

THE ARGUMENT OF THE EPISTLES IN GENERAL.

After the Ghospels, which is a storie of Chrift himfelfe, and after the *Actes of the Apostles*, which is a storie of Chriftes Church: now follow the *Epiftles of the Apostles*, which they wrote of fuch matters, as they had then occafion to write of. For, being the Founders and the Doctours of the Church, they did in their time, as the Doctours that fucceeded them, did after them: who from the beginning vnto this day, haue written Epiftles & Bookes againft herefies, euer as they arofe, and of al other Ecclefiastical matters, as they had occafion miniftred vnto them. Of which their doing the Apoftles firft gaue here the enfample: as alfo S. Luke in the Actes of the Apoftles, led the way to al the Writers of the Ecclefiastical Hiftorie after him. For although there be no comparifon between them for authoritie, for asmuch as thefe are Canonical Scripture, and fo are not any writings of their Succelfours; yet the occafions and matters (as I haue faid) are like.

*Eufeb.
li. 2. Eccl.
hift. c. 23.*

Moft of the Epiftles are S. Paules Epiftles: the reft are called *Catholicæ Epiftolæ*, the *Epiftles Catholike*. For S. Paul writeth not any Epiftle to al (howbeit euery one of them is for al the Church:) but fome to particular Churches of the Gentils; as to the Romanes, to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colofians, to the Theffalonians: fome to particular Perfons, as to Timothee, to Tite (who were Bishops among the Gentils, to wit, of Ephesus, and of Crete) and to Philemon, and then one to the Hebrewes, who were the Iewes of Hierufalem & Iurie. But the Epiftles of the other Apoftles, that is, of S. Iames, S. Peter, S. Iohn, and S. Iude, are not fo intituled to any one Church or perfon (except S. Iohns two later short Epiftles, which yet might not be separated from his firft, becaufe they were al of one Authour) and therefore they are termed *Catholike*, that is *vniuerfal*. For fo writeth S. Iames: *To the twelue Tribes that are in difpersion, greeting*. And S. Peter in his firft Epiftle, thus: *To the*

elect ftrangers of the difperſion of Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Aſia, & Bithynia; in his ſecond, thus: To them that haue obtained equal faith with vs. Likewiſe S. Iude: To them that are in God the Father beloued, & in Ieſus Chriſt preferred, & called. S. Iohns firſt is without title.

Now, for the occaſions of their writing, whereby we ſhal perceiue the matters of arguments that they handle; it muſt be remembred (as the Storie of that time in the Actes of the Apoſtles doth at large declare) that the Church then beginning, was planted by the Apoſtles not only in the Iewes, but alſo in the Gentils: yea and ſpecially in the Gentils. Which thing offended the Iewes many waies. For, they could not abide to ſee ſo much as their owne Countrie to receiue him for CHRIST, whom they had reiected and crucified; much leſſe, to ſee them preach him to the Gentils alſo: that offended euen thoſe Iewes alſo, that beleued him to be Chriſt. Howbeit ſuch of them as were Catholikes, and therefore not obſtinate, were ſatiſfied when they vnderſtood by the Apoſtles that it was Gods pleaſure, as *Act. 11.* we read. But others of them became heretikes, & preached to the Chriſtian Gentils, that it was neceſſary for them to receiue alſo the Iewes religion. Of ſuch we read *Act. 15.* *Vnles you be circumcifer, you can not be ſaued.* And as theſe did ſo preach againſt the truth, ſo did the vnchriſtned Iewes not only themſelues perfecute, but alſo ſtirre vp the Idolatrous Gentils euery where to perfecute the Chriſtians; by ſuch obſtinacie prouoking God to reprobate their Nation: which yet they thought vnpoſſible to be done, becauſe they were the ſeed of Abraham, and were circumcifer, and had receiued the Law by Moyſes. For ſuch carnal reſpects they truſted in themſelues, as though God and Chriſt were vnſeparably bound vnto them: attributing alſo ſo much to their owne workes, (which they thought they did of themſelues, being holpen with the knowledge of their law,) that they would not acknowledge the death of Chriſt to be neceſſarie for their ſaluation: but looked for ſuch a Chriſt, as ſhould be like other Princes of this world, and make them great men temporally.

Hereupon did S. Paul write his Epistles, to shew both the vocation of the Gentils, and the reprobation of the Iewes. Moreouer, to admonish both the Christian Gentils, not to receiue Circumcision and other ceremonies of Moyfes law, in no wise: and the Iewes also, not to put their trust in the same, but rather to vnderstand, that now Christ being come, they must cease. Againe, to shew the necessitie of Christs comming and of his death, that without it neither the Gentils could be saved; no nor the Iewes, by no workes that they could doe of themselves, although they were also holpen by the Law: telling them what was good & what bad: for so much as all were sinners, and therefore also impotent or infirme, and the law could not take away sinne and infirmitie, and giue strength to fulfil that which it gaue knowledge of. But this was God only able to doe, and for Christs sake only would he doe it. Therefore it is necessarie for all to beleue in Christ, and to be made his members, being incorporate into his Body which is his Catholike Church. For so (although they neuer yet did good worke, but all ill) they shall haue remission of their finnes, and new strength withal, to make them able to fulfil the commandements of Gods law, yea & their workes after this shall be so gracious in Gods sight, that for them he will giue them life euerlasting. This is the necessitie, this is also the fruit of Christian Religion. And therefore he exhorteth all, both Gentils and Iewes, as to receiue it humbly, so also to perseuer in it constantly vnto the end, against all seduction of heresie, and against all terrour of persecution: and to walke all their time in good workes, as now God had made them able to doe.

The same doctrine doth the Catholike Church teach vnto this day most exactly: to wit, that no workes of the vnbeleeuing or vn baptized, whether they be Iewes or Gentils, can save them: no nor of any Heretike, or Schismaticke, although he be baptized, because he is not a member of Christ. Yea more then that, no worke of any that is not a liuely member of Christ, although otherwise he be baptized, and continue within his Church,

The doctrine of the Cath. Church concerning good workes.

yet becaufe he is not in grace but in mortal finne, no worke that he doth, is meritorious or able to faue him.

This very fame is S. Paules doctrine: he denieth to the workes of fuch as haue not the Spirit of Chrif, al vertue to iuftifie or to faue; neither requireth he a mā to haue had knowledge of the Law, or to haue kept it aforetime, as though otherwife he might not be faued by Chrif: but yet when he is Chriftned, he requireth of neceffitie, that he keep Gods commandements, by auoiding of al finne, and doing good workes: and to fuch a mans good workes he attributeth as much vertue as any Catholike of this time.

S. Paules doctrine concerning faith and good workes.

Neuertheleffe there were certaine at that time (as alfo al the Heretikes of this our time) whom S. Peter termeth *vnlearned and vnftable*, who reading S. Paules Epiftles, did misconfter his meaning, as though he required not good workes no more after Baptifme, then before Baptifme; but held that only Faith did iuftifie and faue a man.

2. Pet. 3.

Thereupon the other Apoftles wrote their Epiftles, as S. Auguftin noteth in thefe wordes: *Therefore becaufe this opinion (Ad falutem obtinendam fufficere folam fidem, that only faith is fufficient to obtaine faluation) was then rifen, the other Apoftolical Epiftles, of Peter, Iohn, Iames, Iude, doe againft it fpecially direct their intention: to auouch vehemently, fidem fine operibus nihil prodeffe, that faith without workes profiteth nothing. As alfo Paul himfelf did not define it to be quamlibet fidem, qua in Deum creditur, whatfoeuer manner of faith wherewith we beleue in God, but that holefome & exprefse Euangelical faith, whofe workes proceed from loue, and the faith (quoth he) that worketh by loue. Wherevpon that faith, which fome thinke to be fufficient to faluation, he fo affirmeth to profit nothing, that he faieth: If I should haue al faith, fo that I could remoue mountaines, and haue not charitie, I am nothing.*

Aug. de fide & oper.

ca. 14. Et

præf. pſal. 31.

Gal. 5.

1. Cor. 13.

He therefore that wil not erre in this point, nor in any other, reading either S. Paules Epiftles, or the reft of the holy Scriptures, muft fticke faft to the doctrine of the Catholike Church, which Church S. Paul termeth *the*

1. Tim. 3.

pillar & ground of the truth: Affuring himself that if any thing there found to him as contrarie hereunto, he faileth of the right sence; and bearing alwaies in his mind the admonition of S. Peter, saying: *As also our most deare brother Paul according to the wisdom giuen to him, hath written to you: as also in his Epistles, speaking in them of these things, in the which are certaine things hard to vnderstand, which the vnlearned and vnstable depraue, as also the rest of the Scriptures, to their owne perdition. You therefore, Brethren, foreknowing, take heed lest ye be led amisse by the error of the vnwise, and fall away from your owne stedfastnes.*