

Warnings To the Churches - The Fallibility of Ministers

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

We who are Jews by birth and not "Gentile sinners" know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:11-16

Have we ever considered what the Apostle Peter 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. 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 from 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 passages 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 opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong." He does more than this--he reproves 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 Spirit wants 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 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 protective about 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\\

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