

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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ST. JOHN. VOL. III.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,
CAVENDISH SQUARE.
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

1873AD

JOHN XIV. 4-11.

4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.	9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou <i>then</i> , Show us the Father?
5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?	10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.
6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.	11 Believe me that I <i>am</i> in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.
7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.	
8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.	

WE should mark in these verses *how much better Jesus speaks of believers than they speak of themselves*. He says to His disciples, "Ye know whither I go, and ye know the way." And yet Thomas at once breaks in with the remark, "We know neither the whither nor the way." The apparent contradiction demands explanation. It is more seeming than real.

Certainly, in one point of view, the knowledge of the disciples was very small. They knew little before the crucifixion and resurrection compared to what they might have known, and little compared to what they afterwards knew after the day of Pentecost. About our Lord's purpose in coming into the world, about His sacrificial death and substitution for us on the cross, their ignorance was glaring and great. It might well be said, that they "knew in part" only, and were children in understanding.

And yet, in another point of view, the knowledge of the disciples was very great. They knew far more than the great majority of the Jewish nation, and received truths which the Scribes and Pharisees entirely rejected. Compared to the world around them, they were in the highest sense enlightened. They knew and believed that their Master was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God; and to know Him was the first step towards heaven. All things go by comparison. Before we lightly esteem the disciples because of their ignorance, let us take care that we do not underrate their knowledge. They knew more precious truth than they were aware of themselves. Their hearts were better than their heads.

The plain truth is, that all believers are apt to undervalue the work of the Spirit in their own souls, and to fancy they know nothing because they do not know everything. Many true Christians are thought more of in heaven while they live than they think of themselves, and will find it out to their surprise at the last day. There is One above who takes far more account of heart-knowledge than head-knowledge. Many go mourning all the way to heaven because they know so little, and fancy they will miss the way altogether, and yet have hearts with which God is well pleased.

We should mark, secondly, in these verses, *what glorious names the Lord Jesus gives Himself*. He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The fulness of these precious words can probably never be taken in by man. He that attempts to unfold them does little more than scratch the surface of a rich soil.

Christ is "the way,"—the way to heaven and peace with God. He is not only the guide, and teacher, and lawgiver, like Moses; He is Himself the door, the ladder, and the road, through whom we must draw near to God. He has opened the way to the tree of life, which was closed when Adam and Eve fell, by the satisfaction He made for us on the cross. Through His blood we may draw near with boldness, and have access with confidence into God's presence.

Christ is "the truth,"—the whole substance of true religion which the mind of man requires. Without Him the wisest heathen groped in gross darkness and knew nothing about God. Before He came even the Jews saw "through a glass darkly," and discerned nothing distinctly under the types, figures, and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Christ is the whole truth, and meets and satisfies every desire of the human mind.

Christ is "the life,"—the sinner's title to eternal life and pardon, the believer's root of spiritual life and holiness, the surety of the Christian's resurrection life. He that believeth on Christ hath everlasting life. He that abideth in Him, as the branch abides in the vine, shall bring forth much fruit. He that believeth on Him, though he were dead, yet shall he live. The root of all life, for soul and for body, is Christ.

Forever let us grasp and hold fast these truths. To use Christ daily as the way, to believe Christ daily as the truth,—to live on Christ daily as the life,—this is to be a well-informed, a thoroughly furnished and an established Christian.

We should mark, thirdly, in these verses, *how expressly the Lord Jesus shuts out all ways of salvation but Himself*. "No man," He declares, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

It avails nothing that a man is clever, learned, highly gifted, amiable, charitable, kind-hearted, and zealous about some sort of religion. All this will not save his soul if he does not draw near to God by Christ's atonement, and make use of God's own Son as his Mediator and Saviour. God is so holy that all men are guilty and debtors in His sight. Sin is so sinful that no mortal man can make satisfaction for it. There must be a mediator, a ransom-payer, a redeemer, between ourselves and God, or else we can never be saved. There is only one door, one bridge, one ladder, between earth and heaven,—the crucified Son of God. Whosoever will enter in by that door may be saved; but to him who refuses to use that door the Bible holds out no hope at all. Without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Let us beware, if we love life, of supposing that mere earnestness will take a man to heaven, though he know nothing of Christ. The idea is a deadly and ruinous error. Sincerity will never wipe away our sins. It is not true that every man will be saved by his own religion, no matter what he believes, so long as he is diligent and sincere. We must not pretend to be wiser than God. Christ has said, and Christ will stand to it, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, *how close and mysterious is the union of God the Father and God the Son*. Four times over this mighty truth is put before us in words that cannot be mistaken. "If ye had known Me, ye would have known my Father."—"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."—"I am in the Father, and the Father in Me."—"The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works."

Sayings like these are full of deep mystery. We have no eyes to see their meaning fully,—no line to fathom it,—no language to express it,—no mind to take it in. We must be content to believe when we cannot explain, and to admire and revere when we cannot interpret. Let it suffice us to know and hold that the Father is God and the Son is God, and yet that they are one in essence though two distinct Persons,—ineffably one, and yet ineffably distinct. These are high things, and we cannot attain to a full comprehension of them.

Let us however take comfort in the simple truth, that Christ is very God of very God; equal with the Father in all things, and One with Him. He who loved us, and shed His blood for us on the cross, and bids us trust Him for pardon, is no mere man like ourselves. He is "God over all, blessed for ever," and able to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners. Though our sins be as scarlet, He can make them white as snow. He that casts his soul on Christ has an Almighty Friend,—a Friend who is One with the Father, and very God.

NOTES. JOHN XIV. 4-11.

4.—[*And whither I go ye know...way ye know.*] This remarkable sentence was evidently meant to stir and cheer the disciples, by reminding them of what their Master had repeatedly told them. It is as though our Lord said, "Do not be cast down by my going away, as if you had never heard Me say anything about heaven and the way to heaven. Awake from your dependency, stir up your memories. Surely you know, if you reflect a little, that I have often told you all about it." Is it not, again, like a tender parent saying to a frightened child, who says he knows not what to do, and is ready to sit down in despair, "Come you know well enough, if you will only consider"?

Poole observes on this verse, "It is pleasant to notice how Christ continueth His discourse to the disciples, like a mother speaking to a little child crying after her when she prepares to go abroad. The child cries; the mother bids it by still, for she is only going to a friend's house. It still cries; she tells it she is only going to prepare a place for it there, where it will be much happier than at home. It is not yet satisfied; she tells it again, that

though she goes, she will come again, and then it shall go with her, and she will part from it no more. The child is yet impatient; she endeavoreth to still it, telling it that it knoweth whither she goeth, and it knows the way by which, if need be, it may come to her.”

Let us note that disciples often know more than they suppose or admit, but do not use their knowledge, or keep it ready for use. Ferus compares them to infants lying in their cradles, who have fathers and fortunes, but do not know it.

Let us note that Christ looks graciously on the little knowledge His people possess, and make the most of it. He can make allowance for their minds being clouded by grief or trouble, and their consequent forgetfulness of truth for a season.

- 5.—[*Thomas saith unto Him, etc.*] This verse shows how foolishly a disciple may talk under the influence of despondency. Here is one of the eleven faithful Apostles declaring flatly that they neither knew where their Master was going, nor the way! The saying is characteristic of the man. Thomas always appears a doubting, slow-minded believer. But we must not judge disciples too sharply for words spoken under deep distress. When the passions and affections are much stirred, the tongue often runs away with a man, and he speaks unadvisedly. Nor must we forget that disciples have very different gifts. All have not equally strong faith, clear understanding, and good memory.

Trapp quaintly remarks that believers in the frame of Thomas are like people who hunt for their keys and purses, when they have got them in their pockets.

- 6.—[*Jesus saith...I...way...truth...life.*] This wonderful saying is a brilliant example of a foolish remark calling out a great truth from our Lord’s lips. To the ill-natured remark of the Pharisees we owe the parable of the Prodigal Son (See Luke chapter xv.); to the fretful complaint of Thomas we owe one of the grandest texts in Scripture. It is one of those deep utterances which no exposition can thoroughly unfold and exhaust.

When our Lord says, “I am the way,” He means, “the Father’s house is to be reached through my mediation and atonement. Faith in Me is the key to heaven. He that believeth in Me is in the right road.”

When our Lord says, “I am the truth,” He means, “The root of all knowledge is to know Me. I am the true Messiah to whom all revelation points, the truth of which the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices were a figure and shadow. He that really knows Me, knows enough to take him safe to heaven, though he may not know many things, and may be troubled at his own ignorance.”

When our Lord says “I am the life,” He means, “I am the Root and Fountain of all life in religion, the Redeemer from death and the Giver of everlasting life. He that knows and believes in Me, however weak and ignorant he may feel, has spiritual life now, and will have a glorious life in my Father’s house hereafter.”

Some think that the three great words in this sentence should be taken together, and that our Lord meant, “I am the true and living way.” Yet the general opinion of the best commentators is decidedly unfavourable to this view of the sentence. To my own mind it cuts down and impoverishes a great and deep saying.

Musculus remarks that no prophet, teacher, or apostle ever used such words as these. They are the language of one who knew that He was God.

[*No man...cometh...Father...by me.*] Here our Lord teaches that He is not merely the way to our Father’s home in heaven, but that there is no other way, and that men must either go to heaven by His atonement or not go there at all. It is a clear distinct limitation of heaven to those who believe on Christ. None else will enter in there. Rejecting Christ they lose all. All hinges on this. There is no bar between a sinner and heaven but unbelief. A man may be poor and unlearned; but if he has faith in Christ he will be saved. A man may

be rich and learned; but if he does not trust Christ's atonement he will be lost.

We should mark carefully what an unanswerable argument this sentence supplies against the modern notion that it does not matter what a man believes,—that all religions will lead men to heaven if they are sincere,—that creeds and doctrines are of no importance.—that heaven is a place for all mankind—whether heathen, Mahometan, or Christian,—and that the Fatherhood of God is enough to save all at last, of all sects, kinds, and characters! Our Lord's words should never be forgotten. "There is no way to the Father but by Me." God is a Father to none but to those who believe in Christ. In short, there are not many ways to heaven. There is only one way.

"Coming to the Father," in this place, we must remark, includes not only coming to Him in glory at the last, but coming to Him in a friendly relation for peace and comfort now in this life.

"By Me," is literally, "through" Me,—as a door, a gate, a road, a path, an entrance. It is an expression which would be peculiarly expressive to the Jews, taught from their childhood to draw near to God only through the priests.

7. [*If...known Me...Father also.*] This is a deep saying, like every saying which handles the mysterious union of the Father and the Son in St. John's Gospel. The meaning seems to be, "If you had rightly, properly, and perfectly known Me, as the Divine Messiah, in all the fulness of my nature, you would then have known more of that Father to whom I am inseparably united. No one can rightly know Me without knowing the Father, because I and the Father are One."

[*And from henceforth...known....seen Him.*] The meaning of these words seems to be, "Understand from this time forward, that in knowing Me you know the Father, and in seeing Me see the Father, so far as the Father can be seen and known by man." Although the Son and the Father are two distinct persons in the Trinity, yet there is so close and mysterious a union between them that he who sees and knows the Son, in a certain sense, sees and knows the Father. Is it not written of the Son that "He is the express image of the Father." (Heb. i. 2.)

The whole difficulty of the verse arises from the extreme mysteriousness of its subject. The relation between the eternal Father and the eternal Son and the eternal Spirit, who, while three Persons, are one God, is precisely one of those things which we have no minds to take in, and no language to express. We must often be content to believe and reverence it, without attempting to explain it. This only we may lay down with certainty, as a great canon and maxim,—the more we know of Christ, "the more we know of the Father."

- 8—[*Philip...shew us the Father...sufficeth us.*] We are not told Philip's motive in making this request. Perhaps, like Moses, he and the other disciples had a pious desire to see a more full vision and revelation of God's glory, as an authentication of their Master's Divine mission. "Show me Thy glory." (Ex. xxxiii. 18.) Perhaps Philip's petition is recorded to show how little clear knowledge the Apostles yet had of their Master's nature, and how little they realized that He and the Father were One:—"If we could only see once for all the Divine Being whom Thou dost call the Father, it would be sufficient. We should be satisfied and our doubts would be removed." At any rate we have no right to think that Philip spoke like the unbelieving Jews, who always pretended to want signs and wonders. Whatever sense we put on the words, we must carefully remember not to judge Philip too harshly. Living as we do in the nineteenth century, amidst light and creeds and knowledge, we can have faint ideas of the extreme difficulty that must have been felt by the disciples in fully realizing their Master's nature, in the days when He was "in the form of a Servant," and under a veil of poverty, weakness, and humiliation.

Melancthon remarks that Philip's petition represents the natural wish of man in very age.

Men feel an inward craving everywhere to see God.

- 9.—[*Jesus saith...so long time...Philip.*] This verse is undoubtedly a gentle rebuke. The expression, “so long time,” is noteworthy, when we remember that Philip was one of the very first disciples whom Jesus called. (See John i. 43.) The meaning seems to be, “After three long years, Philip, dost thou not yet thoroughly know and understand who I am “

[*He...seen me...seen the Father.*] This deep sentence can only mean “He that hath thoroughly seen me with the eye of faith, and realized that I am the eternal Son, the Divine Messiah, hath seen as much of my Father, whose express image I am, as mortal man can comprehend.” There is so close and intimate a union between persons in the Trinity, that he who sees the Son sees the Father. And yet we must carefully beware that we do not, like some heretics, “confound the Persons.” The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father.

Musculus observes that to see with bodily eyes is one thing, and to see with the eyes of faith quite another.

[*And how sayest thou...show...Father.*] This question is a further gentle rebuke of Philip’s ignorance. “What dost thou mean by saying, Show us the Father? What clear knowledge of Me canst thou have if thou canst ask such a question?”

Let us note how Jesus calls “Philip” by his name. It was doubtless meant to prick his conscience. “Thou, Philip, an old disciple, so ignorant! Ought not thou, after following and hearing Me for three years to have known better than this?”

- 10.—[*Believest thou not...I...in Father...in Me.*] This question continues the rebuke to Philip. It means, “Hast thou not yet believe and realize what I have taught,—that there is a mystical union between Me and the Father, and that He is in Me and I in Him?”

This question surely seems to indicate that our Lord had often taught His disciples about the union between Himself and the Father. But, like many of the things He taught, the mighty truth passed over their heads at first, and was not remembered till afterwards. How little reason have ministers to complain if their teaching is little regarded, when this was Christ’s experience!

[*The words that I speak...Father...works.*] There can be little doubt that this is a very elliptical sentence. The full meaning must be supplied in this way. “The words that I speak to you I speak not independently of the Father; and the works that I do I do not do them independently of the Father. The Father who dwells in Me, speaks in Me and works in Me. My words are words given Me to speak, and my works are works given Me to do, in the eternal counsel between the Father and the Son. Both in speaking and working I and my Father are one. What I speak He speaks, and what I work He works.”

The whole difficulty of the verse arises from forgetting the close and mysterious and insoluble union between the Persons of the Trinity. How little we realize the fulness of the expression, “The Father dwelleth in Me.”

- 11.—[*Believe Me...in the Father...in Me.*] Direct instruction follows the rebuke of the preceding verse. Our Lord repeats for the benefit not of Philip only, but of all the eleven, the great doctrine He had so often taught them. “Once more, I say, Believe, all of you, my words, when I say that I and the Father are so closely united that I am in Him and He in Me.”

The word rendered “believe” in this verse is in the plural number. Our Lord does not address Philip only, but the whole company of the Apostles.

What an example we have here of the necessity of repeating instruction over and over again. Our Lord had evidently taught these things before to the eleven, and yet they had either not understood or not remembered.

[*Or else believe...works' sake.*] Here our Lord condescends to the weakness of the disciples. "If you will not believe the close union of Myself and the Father because of my word, believe it because of the works I work. They are such works as no one could work of himself, and without the Father."

Let us carefully observe how our Lord here, as elsewhere, specially names His works, or miracles, as testimonies of His nature and Divine mission. To leave out miracles in the list of the evidences of Christianity is a great mistake.