

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,  
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN XIII. 16-20.

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.	lifted up his heel against me.
17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.	19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am <i>he</i> .
18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath	20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

IF we would understand the full meaning of these verses, we must mark carefully where they stand in the chapter. They follow hard after the remarkable passage in which we read of Christ washing His disciples' feet. They stand in close connection with His solemn command, that the disciples should do as they had seen Him do. Then come the five verses which we have now to consider.

We are taught, for one thing, in these verses, that *Christians must never be ashamed of doing anything that Christ has done*. We read, "Verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him."

There seems little doubt that our Lord's all-seeing eye saw a rising unwillingness in the minds of the Apostles to do such menial things as they had just seen Him do. Puffed up with their old Jewish expectation of thrones and kingdoms in this world, secretly self-satisfied with their own position as our Lord's friends, these poor Galileans were startled at the idea of washing people's feet! They could not bring themselves to believe that Messiah's service entailed work like this. They could not yet take in the grand truth, that true Christian greatness consisted in doing good to others. And hence they needed our Lord's word of warning. If He had humbled Himself to do humbling work, His disciples must not hesitate to do the same.

The lesson is one of which we all need to be reminded. We are all too apt to dislike any work which seems to entail trouble, self-denial, and going down to our inferiors. We are only too ready to depute such work to others, and to excuse ourselves by saying, "It is not in our way." When feelings of this kind arise within us we shall find it good to remember our Lord's words in this passage, no less than our Lord's example. We ought never to think it beneath us to show kindness to the lowest of men. We ought never to hold our hand because the objects of our kindness are ungrateful or unworthy. Such was not the mind of Him who washed the feet of Judas Iscariot as well as Peter. He who in these matters cannot stoop to follow Christ's example, gives little evidence of possessing true love or true humility.

We are taught, for another thing, in these verses, *the uselessness of religious knowledge if not accompanied by practice*. We read, "If ye know the-

se things, happy are ye if ye do them.” It sounds as if our Lord would warn His disciples that they would never be really happy in His service if they were content with a barren head-knowledge of duty, and did not live according to their knowledge.

The lesson is one which deserves the continual remembrance of all professing Christians. Nothing is more common than to hear people saying of doctrine or duty,—“We know it, we know it;” while they sit still in unbelief or disobedience. They actually seem to flatter themselves that there is something creditable and redeeming in knowledge, even when it bears no fruit in heart, character, or life. Yet the truth is precisely the other way. To know what we ought to be, believe, and do, and yet to be unaffected by our knowledge, only adds to our guilt in the sight of God. To know that Christians should be humble and loving, while we continue proud and selfish, will only sink us deeper in the pit, unless we awake and repent. Practice, in short, is the very life of religion. “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James iv. 17.)

Of course we must never *despise* knowledge. It is in one sense the beginning of Christianity in the soul. So long as we know nothing of sin, or God, or Christ, or grace, or repentance, or faith, or conscience, we are of course nothing better than heathens. But we must not *overrate* knowledge. It is perfectly valueless unless it produces results in our conduct, and influences our lives, and moves our wills. In fact knowledge without practice does not raise us above the level of the devil. He could say to Jesus, “I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.” The devils, says St. James, “believe and tremble.” (James ii. 20.) Satan knows truth, but has no will to obey it, and is miserable. He that would be happy in Christ’s service must not only know, but do.

We are taught, for another thing, in these verses, *the perfect knowledge which Christ has of all His people*.

He can distinguish between false profession and true grace. The Church may be deceived, and rank men as Apostles who are nothing better than brethren of Judas Iscariot. But Jesus is never deceived, for He can read hearts. And here He declares with peculiar emphasis, “I know whom I have chosen.”

This perfect knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is a very solemn thought, and one which cuts two ways. It ought to fill the hypocrite with alarm, and drive him to repentance. Let him remember that the eyes of the all-seeing Judge already see him through and through, and detect the want of a wedding garment. If he would not be put to shame before assembled worlds, let him cast aside his false profession, and confess his sin before it is too late. Believers, on the other hand, may think of an all-knowing Saviour with comfort. They may remember, when misunderstood and slandered by

an evil world, that their Master knows all. He knows that they are true and sincere, however weak and failing. A time is coming when He will confess them before His Father, and bring forth their characters clear and bright as the summer sun at noon-day.

We are taught, finally, in these verses, *the true dignity of Christ's disciples*. The world may despise and ridicule the Apostles because they care more for works of love and humility than the pursuits of the world. But the Master bids them remember their commission, and not be ashamed. They are God's ambassadors, and have no cause to be cast down. "Verily, verily," He declares, "He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me."

The doctrine here laid down is full of encouragement. It ought to cheer and hearten all who lay themselves out to do good, and specially to do good to the fallen and the poor. Work of this kind gets little praise from men, and they who give themselves up to it are often regarded as miserable enthusiasts, and meet with much opposition. Let them however work on, and take comfort in the words of Christ which we are now considering. To spend and be spent in trying to do good makes a man far more honourable in the eyes of Jesus than to command armies or amass a fortune. The few who work for God in Christ's way have no cause to be ashamed. Let them not be cast down if the children of the world laugh and sneer and despise them. A day comes when they will hear the words, "Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." (Matt. xxv. 34.)

#### NOTES. JOHN XIII. 16-20.

16.—[*Verily, verily, I say unto you, etc.*] This well-known mode of expression is doubtless used here to show the importance of the lessons which our Lord is imposing on the disciples at this point. It is as though He said, "Do not think lightly of what I am teaching you now. It is no trifling matter. Love and humility are weighty things in my service. I solemnly charge you to remember that, as I have often told you, the servant is not greater than his master, but must strictly follow his example. The messenger sent on an errand is not greater than him that sends him, and must carefully do as he is bid. If I, your Master and Head, have done these actions of love and humility, never be ashamed of doing the same, or similar ones. If you are really my disciples and messengers, you must prove it by shrinking from nothing which you have seen Me do."

The Greek word which we render here, "He that is sent," is the same that is elsewhere rendered "the Apostle." Our translators seem to have translated the word as they have to show more forcibly the connection between "the sender" and "the sent," which, to a reader ignorant of Greek, would not have appeared if the word "apostle" had been used.

17.—[*If ye know...happy....do them.*] The object of this verse seems to be the confirmation of the preceding one. "Be not content with knowing these things with your heads. See that you actually practice them. If you really know and understand my meaning; you will find it your happiness to put it in practice." The latent idea seems to be, "Wretched and miserable Christians are ye, if you know these things, and then stop short, and do not practice them."

Let us note the solemn principle which lies beneath the verse. Knowledge without practice is the character of the devil. None knows more truth, and none does more evil than he. Let us not forget that!

- 18.—[*I speak not of you all.*] It is not quite clear what our Lord meant by these words. Some think, as Bishop Hall, that the connection is with the verse before, and that our Lord meant, “When I speak of happiness, knowledge, and practice, I do not speak as if there was no false Apostle among you.”

Others think that the sense should be carried forward. “I am not speaking as if you were all equally faithful, and equally sent by Me.”

[*I know whom I have chosen.*] This sentence again admits of being taken in two senses. Some think, as Calvin, Poole, Rollock, and Hutcheson, that it refers to the eternal election and choice of those disciples who were true believers. “I know whom I have really called and chosen to be mine by my Spirit.” Others think, as Zwingle, Musculus, Hall, Whitby, Hengstenberg, and Burgon, that it only refers to the official choice and calling of the twelve when our Lord selected them to be His disciples, and has no reference to the inward call of grace. It would then mean, “I know the real inward character of all those whom I have called to be my professing disciples.” It certainly favours this view, that our Lord uses precisely the same expression in John vi. 70: “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

Any one who cares to see the question well discussed, will find it ably examined by Gomarus.

[*But that the Scripture...fulfilled.*] Our Lord’s meaning seems to be filled up in the following way: “I speak not of you all, as if I thought you all faithful. I know that ye are not all clean and trustworthy, and I know that in this way you will see the words of Scripture fulfilled.”

Here, as in many places where the expression occurs, “This was done that the Scripture might be fulfilled,” we must not for a moment suppose that “things were done in order that Scripture might be fulfilled,” but that “when things were done the Scripture was fulfilled.” “I know the characters of all my disciples,” our Lord seems to say, “and I know that very soon something will happen by which the Scripture will be fulfilled.”

[*He that eateth bread, etc.*] The forty-first Psalm is here shown to apply to one greater than David, and one worse than Ahitophel. The ninth verse here quoted says, “Mine own familiar friend, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” The expression implies the act of one who like a stubborn and vicious horse, suddenly turns round against his master and kicks at him. “This,” our Lord says, “is about to be fulfilled in the conduct of Judas Iscariot to Me.”

It cannot of course be said that this quotation is positive proof that Judas ate the Lord’s Supper. But it certainly rather increases the probability of it. The words, “eateth bread with Me,” used in such close juxtaposition to the institution of the Lord’s Supper, are very remarkable.

The grand lesson, that we must be prepared for much disappointment in friends and companions in this life, is very plain in this passage. The less we expect from man the better.

- 19.—[*Now I tell you before, etc.*] There can be little doubt that this verse applies to the warning of Judas’ approaching apostasy which our Lord had just given. “I tell you of the coming fall of one of your number before it takes place, in order that when it takes place you may not be confounded, but may see fresh reason for believing that I am the promised Messiah.”

The expression, “I am He,” in the Greek is literally, “I am.” Is there any reference to the famous “I AM hath sent me,” in Exodus? It comes in close connection with “sending” in

the next verse.

20.—[ *Verily, verily I say, etc.*] Our Lord's purpose in this verse seems to be to encourage and cheer His faithful disciples. "Be not dismayed" he seems to say, "though one of your number is unfaithful and falls away. Persevere and fear not. Remember the high dignity of your office. I solemnly declare to you that he who receives you or any one else whom I send forth to preach the Gospel, receives Me, because ye are my representatives. Nor is this all. He that receives Me, receives not Me only, but God the Father who sent Me. Ye have no cause therefore to be ashamed of your calling however unworthily some may behave."

Let us note that it is no light matter to reject and despise a faithful minister of Christ. A weak and ignorant servant may carry a message for a royal master, and for his master's sake, ought not to be lightly esteemed. Contempt for Christ's ministers, when they are really faithful, is a bad symptom in a church or nation.

The connection of this verse with the preceding passage is certainly not easy to see, and has puzzled all commentators. Some, as Alford, have thought that our Lord intended to show the wickedness of Judas in giving up such an honourable office as that of the Apostleship. This seems far-fetched.—Some refer it back to the command to imitate our Lord's humility by washing one another's feet, and think it is meant to remind them that even they are Christ's ambassadors. I prefer the view already given, that the words are meant to cheer and comfort the disciples. Though not all were faithful, the true-hearted ones were Christ's commissioned ambassadors.

Stier says. "The whole circle of the Apostles seemed to be disgraced and broken up by the treachery of Judas, and therefore our Lord confirms the faithful in their election, and that very fitly by repeating an earlier promise."