

Jelly-fish Christianity

By [J.C. Ryle](#)

The consequences of this widespread dislike to *distinct biblical doctrine* are very serious. Whether we like it or not, it is an epidemic which is doing great harm, and especially among young people. It creates, fosters, and keeps up an immense amount of *instability* in religion. It produces what I must venture to call, if I may coin the phrase, a 'jelly-fish' Christianity in the land — that is, a Christianity without bone, or muscle, or power.

A jelly-fish, as everyone who has been much by the seaside knows, is a pretty and graceful object when it floats in the sea, contracting and expanding like a little delicate transparent umbrella. Yet the same jelly-fish, when cast on the shore, is a mere helpless lump, without capacity for movement, self-defense, or self-preservation.

Alas! it is a vivid type of much of the religion of this day, of which the leading principle is, '*No dogma, no distinct beliefs, no doctrine.*' We have hundreds of ministers who seem not to have a single bone in their body of divinity! They have no definite opinions; they are so afraid of 'extreme views,' that they have no views at all. We have thousands of sermons preached every year, which are without an edge or a *point* or a *corner* — they are as smooth as marble balls, awakening no sinner, and edifying no saint!

We have legions of young men annually turned out from our universities, armed with a few scraps of second-hand philosophy, who think it a mark of cleverness and intellect to have *no decided opinions* about anything in religion — and to be utterly unable to make up their minds as to what is Christian truth. Their only creed, is a kind of 'nothingism.' They are sure and positive about nothing!

And last, and worst of all, we have myriads of respectable church-going people, who have no distinct and definite views about any point in theology. They cannot discern things that differ, any more than color-blind people can distinguish colors. They think ...

everybody is right — and nobody is wrong,
everything is true — and nothing is false,
all sermons are good — and none are bad,
every clergyman is sound — and no clergyman unsound.

They are 'tossed to and fro, like children, by every wind of doctrine;' often carried

away by some new excitement and sensational movement; ever ready for new things, because they have no firm grasp on the old; and utterly unable to 'render a reason of the hope that is in them.'

All this, and much more, is the result of that effeminate *dread of distinct doctrine* which has been so strongly developed, and has laid such hold on many pastors in these days.

I turn from the picture I have exhibited with a sorrowful heart. I grant it is a gloomy one; but I am afraid it is only too accurate and true. Let us not deceive ourselves. Distinct and definitive doctrine is at a premium just now. Instability and unsettled notions are the natural result, and meet us in every direction.

Cleverness and *earnestness* are the favorite idols of the age!

What a man says matters nothing — however strange and heterogeneous are the opinions he expresses! If he is only brilliant and 'earnest' — he cannot be wrong! Never was it so important for believers to hold sound systematic views of truth, and for ministers to 'enunciate doctrine' very clearly and distinctly in their teaching.

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