

The Faith and Obedience of Churchmen, the Strength of the Church

by J.H. Newman

The Church's ability to defy the Devil's assaults and promote its welfare and stability depends on its members adhering firmly to the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:25, Matthew 16:16, Ephesians 2:20, Ephesians 5:27, 1 John 5:12

Topics: "Church Stability", "Apostolic Faith"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the foundational truth that the Church is built upon the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, a truth revealed by God and taught by the Apostles. He emphasizes the importance of adhering to this truth for both individual spiritual life and the Church's stability, warning against departing from this faith. Newman urges Christians to prioritize religious duties, as neglecting them may lead to the Church's downfall in times of trouble and persecution.

Transcript

AND Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the CHRIST the Son of the Living GOD. And JESUS answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but MY FATHER which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matt. xvi. 16-18.

The rock, then, upon which the Church is built, is the confession, that JESUS is the CHRIST, the Son of the Living GOD; a truth set forth and shadowed by the Prophets, but openly and plainly taught by the Apostles. St. Paul uses a similar expression, when he speaks of the body of Christians being "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets;" (i. e. resting in the sound and true doctrine which they taught;) "JESUS CHRIST Himself being the chief corner-stone," (Ephes. ii. 20.); -our very spiritual existence depending upon our adherence to this great truth that JESUS was the anointed Son of GOD, GOD and Man, the promised SAVIOUR of the world; -He, who by taking man's nature upon Him in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, fulfilled the prophecy that the SAVIOUR should be of the seed of Abraham, in whom "all the nations of the earth should be blessed," (Gen. xxii. 18.) and the seed of the woman, who should "bruise the serpent's head," (Gen. iii. 15.); -and who, inasmuch as He was "the Only begotten SON of GOD," (John iii. 18.) "GOD of GOD," "Very GOD of very GOD," (Nicene Creed,) fulfilled the prophecy, that the SAVIOUR should be "the mighty GOD," (Isaiah ix. G.); -He of whom it was said, "Let all

the Angels of GOD worship Him," (Heb. i. 6.); -and of whom it was likewise said, "Thy throne, O GOD, is for ever and ever," Ps. xlv. 6.

I said, that our very spiritual existence depends upon our adhering to this great and fundamental truth; and this I said not of us as individuals only, but as Members of the Church of CHRIST, and of that portion of CHRISTÂ'S CHURCH in this Kingdom which is usually called the Church of England. It is true of us individually, as appears by the words of St. John; "He that hath the SON, hath life; and he that hath not the SON of GOD, hath not life;" (1 John v. 12.); by which we learn, that as long as we slight or disbelieve, or deny this sacred truth, we have no spiritual life in us.

It is also true of us, as Members of the Church of CHRIST, and of that portion of CHRISTÂ'S Church in this Kingdom which is usually called the Church of England, as appears from the passage before us; "Upon this rock," (i. e. upon this firm confession of faith in JESUS as the Christ, the Son of the Living GOD,) "I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." For from this we learn, that the Church, and any given portion of that Church, is only then able to defy the assaults of the Devil, that she can only then look forward with confidence to get the victory, so long as she adheres firmly to this faith and belief in CHRIST.

When she departs from that foundation, then she ceases to have a claim for the continuance of the promised aid. This is a matter which it behoves Christians at all times to place before their eyes, and to keep in remembrance; but especially at the present time, does it behove us, who are Members of the Church of CHRIST in England, to do so: because of the unceasing endeavours which are being made by men who are either careless of religion altogether, or who have embraced false views of it, to overthrow our Church; endeavours, which we have reason to regard either with fear, or not, according as we have reason, or not, to suppose that the Members of the Church have departed from the true faith and fear of GOD, and of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

If there is reason to believe that many or most of the Members of our Church are regardless of that true faith, and of the honour of Him in whom we believe, that by their lips, or by their lives, they set at nought His Majesty, neglect His sacraments, despise His Word, forsake His Worship, obey not His Voice, or look for redemption and salvation by any other means than by His Cross and Blood, then we have every reason to fear that these endeavours of our enemies will be successful; that the light of GODÂ'S presence will be withheld from us; and that, as He withdrew from the Jews, when they neglected CHRIST, the LORD of Glory, so He will withdraw from our Nation also, and leave it to the wretchedness of its own chosen ways; to the enjoyment of those idols, the world, the flesh and the Devil, for which it will have forsaken the HOLY ONE of Israel, and refused to hearken to the voice of the LAMB of GOD, who died to take away the sins of the world.

But if not, if we have reason to hope that there are many true servants of GOD still to be found; that there are many who, not with their lips only, but in their hearts and with their lives acknowledge Him the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST whom He has sent; acknowledge Him so as to obey His voice, and keep and do what He has commanded; then may we regard the attempts of our enemies without dismay; then may we have firm and stedfast hope that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against us: that though it may please GOD that we should suffer for a while; -as we suffered together with good King Charles at the hands of the Dissenters; as we suffered in the days of bloody Queen Mary, at the hands of the Roman Catholics; as we suffered during the first three hundred years after CHRIST, at the hands of the Heathens and the Jews; -yet that eventually triumph will await us; that He will bring our Church out of the trial, like

gold out of the fire, more pure and of greater worth, ("I will purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin ;" Is. i. 25.) that "all things will work together for good "to us; and that the purpose aimed at by the affliction is, that He "may present our Church to Himself as a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and with out blemish." Ephes. v. 27.

It will hence appear, that it is in the power of every individual, by a holy and religious life in the true faith and fear of GOD and our LORD JESUS CHRIST, to promote not only his own salvation, but the welfare and stability of the Church of CHRIST; or by an unholy, careless, and irreligious life, not only to secure his own damnation, but to assist the enemies of GOD and man, who are purposed to overthrow that Church.

If times of confusion and trouble shall come, where can we seek for comfort but in the love of CHRIST, in the love of GOD to man for CHRIST'S sake? But how can we then take comfort in that love, if now we take no account of it? Let me entreat you, then, Christian Brethren, while the days of peace are vouchsafed to you, to give more and more heed to all religious duties. The days may come, when your Churches will be shut up, or only filled by men who will not teach the whole truth as it is in JESUS; when you will be deprived of Ministers of Religion; or have only such as are destitute of GOD'S Commission. Do not, I beseech you, by your neglect now, add to your misery then the bitterness of self-reproach, when you will have to say, "I had once the opportunity of worshipping GOD aright, but I neglected it, and He now has withheld it from me. I had once the means of receiving the Body and Blood of my SAVIOUR, at the hands of His own Minister; but I refused it, and now He has placed it out of my power."

OXFORD.

The Feast of the Epiphany.

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