

to the city of Antioch; and after labouring for a time in the congregation, both Paul and Barnabas purpose and make arrangements to re-visit the infant congregations previously formed by their joint labours. Barnabas had been a faithful companion of Paul; and both were on the eve of setting out on their second evangelical tour: for it was an appointment of heaven that such general workmen should give attention to the up-building of saints as well as the conversion of sinners. Barnabas was earnestly desirous of having John Mark as a third party in this work; but Paul resolved that brother Mark should not be their companion. These two good men, and faithful labourers in the gospel, became angry—an opinion being at the bottom of it. Preacher Barnabas plead for Mark; the zeal of Paul opposed him.—It was a simple matter of expediency. It was a contention between the judgment of Paul and the judgment of Barnabas; and the difference produced a quarrel—so considerable, indeed, that Barnabas went off with Mark in one direction, and Paul with Silas in another direction. Was there any truth, any principle, any authority of the Great Master at stake? Not at all: a matter of expediency—an opinion—was the all and all of the “sharp contention;” and if these men had been like some in later times, they would have preached against each other and formed separate parties—Paulites and Barnabasm would have been found in all those regions wherever they laboured. But no: they had their contention: it was not about the faith: it was an opinion that produced the dispute: they still labour as formerly in the one cause of the one Lord.

A most erroneous opinion may be very harmless, and a very weak opinion may become most destructive. The opinion itself, whether very far from the truth or quite near the truth, is of small consequence so long as the truth of God is firmly relied on and the opinion is not relied on. The opinion that wherever saints walk they step upon angels' heads, is an innocent impression if it does not invalidate the correct idea of the existence, character, and influence of the angels spoken of by the scriptures. The opinion that Satan converted himself once into a tortoise and made a woman among the ancients dream great dreams, is all of no account—provided what the inspired Book says about Satan be cordially and fully embraced. So of every other topic connected with “things in earth and things in heaven.” We care not what opinions men entertain if they take hold and keep hold of the truth as it is in Jesus. The faith of the Gospel will draw men one toward another, and unite them to the Lord, and produce the good fruits of salvation, and prevent the evil influence of any untoward opinion.