Lord's jewels are made up, and the manifestation of the sons of God takes place, episcopacy, and presbyterianism, and congregationalism will not be mentioned. One Church only will be named, and that is the Church of the elect.

This is the Church *for which a true minister of the Lord Jesus Christ's Gospel chiefly labours*. What is it to a true minister to fill the building in which he preaches? What is it to him to see communicants come up more and more to his table? What is it to him to see his party grow? It is all nothing, unless he can see men and women "born again,"—unless he can see souls converted and brought to Christ,—unless he can see here one, and there another, "coming out from the world," "taking up the cross and following Christ," and thus increasing the numbers of the one true Church.

Reader, *this is the Church to which a man must belong, if he would be saved*. Till you belong to this, you are nothing better than a lost soul. You may have the form, the husk, the skin, and the shell of religion, but you have not got the substance and the life. Yes! you may have countless outward privileges,—you may enjoy great light and knowledge, and opportunities;—but if you do not belong to the body of Christ, your light, and knowledge, and privileges, and opportunities will not save your soul. Alas! for the ignorance that prevails on this point! Men fancy if they join this Church or that Church, and become communicants, and go through certain forms, that all

¹⁰ "Of all such as are effectually called, or authentically admitted into this society, none will revolt again to the synagogue of Satan, or to the world."—*Jackson on the Church*. 1670.

must be right with their souls. It is an utter delusion. It is a gross mistake. All were not Israel who were called Israel, and all are not members of Christ's body who profess themselves Christians. Take notice, you may be a staunch Episcopalian, or Presbyterian, or Independent, or Baptist, or Wesleyan, or Plymouth Brother, and yet not belong to the true Church. And if you do not, it will be better at last if you had never been born.¹¹

II. Let me pass on now to the second point I proposed to speak of. Let me explain *the position and value of all visible professing Churches*.

No careful reader of the Bible can fail to observe that many separate Churches are mentioned in the New Testament. At Corinth, at Ephesus, at Thessalonica, at Antioch, at Smyrna, at Sardis, at Laodicea, and several other places,—at each we find a distinct body of professing Christians,—a body of people baptized in Christ's name, and professing the faith of Christ's Gospel. And these bodies of people we find spoken of as “the Churches” of the places which are named. Thus St. Paul says to the Corinthians, “But we have no such custom, neither the Churches of Christ.” (1 Cor. xi. 16) So also we read of the Churches of Judea, the Churches of Syria, the Churches of Galatia, the Churches of Asia, the Churches of Macedonia. In each case the expression means the bodies of baptized Christians in the countries mentioned.

Now, we have but little information given us in the New Testament about these Churches;—but that little is very clear and plain, so far as it goes.

We know for one thing, that these Churches were all mixed bodies. They consisted not only of converted persons, but of many unconverted persons also. They contained not only believers, but members who, fell into gross errors and mistakes, both of faith and practice. This is clear from the account we have of the Churches at Corinth, at Ephesus, and at Sardis. Of Sardis the Lord Jesus Himself says, that there were “a few,” a few only, in it, who had not “defiled their garments.” (Rev. iii. 4.)

We know, moreover, that even in the Apostle's times Churches received plain warnings, that they might perish and pass away altogether. To the Romans the threat was held out that they should be “cut off;” to the Ephesians that their “candlestick should be taken away;” to the Laodiceans, that they should be utterly rejected. (Rom. xi. 22. Rev. xxv. 3, 16.)

We know, moreover, that in all these Churches, there was public worship, preaching, reading of the Scriptures, prayer, praise, discipline, order,

¹¹ “We insist that Christians do certainly become members of particular churches,—such as the Roman, Anglican, or Gallican, by outward profession,—yet do not become true members of the Holy Catholic Church, which we believe, unless they are sanctified by the inward gift of grace, and are united to Christ, the Head, by the bond of the Spirit.”—*Bishop Davenant's Determinations*. 1634. vol. ii. p. 474.

government, the ministry, and the sacraments. What kind of governments some churches had it is impossible to say positively. We read of officers, who were called angels,—of bishops, of deacons, of elders, of pastors, of teachers, of evangelists, of prophets, of helps, of governments. (1 Cor. xii. 28. Ephes. iv. 11. 1 Phil. i. 1. 1 Tim. iii. Rev. i. 20.) All these are mentioned. But the particulars about most of these officers are kept from us by the Spirit of God. As to the standard of doctrine and practice in the Churches we have the fullest and most distinct information. On these points the language of the New Testament is clear and un mistakeable. But as to government and outward ceremonies, the information given to us is strikingly small. The contrast between Churches of the Old Testament and the New, in this respect, is very great. In the one we find little comparatively about doctrine, but much about forms and ordinances. In the other we have much about doctrine, and little about forms. In the Old Testament Church the minutest directions were given for the performance of every part of the ceremonies of religion. In the New Testament Church we find the ceremonies expressly abolished, as no longer needed after Christ's death, and nothing hardly except a few general principles supplying their place. The New Testament Churches have got no book of Leviticus. Their two chief principles seem to be, "Let all things be done decently and in order,—let all things be done unto edification." (1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40.) But as to the application of these general principles, it seems to have been left to each particular Church to decide.¹²

We know finally that the work begun by the missionary preaching of the apostles, was carried on through the instrumentality of the professing Churches. It was through their public assemblies that God converted sinners and built up saints. Mixed and imperfect as these Churches plainly were, within their pale were to be found nearly all the existing believers and members of the body of Christ. Everything in the New Testament leads us

¹² "I find no one certain and perfect kind of government prescribed or commanded in the Scriptures to the Church of Christ."

"I do deny that the Scriptures do express particularly everything that is to be done in the Church, or that it doth put down any one sort of form and kind of government of the Church to be perpetual for all times, persons, and places, without alteration."—*Archbishop Whitgift*. 1674. *Folio Edition*. p. 84.

"I for my part do confess that in revolving the Scriptures, I could never find but that God hath left the like liberty to the Church government, as He hath done to the civil government; to be varied according to time, place, and accidents. So likewise in Church matters, the substance of doctrine is immutable, and so are the general rules of government. But for rites, and ceremonies, and the particular hierarchies, policies, and discipline of the Churches, they be left at large."—*Lord Bacon's Works*. Vol. 7. page 68.

to suppose that there could have been few believers, if any, who were not members of some one or other of the professing Churches, scattered up and down the world.

Such is about the whole of the information the New Testament gives us concerning visible Churches in the apostolic times. How shall we use this information? What shall we say of all the visible Churches in our own time? We live in days when there are many Churches;—the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Church of Ireland, the Church of Rome, the Greek Church, the Syrian Church, the Armenian Church, the Lutheran Church, the Genevan Church, and many others. We have Episcopalian Churches. We have Presbyterian Churches. We have Independent Churches. In what manner shall we speak of them? Let me put down a few general principles, but go no further.¹³

For one thing, no visible Church on earth has a right to say, “We are the true Church, and except men belong to our communion they cannot be saved.” No Church whatever has a right to say that;—whether it be the Church of Rome, the Church of Scotland, or the Church of England;—whether it be an Episcopalian Church, a Presbyterian, or an Independent. Where is the text in the Bible that ties admission into the kingdom of God to the membership of anyone particular visible Church upon earth?—I say confidently, not one.

Furthermore, no visible church has a right to say, “We alone have the true form of worship. We alone have the true Church government,—the true way of administering the sacraments,—and the true manner of offering up united prayer; and all others are completely wrong.” No church, I repeat, has a right to say anything of the kind. Where can such assertions be proved by Scripture? What one plain, positive word of revelation can men bring forward in proof of any such affirmations? I say confidently, not one. There is not a text in the Bible which expressly commands Churches to have one special form of government, and expressly forbids any other. If there is, let men point it out. There is not a text which expressly confines Christians to the use of a liturgy, or expressly enjoins them only to have extempore prayer. If there is, let it be shown. And yet for hundreds of years Episcopalians and Presbyterians and Independents have contended with each other, as if these things had been settled as minutely as the Levitical ceremonies, and as if everybody who did not see with their eyes was almost guilty of a deadly sin! It seems wonderful that in a matter like this, men should not be satisfied with the full persuasion that they themselves are right, but must also go on

¹³ For convenience sake these Churches collectively are often spoken of as “The Church,” in contradiction to the Heathen and Mahometan part of mankind. Only let us remember, that this is a very mixed Church, and one to which no special promises belong.

to condemn everybody who disagrees with them as utterly wrong. And yet this groundless theory, that God has laid down one particular form of Church government and ceremonies has often divided men who ought to have known better. It has caused even good men to speak and write very unadvisedly. It has been made a fountain of incessant strife, intolerance, and bigotry by men of all parties, even among Protestants, from the times of Cartwright, Travers, and Laud, down to the present day.

Furthermore, no visible church on earth has a right to say, "We shall never fall away. We shall last for ever." There is no promise in the Bible to warrant the continuance of anyone professing Church upon earth. Many have fallen completely. Many have perished already. Where are the Churches of Africa, in which Augustine and Cyprian used once to preach? Where are the Churches of Asia Minor, of many of which we read in the New Testament?—They are gone. They have passed away, and left hardly a wreck behind. Other existing Churches are so corrupt that it is a plain duty to leave them, lest we become partakers of their sins, and share in their plagues.

Furthermore, no visible Church is in a sound and healthy state, which has not the marks we see in all the New Testament Churches. A Church in which the Bible is not the standard of faith and practice,—a Church in which repentance, faith, and holiness, are not prominently put forward as essential to salvation,—a Church in which forms, and ceremonies, and ordinances not commanded in the Bible, are the chief things urged upon the attention of the members, such a Church is in a very diseased and unsatisfactory state. It may not formally deny any article of the Christian faith. It may have been founded originally by the apostles. It may boast that it is catholic. But if the apostles were to rise from the dead, and visit such a Church, I believe they would command it to repent, and have no communion with it till it did. Would St. Peter be seen worshipping at the cathedral of St. George's, Southwark? I believe firmly that he would not.

Furthermore, no mere membership of any visible Church will avail a man anything "in the hour of death and in the day of judgment." No communion with a visible Church will stand in the place of direct personal communion with Jesus. No attendance whatever on its ordinances is a substitute for personal faith and conversion. It will be no consolation when you and I come to lay our heads upon a dying pillow, if we can say no more than this,—that we have belonged to a pure Church. It will be no answer in the last great day, when the secrets of all hearts are revealed, if we can only say that we worshipped in the Church in which we were baptized, and attended upon its forms.

And now, reader, let me tell you what is the great use and purpose for which God has raised up and maintained visible churches upon earth. They are useful as witnesses, keepers, and librarians of Holy Scripture. They are

useful as maintainers of a regular succession of ministers to preach the Gospel. They are useful as preservers of order among professing Christians. But their great and principal use is to train up, to rear, to nurse, to keep together, members of that one true Church which is the body of Jesus Christ. They are intended to “edify the body of Christ.” (Ephes. iv. 12.)

Which is the best visible Church upon earth? That is the best, which adds most members to the one true church, which most promotes “repentance towards God, faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ,” and good works among its members. These are the true tests and tokens of a really good and flourishing Church. Give me that Church which has evidence of this kind to show.

Which is the worst visible Church on earth? That is the worst, which has the fewest members of the one true Church to show in its ranks. Such a Church may possess excellent forms, pure orders,—venerable customs,—ancient institutions. But if it cannot point to faith, repentance, and holiness of heart and life in its members, it is a poor church indeed. “By their fruits,” the Churches upon earth must be judged, as well as individual Christians.¹⁴

Reader, I advise you strongly to seek to understand these things. Try, on the one side, to understand that a visible professing Church is a true thing, and a thing according to the mind of God. It is not, as some would tell us in these days, a mere human device,—a thing which God does not speak of in the Word. It is amazing to my mind, that anyone can read the New Testament, and then say that visible Churches are not authorized in the Bible. Try, on the other side, to understand that something more is needed than merely belonging to this Church, or that Church, to take a man to heaven. Are you born again? Have you repented of you sins? Have you laid hold on Christ by faith? Are you a man holy in life and conversation?—These are the grand points that a man must seek to ascertain. Without these things, the highest, the strictest, and the most regular members of a visible Church, will be a lost churchman in the last great day.

Look upon visible Churches, with their outward forms and ordinances, as being to the one true Church what the husk is to the kernel of the nut.—Both grow together,—both husk and kernel. Yet one is far more precious than the other. Just so the true Church is far more precious than the outward and visible.—The husk is useful to the kernel. It preserves it from many injuries, and enables it to grow. Just so the outward Church is useful to the body of

¹⁴ “That which makes every visible Church to be more or less the true Church of God, is the greater or less efficacy or conformity of its public doctrines and discipline for enacting or fashioning the visible members of it, that they may become live members of the Holy Catholic Church, or living stones of the new Jerusalem. Every true visible Church is as an inferior free school or nursery for training up scholars, that they may be fit to be admitted into the celestial academy.”—*Jackson on the Church*. 1670.

Christ; it is within the pale of its ordinances that believers are generally born again, and grow up in faith, hope, and charity.—The husk is utterly worthless without the kernel. Just so the outward church is utterly worthless except it guards and covers over the inward and the true.—The husk will die, but the kernel has a principle of life in it. Just so the forms and ordinances of the outward Church will all pass away, but that which lives and lasts for ever is the true Church within.—To expect the kernel without the husk, is expecting that which is contrary to the common order of the laws of nature. To expect to find the true Church, and members of the true Church, without having an orderly and well-governed visible Church, is expecting that which God, in the ordinary course of things, does not give.¹⁵

Reader, I solemnly charge you to seek a right understanding upon these points. To give to the visible Church the names, attributes, promises, and privileges which belong to the one true Church,—the body of Christ;—to confound the two things, the visible and the inward Church,—the Church professing, and the Church of the elect,—is an immense delusion. It is a trap into which only too many fall. It is a great rock, on which many in these days unhappily make shipwreck.

Once confound the body of Christ with the outward professing Church, and there is no amount of error into which you may not at last fall. Nearly all perverts to Romanism begin with getting wrong here.¹⁶

Once get hold of the idea that Church government is of more importance than sound doctrine, and that a Church with bishops teaching falsehood is better than a Church without bishops teaching truth, and none can say what you may come to in religion.

III. Let me now pass on to the third and last thing I proposed to do. Let me *draw from the subject some practical counsels and cautions for the times in which you live.*

I feel deeply that I should neglect a duty if I did not do this. The errors and mistakes connected with the subject of the Church are so many and so serious, that they need to be plainly denounced, and men need to be plainly put upon their guard against them. You have read the general principles laid down about the one true Church, and about the visible professing Churches. Now let me go on to make some particular application of these general prin-

¹⁵ “The invisible Church is ordinarily and regularly part of the visible, but yet that only part that is the true one.”—*Bishop Jeremy Taylor*. 1670.

¹⁶ “For lack of diligent observing the difference first between the Church of God,—mystical and visible:—then between the visible sound and the visible corrupted, the oversights are neither few nor light that have been committed.”—*Hooker. Eccles. Pol. III.* 1600.

cipling to the times in which we live.

1. First of all, *do not suppose, because I have said that no membership of a visible Church can be the saving of a soul, that it does not signify to what visible Church a man belongs.* It does signify to what visible Church a man belongs;—and it signifies very much. There are Churches in which the Bible is practically lost sight of altogether. There are Churches in which Jesus Christ’s Gospel is buried, and lies completely hidden. There are Churches in which a man may hear God’s service performed in an unknown tongue, and never hear of “repentance towards God, faith towards Christ,” and the work of the Holy Ghost, from one end of the year to the other. Such are the Armenian and Greek Churches; and such, above all others in corruption, is the Church of Rome. To belong to such Churches brings tremendous peril upon anybody’s soul. They do not help men to the one true Church. They are far more likely to keep men out, and put barriers in their way for ever. Beware of ever being tempted to belong to these Churches yourself, or of ever thinking lightly of the conduct of those who join those churches, as if they had only committed a little sin.¹⁷

2. In the next place, *do not be moved by the argument of the Roman Catholic, when he says, “There is only one true Church, and that one true Church is the Church of Rome, and you must join us if you mean to be saved.”* Beware of being entrapped by such miserable sophistry as this. A more preposterous and unwarrantable assertion was never made, if the question is simply tried by the Bible. It is a wonderful proof of the fallen condition of man’s understanding, that so many people are taken in by it. Tell the man who uses this argument, that there is indeed only one true Church, but it is not the Church of Rome, or the Church of England, or of any other country upon earth. Defy him boldly to show a single text which says, that the Church of Rome is that one true Church to which men must belong. Tell him that to quote texts of Scripture which merely speak of “the church;” is

¹⁷ “If it be possible to be there where the true Church is not, then is it at Rome.”—*Church of England Homily for Whit-Sunday.*

“We have forsaken a Church in which we could neither hear the pure Word of God, nor administer the Sacraments, nor invoke the name of God as we ought,—and in which there was nothing to retain a prudent man, who thought seriously of his salvation.”—*Bishop Jewel’s Apology.*

“Such adherence to the visible or representative Church of Rome, as the Jesuits and others now challenge, doth induce a separation from the Holy Catholic Church, and is more deadly to the soul than to be bed-fellow to one sick of the pestilence is to the body.”—*Jackson on the Catholic Church.* 1670.

no proof on his side at all, and that such texts might just as well refer to the Church of Jerusalem, or the Church of Antioch, as to Rome. Point out to him the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, which foretells Romish arrogance, and Romish presumption, and the possibility of Rome itself being cut off. Tell him that his Church's proud claim to be the one true Church is a mere baseless assumption,—a house built upon sand, which has not a tittle of Scripture to rest upon. Alas! how awful it is to think, that many in this day of light and knowledge should be completely carried away by this miserable argument,—“There must be one true Church;—that one true Church must be a visible, professing Church;—the Church of Rome is that one true Church;—therefore join it, or you will not be saved!”

3. In the next place, *do not be shaken by those persons who talk of ‘the voice of the church,’ and the ‘Catholic Church,’ when you disagree with them, as if the very mention of these words ought to silence you.* There are many in these days of theological warfare, whose favourite weapon, when the Bible is appealed to, is this, ‘The Church says it;—the church has always so ruled it;—the voice of the church has always so pronounced it.’ I warn you never to be put down by arguments of this kind. Ask men what they mean when they talk in this vague way about “the Church.” If they mean the whole professing Church throughout the world, call upon them to show when and where the whole Church has met to decide the matter about which they speak. Or ask them, if the Church had met, what right its decision would have to be listened to, except it could be shown to be founded upon the Word of God? Or, if they mean by “the voice of the Church,” the voice of the Church of England; ask them to show you in the thirty-nine articles the doctrine which they want you to receive, and are pressing upon you. Point out to them that the Church of England says in those articles, that “nothing is to be required of men, as necessary for salvation, except it can be read in, or proved by the Holy Scriptures.” Point out to them that it says furthermore, that although “the Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith, yet “it is not lawful for the visible Church to ordain anything contrary to God’s Word written, or so to expound one place of Scripture as to make it repugnant to another.” Show them also what the Church of England says when it speaks of the three creeds,—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. It does not say they are to be received and believed, because the primitive Church put them forth,—but because “they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.” (Article vi. xx. viii.)

Tell men, when they talk mysteriously to you about “hearing the Church,” that our Lord was not speaking of matters of faith at all, when He said, “hear the Church.” (Matt. xviii. 17.) Tell them that your rule of faith

and practice is the Bible only, and that if they will show you their views in the Bible, you will receive them, but not otherwise. Tell them that their favourite arguments, “the voice of the Church,” and the “Catholic Church,” are nothing but high-sounding phrases, and mere meaningless terms. They are great swelling words which make a noise in the distance, but in reality have neither substance, nor power.

Alas! that it should be needful to say all this. But I fear there are only too many to whom “the voice of the Church” has been like the fabled Medusa’s head. It seems to have petrified their common sense.¹⁸

4. In the next place, *let me warn members of the Church of England never to take up ground on behalf of their Church, which cannot be defended from the Holy Scriptures.* I love the church of which I am a minister, and I delight to take up high ground on its behalf. But I do not call that ground really high, which is not also Scripturally safe. I think it foolish and wrong to take up ground from which we are sure to be driven when we come to argue closely with those who differ from us.

Now there are many in this day, who would have us tell all Presbyterians and Independents, that the only true Church is always an episcopal Church,—that to this belong the promises of Christ, and to no other kind of Church at all,—that to separate from an episcopal Church is to leave the Catholic Church, to be guilty of an act of schism, and fearfully to peril the soul. This is the argument made use of by many. Beware, I beseech you of ever taking up such ground. It cannot be maintained. It cannot be shown to be tenable, by plain, unmistakeable texts of Scripture.

When the Scripture says, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,”—when the Scripture says, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,”—when the Scripture says, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord,”—when the Scripture says, “he that believeth not on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be damned,”—when the Scripture so speaks, such doctrines cannot be proclaimed too plainly by us. But never anywhere does Scripture say, from Matthew down to Revelation, ‘Except a man belong to a Church governed by bishops, he cannot be saved.’ There is not a text in

¹⁸ The only case in which an appeal to the testimony of the Church seems allowable is, where it is made in order to establish an historical fact. For instance, the sixth Article of the Church of England says, that of the “Authority of the Canonical Books of the New Testament, there never was any doubt in the Church,” that is, in the whole body of professing churches. Only let it be remembered, that receiving the testimony of the Church to a fact, does not for a moment imply that the Church has any authoritative power to interpret doctrine infallibly. A man may be a very competent witness to the fact, that a book has been faithfully printed, and yet know little or nothing about the meaning of its contents.

Scripture which says anything of the kind, from first to last. It is in vain for us to argue as if Scripture had spoken in this way. Once begin to require things in religion which are not required of men in the Bible, and where are we to stop?¹⁹

Reader, do not misunderstand my meaning in saying this. I am deeply convinced of the excellency of my own Church,—I would even say, if it were not a proud boast,—of its superiority over any other Church upon earth. I see more for episcopacy in the Bible than I do for any other form of Church government.—I consider the historical fact that there were bishops in most of the professing Churches at the beginning of Christianity, deserves much weight.—I believe it is far wiser to have a regular, settled liturgy, for the use of congregations, than to make a congregation dependent upon its minister's frames and feelings for the tone of its regular prayers.—I think that endowments settled and established by law, are a way of paying ministers far preferable to the voluntary system. I am satisfied that, *well administered*, the Church of England is more calculated to help souls to heaven than any Church on earth. But I never can take up the ground that some men do in this day, who say that the episcopal Church is the only true Church in Great Britain, and that all outside that Church are guilty schismatics. I cannot do it, *because I am sure such ground as this never can be maintained*.

I am quite aware that the opinions I am expressing on this point, are utterly opposed to those which many members of the Church of England hold in the present day. Such men will say, "I am no sound churchman, I am ignorant of true Church principles," and so forth. Such charges weigh very little with me. I have found that those who talk loudest about the church are not always its most faithful friends, and often end with leaving it altogether. I am not to be put down by such vague talk as this. I should like men who tell me my views are not "Church views", to consider calmly what authority

¹⁹ "You shall not find in all the Scripture this your essential point of succession of bishops."—*John Bradford, Reformer and Martyr, Chaplain to Bishop Ridley*. 1550.

"I conceive that the power of ordination was restrained to Bishops rather by Apostolical practice, and the perpetual custom and canons of the Church, than by any absolute precept that either Christ or His Apostles gave concerning it. Nor can I yet meet with any convincing argument to set it upon a more high and divine institution."—*Bishop Cosin*. 1660.

"We have found neither any express commandment, nor any example, which prescribes as universal and unchangeable one particular system for the regulation of the Church and its ministers. Our argument consists only of inferences.—The conclusions in favour of Episcopacy from the new Testament, are intimations rather than proofs.—We can produce no single text so clear as to compel us to conclude that the Apostles deemed any one peculiar form of government to be indispensable, and unalterable in the Church."—*Discourses by Rev. C. Benson, Master of the Temple*.

they have for such an assertion. I appeal confidently to the authorized formularies of the Church of England, and I defy them to meet me on that ground. What do those formularies say of the visible Church? Hear the nineteenth article: "It is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered." What do they say of the ministry? Hear the twenty-third article: "We ought to judge those lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." What do they say of ceremonies? Hear the thirty-fourth article: "They may be changed, according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word." What do they say of bishops, priests, and deacons? Hear the preface to the ordination service: "It is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scriptures and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' times there have been these orders of ministers in Christ's Church: bishops, priests, and deacons." What do they say of ministers ordained according to this service? Hear the thirty-sixth Article: "We decree all such to be rightly, orderly, and lawfully consecrated and ordered."

Now to all this I heartily and cordially subscribe. The Church of England calmly asserts that its own ministers are scripturally ordained. But this is a very different thing from saying that those who are not ordained in like manner, are not ordained at all.—It calmly asserts that there always have been bishops, priests, and deacons. But this is very different from saying that where these orders are not, there is no true Church.—It calmly asserts that a man must be lawfully called and sent, in order to be a minister. But it nowhere says that none but bishops have power to call.²⁰

I believe the Church of England has been graciously led to adopt the language of true scriptural moderation. It is a moderation strikingly in contrast with the bold, decided language which it uses when speaking in the doctrinal articles about things essential to salvation. But it is the only true ground which can ever be maintained. It is the only ground on which you and I ought to stand. Let us be satisfied that our own communion is scriptural; but

²⁰ "It might have been expected that the defenders of the English Hierarchy against the first Puritans should take the highest ground, and challenge for the Bishops the same unre-served submission on the same plea of exclusive apostolical prerogative, which their adversaries feared not to insist on for their elders and deacons. It is notorious, however, that such was not in general the line preferred by Jewel, Whitgift, Bishop Cooper, and others to whom the management of that controversy was intrusted during the early part of Elisabeth's reign.—It is enough with them to show, that the government by Archbishops and Bishops, is ancient and allowable. They never venture to urge its exclusive claims, or to connect the succession with the validity of the Sacraments."—*Keble's Preface to Hooker's Works*. Page 59.

let us never pretend to unchurch all other communions beside our own. For my own part, I abhor the idea of saying that men like Carey, and Rhenius, and Williams, and Campbell, the missionaries, were not real ministers of Jesus Christ. I loathe the idea of handing over the communions to which such men as Matthew Henry, and Doddridge, and Robert Hall, and M'Cheyne, and Chalmers belonged, to the uncovenanted mercies of God, or saying such men as these were not really and truly ordained. Hard language is sometimes used about them. People dare to talk of their not belonging to the Catholic Church, and of their being guilty of schism. I cannot for a moment hold such views. I deeply lament that anyone should hold them. I would to God that we had many Episcopalians like the men I have named. People may shut them out from what they call the Catholic Church, but I am firmly persuaded, they will not shut them out from the kingdom of God. Surely those whom God hath not excluded, you and I should take care not to exclude.

5. In the next place, *let me warn you not to set down men as no Christians, because they do not agree with you in your manner of worshipping God.* In saying this, I would have it distinctly understood, that I am not speaking now of those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity, and the sufficiency of Scripture to make men wise unto salvation. I speak with especial reference to the great body of Protestant Dissenters in England, who hold the leading doctrines of the Gospel as set forth at the time of the Reformation. I wish every member of the Church of England to take broad, charitable, and Scriptural views of such persons, and to dismiss from his mind the wretched, narrow-minded, bigoted prejudices which are so unhappily common on the subject. Are they members of the one true Church?—Do they love the Lord Jesus Christ?—Are they born again of God's Spirit?—Are they penitent, believing, holy people?—If they are, they will get to heaven, I firmly believe, as certainly as any Episcopalian on earth. Men must tolerate them,—if such a word may be used,—men must tolerate them, see them, and love them too, in heaven and the kingdom of Christ. Surely, if we expect to meet men of different denominations from our own, at the right hand of the Lord Jesus, and to spend eternity in their company, we ought not to look coldly on them upon earth. Surely it were far better to begin something like union and cooperation with them, and to cultivate a spirit of love and kind feeling towards them while we can.

We may think our dissenting brethren mistaken in many of their views. We may believe they miss privileges, and lose advantages by being separated from our own Church. We may be fully satisfied that episcopacy is that form of government which is most agreeable to God's Word, and most in harmony with what we read of in the history of the early Church. We may

feel persuaded, that, taking human nature as it is, it is far better, both for ministers and hearers, to have a liturgy, or settled form of prayer, and endowments guaranteed by the state, and not dependent on pew-rents. We may feel persuaded from observation of the working of the voluntary system, and of the state of religion among Dissenters generally, that the way of the Church of England is the more excellent way. But, after all, we must not speak positively where the Bible does not speak positively. Where, in all the compass of Scripture, can we point out that text which says that episcopacy and a liturgy are things *absolutely needful to salvation*? I say, without fear of contradiction, nowhere at all.

We may regret the divisions among professing Christians in our own country. We may feel that they weaken the holy cause of Christ's Gospel. We may feel that people have often, and do often become Dissenters in England from very insufficient reasons, and from motives by no means of the highest order. But, after all, we must not forget by whom the greater part of these divisions were primarily occasioned. Who obliged the bulk of English Nonconformists to secede? Who drove them out of the fold of the Church of England? We of the Church of England did it ourselves, by not properly providing for their souls' wants. Who, in reality, built the dissenting chapels, the Bethels, the Bethesdas, which so often offend the eyes of many members of the Church of England in these days? We did ourselves. We did it by gross neglect of the people's souls,—by the grossly unscriptural kind of preaching which prevailed in the pulpits of our Churches a century ago. I believe the plain truth is, that the vast majority of Dissenters in England did not leave the Church of England *at first* from any abstract dislike to the principle of Episcopacy, or liturgies, or establishments.—But they did dislike the moral essays and inconsistent lives of the clergy; and we must confess with shame, that they had only too much reason. Some may think it strange that they did not see the beauties of our Prayer Book and Episcopacy more clearly. But there was one thing they saw far more clearly, and that was, that men wholly taken up with field-sports and the world, and never preaching Christ, were not likely to teach them the way to be saved. Surely when these things are so, we have no right to speak harshly about Dissenters. We have no right to wonder at secession and separations. If sheep are not fed, who can wonder if they stray? If men found out that the Gospel was not preached by the clergy of the Church of England, who can blame them if they cared more for the Gospel than for the clergy,—and went to hear that Gospel wherever it could be heard?

I know well that such opinions as these are very offensive to many people. I know that many will think I am taking very low ground in speaking as I have done about Dissenters. It is easy to think so, and to fancy higher ground might be found. It is not quite so easy to point out higher ground in

Scripture, or to justify the language frequently used in speaking of English Dissenters upon any principles whatever. We must consider calmly the conduct of the Church of England for the last two hundred years. We must not forget that “he is the schismatic who causes the schism.” We must confess that the Church of England caused most of the dissent that has taken place. However much we may regret divisions, we must take the greater part of the blame to ourselves. Surely we ought to feel very tenderly towards our separating brethren. We should never forget that they hold the essence of Jesus Christ’s Gospel. Justice and fairness demand that we should treat them with kindness. Whatever their mistakes may be, we of the Church of England made the vast majority of them what they are at the present day. Granting for a moment that they are wrong, we are not the men who can, with any face, tell them so.

6. Let me pass on now to another warning of a different kind. Let me warn you *not to fancy that divisions and schisms are unimportant things*. This also is a great delusion, and one into which many fall, when they find there is no visible Church which can be called the only true Church on earth. So weak are our understandings, that if we do not fall over upon the one side, we are disposed at once to fall over on the other. Settle it down then in your minds, that all divisions among Christians are an immense evil. All divisions strengthen the hands of infidels. All divisions help the devil.—The great maxim of Satan is, “divide and conquer.” If he can set professing Christians by the ears, and make them spend their strength in contending one with another, our spiritual enemy has gained a great point. You may be very sure that union is strength, and you may be no less sure that discipline and uniformity are one great aid to union. Order is a vast help to efficient working in Christ’s cause as well as in other things, and “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints.” (1 Cor. xiv. 33.)

I would not be misunderstood in saying this. I fully admit that separation is justifiable under some circumstances, beyond a question. But it is absurd to say on that account that there is no such thing as schism. I for one cannot say so. Men ought to tolerate much,—I say it confidently, men ought to tolerate and put up with much, before they think of separating and dividing, and leaving one Church for another. It is a step which nothing but the deliberate teaching of false doctrine can really justify. It is a step that should never be taken without much consideration, much waiting, and much prayer. It is a step that seems to me more than questionable, except it can be clearly proved that the salvation of the soul is really at stake. It is a step that in England is often taken far too lightly, and with an evident want of thought as to its serious nature and tendency. It is a common opinion of ignorant people,

“It is no matter where we go;—it is no matter if we first join one denomination and then join another,—first worship with this people and then with that;—it is all the same where we go if we do but go to some place of worship.” I say this common opinion is an enormous evil, and ought to be denounced by all true-hearted Christians. This Athenian kind of spirit which ever wants something new,—which must have something different in religion from what it had a little time ago, is a spirit which I cannot praise. I believe it to be the mark of a very diseased and unhealthy state of soul.

7. In the next place, let me warn you *not to be shaken by those who say that all visible Churches are necessarily corrupt, and that no man can belong to them without peril to his soul*. There never have been wanting men of this kind, men who have forgotten that everything must be imperfect which is carried on by human agency, and have spent their lives in a vain search after a perfectly pure Church. Members of all Churches must be prepared to meet such men, and especially members of the Church of England. It should never be forgotten that fault-finding is the easiest of all tasks. There never was a system upon earth, in which man had anything to do, in which faults, and many faults too, might not soon be found. You must expect to find imperfections in every visible Church upon earth. There always were such in the New Testament Churches. There always will be such now. There is only one Church without spot or blemish. That is the one true Church, the body of Christ, which Christ shall present to His Father in the last great day.

With regard to the Church of England, I will only remark, that men ought not to confound the bad working of a system with the system itself. It may be quite true that many of its ministers are not what they ought to be. It may be true that some of its revenues are misapplied, and not properly spent. This does not prove that the whole machinery of the Church of England is rotten and corrupt.—It does not prove that the whole Church is an institution which ought to be cast down. Surely there is many a good machine on earth at this moment, which works badly, simply because it is in hands that know not in what way it ought to be worked.

I will only ask those who advise men to leave the Church of England, what they have got better to show us?—Where is the visible Church,—where is the denomination of Christians upon earth, which is perfect, without spot, and without blemish? None, I say confidently,—none are to be found at all. Many people of scrupulous consciences, I firmly believe, have found this to their cost already.—They left the Church of England because of alleged imperfections. They thought they could better their condition. What do they think now? If the truth were really told, I believe they would confess that in getting rid of one kind of imperfection, they have met with

another, and that in healing one sore, they have opened two more far worse than the first.

Reader, if you are a member of the Church of England, let me simply advise you not to leave that Church lightly, and without good reason. Numerous forms and ceremonies may be attended with evil consequences, but there are also evils in the absence of them. Episcopacy may have its disadvantages, but Presbyterianism and Congregationalism have their disadvantages too. A liturgy may possibly cramp and confine some highly-gifted ministers, but the want of one sadly cramps and confines the public devotion of many congregations. The Church of England Prayer-book may not be perfect, and may be capable of many improvements. It would be strange if this was not the case, when we remember that its compilers were not inspired men. Still, after all, the Prayer-book's imperfections are few, compared to its excellencies. The testimony of Robert Hall, the famous Baptist, on this subject is very striking. He says "The evangelical purity of its sentiments,—the chastened fervour of its devotion,—and the majestic simplicity of its language, have combined to place it in the very first rank of uninspired compositions."

8. In the last place, let me advise you *to try to understand thoroughly the principles and constitution of the Church of England*. I say that advisedly. I say it to churchmen and dissenters alike. I feel that the ignorance which prevails in our country about the Church of England is really awful and solemn indeed. There are thousands of members of that Church who never studied the thirty-nine articles of religion,—who hardly know of their existence,—and who have often found fault with the very doctrines that these articles contain, and especially the seventeenth. Yet those articles are the Church's confession of faith. They show what is the Church's view of doctrine. No man, I say, is a true member of the Church of England who does not thoroughly agree, in heart and in truth, with the thirty-nine articles of his own Church.

So also there are thousands who have never read the Homilies which the Church of England has provided. Many have never heard of them, much less read them. Yet those Homilies are declared by the thirty-fifth article to contain godly and wholesome doctrine, and they condemn thousands of so-called Churchmen in this day.

So also there are hundreds of thousands who do not know that the laity might prevent any improper minister from being ordained in the established Church. No man can be ordained a deacon in the Church of England, without notice being read in the parish Church to which he belongs, and without people being invited to tell the bishop, if they know of any just cause or impediment why he should not be ordained. But the laity hardly ever raise any

impediment against the ordination of a young man.—Surely when this is the case, if men utterly unfit for the ministerial office get into the ministry of the Church of England, the blame ought not to be borne only by the bishops who ordain them, but to be shared by the laity who never objected to their being ordained.

Reader, if you belong to the Church of England, wipe off this reproach. Try to understand your own Church. Study the articles of religion regularly.—Make yourself master of them. Read the Homilies with care, and see in them what the Reformers taught as true. Surely, I may well come round to the point with which I started. I may well say that ignorance covers the whole subject as with a cloud. As to the true Church,—as to the visible professing Churches,—as to the real doctrines and constitution of the established Church of England,—as to all these subjects it is painful to see the ignorance which prevails. Surely it ought not to be so. The Lord grant that in your case it may not be so any longer!

And now, let me conclude this tract by saying a few words of practical application to the conscience of every one who reads it.

First of all, let me ask you solemnly and seriously, *whether you belong to that one true Church of Christ, which I began by describing.*

Reader, I do not now ask whether you go to a place of worship on the Sunday.—I do not ask whether you call yourself a Churchman, or whether you are a Dissenter.—I only ask whether you belong to the Church, which is made up of true believers,—whether you have been brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ,—whether you have laid aside the world and sin, come out from following them, and fled to Christ by faith. If you have not, take warning this day that you are in a most dangerous and unsatisfactory state of soul. You have got hold of nothing worth calling religion. You have got the husk of Christianity, but not the kernel. You have nothing to rest upon,—nothing to comfort you in the day of trial,—nothing to satisfy you in an empty world,—and nothing, above all things, to save you in the last day. The hopes of all men shall be put upon their trial sooner or later. Except you belong to the one true Church, your end will be, a Churchman or Dissenter lost,—a Churchman or Dissenter cast away,—a Churchman or Dissenter in hell, without hope, and without comfort, and that for ever.

Oh! that men would but see that salvation turns upon this question! Oh! that men would but see that it shall profit nothing to say, “I have always gone to my Church,” or “Always gone to Meeting,” if they have not gone to Christ by faith, and been born again, and been made one with Christ, and Christ with them! Oh! that men would understand that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,—that true religion does not turn on Episcopacy, or Presbyterianism,—on Churches or Chapels,—on liturgies or extempore prayer; but on

justification, and sanctification, on saving faith, and new hearts!²¹ Oh! that men would set their minds more upon these points, and leave off their miserable squabbling about unprofitable controversies, and settle down to this one great question,—Have I come to Christ, and laid hold of Him, and been born again?

In the next place, *if you do not belong to the one true Church, let me ask you, in all brotherly affection, to come and join that one true Church this day.*

Reader, I call upon you and invite you to come and be a Churchman, in the highest and best sense.—Come, and be a member of that one Church of which Jesus is the Head,—Jesus, the High Priest,—Jesus, the Mediator. Come and join that Church in which Jesus is the Saviour,—that Church into which Jesus stands ready to admit you, saying, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Come to Christ, dear reader, this day, if you have never come before. This is the end for which I desire to write and preach; and it is of little use or value to write and preach for anything else. Come, I say once more, come to Christ this day.—Call upon Him. Say to Him, “O Lord save me, or I perish. Lord, let me not be lost in the midst of light and privileges.—Let me not only have knowledge in the head, but grace in the heart. Let me not only be a member of a professing Church on earth, but a living member of thy body, and a sharer in thy glory!”

Last of all, *if you can say that you belong to the one true Church, then you may rejoice.* Your Church shall never fall.—Your Church shall never come to an end. The world and all its greatness will pass away. The works of statesmen shall vanish and come to nothing. The cathedrals and churches of man’s erecting shall all crumble into dust. But the one true Church shall never perish.—It is built upon a rock.—It shall stand for ever.—It shall never fall.—It shall wax brighter and brighter to the end, and never be so bright as when the wicked shall be separated from it, and it shall stand alone.

Reader, if you belong to the true Church, do not waste your time in controversies about outward things. Say to them all, “Get ye behind me.” Care for nothing so much as the heart and marrow of Christianity. Let the grand point to which you give your attention be the essence of true religion,—the

²¹ “I cannot be so narrow in my principles of Church communion as many are;—that are so much for a liturgy, or so much against it;—so much for ceremonies, or so much against them, that they can hold communion with no Church that is not of their mind and way.

“I cannot be of their mind who think God will not accept him that prayeth by the Common Prayer Book; and that such forms are a self-invented worship which God rejecteth; nor yet can I be of their mind that say the like of extempore prayers.”—*Baxter in Orme’s Life.* Page 385.

foundations of the one true Church.

Reader, if you belong to the true Church, see that you love all its members. Let your principle be, “Grace be with all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” (Ephes. vi. 24.) Wherever you find a man that has grace and faith, hold out your right hand to him. Do not stop to ask him where he was baptized, and what place of worship he attends?—Has he been with Jesus?—is he born again?—then say to yourself, “This is a brother. I am to be with him in heaven by-and-by for ever. Let me love him upon earth. If we are to be in the same home, let us love each other even now upon the road.”²²

Lastly, if you belong to the true Church, try to increase the number of members of that Church. Do not work merely for a party. Do not merely labour to get proselytes to your own professing visible Church. Let your first care be to pluck brands from the fire,—to awaken sleeping souls,—to rouse those who are in darkness and ignorance, and to make them acquainted with Him who is “the light of the world,” and “whom to know is life eternal.” Never forget, that he who has helped to turn one sinner from his sins and make him a temple of the Holy Ghost, has done a far more glorious and lasting work, than if he had built York Minster, or St. Peter’s at Rome.

Reader, I commend these things solemnly to your attention. That you may know them by experience, is my heart’s desire. That the knowledge of them may spread more and more is my daily prayer.

²² “Wherever my Lord has a true believer, I have a brother.”—*Bishop M’Ilvaine*.