EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN XVII. 9–16.

9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.
10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine: and I am glorified in them.
11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.
12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition: that the Scripture might be fulfilled.
13 And now come I to thee: and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.
14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.
15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.
16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

THESE verses, like every part of this wonderful chapter, contain some deep things which are “hard to be understood.” But there are two plain points standing out on the face of the passage which deserve the special attention of all true Christians. Passing by all other points, let us fix our attention on these two.

We learn, for one thing, that the Lord Jesus does things for His believing people which He does not do for the wicked and unbelieving. He helps their souls by special intercession. He says, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me.”

The doctrine before us is one which is specially hated by the world. Nothing gives such offence, and stirs up such bitter feeling among the wicked, as the idea of God making any distinction between man and man, and loving one person more than another. Yet the world’s objections to the doctrine are, as usual, weak and unreasonable. Surely a little reflection might show us that a God who regarded good and bad, holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous, with equal complacency and favour, would be a very strange kind of God! The special intercession of Christ for His saints is agreeable to reason and to common sense.

Of course, like every other Gospel truth, the doctrine before us needs careful statement and Scriptural guarding. On the one hand, we must not narrow the love of Christ to sinners, and on the other we must not make it too broad. It is true that Christ loves all sinners, and invites all to be saved; but it is also true that He specially loves the “blessed company of all faithful people,” whom He sanctifies and glorifies. It is true that He has wrought out a redemption sufficient for all mankind, and offers it freely to all; but it is also true that His redemption is effectual only to them that believe. Just so it is true that He is the Mediator between God and man; but it is also true that He intercedes actively for none but those that come unto God by Him. Hence it is written, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world.”
This special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer’s safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unfailing care, by One whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is “able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb. vii. 25.) They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them. When Judas fell never to rise again, while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored, the reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” (Luke xxii. 32.)

The true servant of Christ ought to lean back his soul on the truth before us, and take comfort in it. It is one of the peculiar privileges and treasures of a believer, and ought to be well known. However much may be wrested and abused by false professors and hypocrites, it is one which those who really feel themselves the workings of the Spirit should hold firm and never let go. Well says the judicious Hooker,—“No man’s condition so safe as ours: the prayer of Christ is more than sufficient both to strengthen us, be we never so weak; and to overthrow all adversary power, be it never so strong and potent.” (‘Hooker’s Sermons.’ Nisbet’s edit., 1834, p. 171.)

We learn, for another thing, in these verses, that Christ does not wish His believing people to be kept out of the world, but to be kept from the evil of it. We need not doubt that our Lord’s all-seeing eye detected in the hearts of His disciples an impatient desire to get away from this troubled world. Few in number and weak in strength, surrounded on every side by enemies and persecutors, they might well long to be released from the scene of conflict, and to go home. Even David had said in a certain place, “O that I had wings like a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest!” (Psalm lv. 6.) Seeing all this, our Lord has wisely placed on record this part of His prayer for the perpetual benefit of His Church. He has taught us the great lesson that He thinks it better for His people to remain in the world and be kept from its evil than to be taken out of the world and removed from the presence of evil altogether.

Nor is it difficult on reflection to see the wisdom of our Lord’s mind about His people, in this as in everything else. Pleasant as it might be to flesh and blood to be snatched away from conflict and temptation, we may easily see that it would not be profitable. How could Christ’s people do any good in the world, if taken away from it immediately after conversion?—How could they exhibit the power of grace, and make proof of faith, and courage, and patience, as good soldiers of a crucified Lord?—How could they be duly trained for heaven, and taught to value the blood and intercession and patience of their Redeemer, unless they purchased their experience
by suffering?—Questions like these admit of only one kind of answer. To abide here in this vale of tears, tried, tempted, assaulted, and yet kept from falling into sin, is the surest plan to promote the sanctification of Christians, and to glorify Christ. To go to heaven at once, in the day of conversion, would doubtless be an easy course, and would save us much trouble. But the easiest course is not always the path of duty. He that would win the crown must carry the cross, and show himself light in the midst of darkness, and salt in the midst of corruption. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” (2 Tim. ii. 11.)

If we have any hope that we are Christ’s true disciples, let us be satisfied that Christ knows better than we do what is for our good. Let us leave “our times in His hand,” and be content to abide here patiently as long as He pleases, however hard our position, so long as He keeps us from evil. That He will so keep us we need not doubt, if we ask Him, because He prays that we may be “kept.” Nothing, we may be sure, glorifies grace so much as to live like Daniel in Babylon, and the saints in Nero’s household,—in the world and yet not of the world,—tempted on every side and yet conquerors of temptation, not taken out of the reach of evil and yet kept and preserved from its power.

NOTES. JOHN XVII. 9–16.

9.—[I pray for them, etc. etc.] In this verse our Lord begins that part of His prayer which is specially intercessory, and proceeds to name things which He asks for His disciples, from this point down to the end of the chapter. It may be convenient to remember that the things He asks may be divided under four heads. He prays that His disciples may be (a) kept, (b) sanctified, (c) united, (d) and be with Him in glory. Four more important things cannot be desired for believers.

To say, as some have said, that our Lord’s intercessory prayer is an exact specimen of what He does in heaven as our High Priest, is straining a point, and going too far. To suppose that the Son literally asks things of the Father by prayer in heaven, is in my judgment unreasonable, and a very limited, narrow view of Christ’s intercession. We are reading a prayer made by our Lord during the time of His earthly ministry, before His ascension and session at God’s right hand; and we are not reading an account of what He does for us, as our Priest, within the veil. Let it suffice us to believe that the intercession of this chapter exhibits accurately Christ’s mind toward believers, His desires for believers, the active interest He takes in believers, and the graces He would fain see in believers. Above all, let us believe that if we seek for ourselves the same four things that Jesus here names, we have a Friend in heaven who will take care that we do not seek in vain and will make our prayer effectual.

There are two interpretations of our Lord’s meaning, when He speaks of praying for the disciples, and “not praying for the world.”

Some, as Bengel and Alford, think that our Lord meant, “At this present moment I pray specially for my disciples, and not for the world.” They will not admit that our Lord does
not pray and intercede in any way for the wicked and unbelieving; and they quote with some show of reason His prayer at the crucifixion for His murderers,—“Father, forgive them.” (Luke xxiii. 34.)

Others, as Hutcheson and Lampe, think that our Lord meant, “I pray specially for my disciples, because now and always it is their special privilege to be prayed for and interceded for by Me.” The advocates of this view maintain that it is derogatory to our Lord’s honour to suppose that He can ever ask anything in vain; and that His intercession specially belongs to “those who come unto God by Him.” (Heb. vii. 25.)

The point in dispute is a nice and delicate one, and will probably never be settled. On the one hand we must take care that we do not forget that our Lord Jesus Christ does take a special interest in His believing people, and does do special things for them which He does not do for the wicked and unbelieving.—On the other hand we must not forget that our Lord pities all, cares for all, and has provided salvation sufficient for all mankind. There is no escaping the text which says of the wicked that they “deny the Lord that bought them.” (2 Peter ii. 1.) The most fair and honest interpretation of the text, “God so loved the world” (John iii. 16), is to regard “the world” as meaning all mankind.

The whole dispute turns, as is often the case in such disputes, on the meaning we put on a word. If by “intercession” we mean vaguely and generally the whole mediatorial work of Christ on behalf of mankind, it is then true that Christ intercedes for all, both good and bad; and this text before us must mean, “I pray at this moment specially for my people, and am only thinking of them.”—If, on the other hand, we mean by “intercession” that special work which Christ does for His people, in order to carry them to heaven, after calling, pardoning, justifying, renewing, and sanctifying them, it is then plain that Christ intercedes for none but believers, and that the words before us mean, “I pray now, as always, specially for my disciples, and not for the world.”

If I must give an opinion, I must own that I decidedly hold the second or last view of which I have spoken. I believe that Christ never, in the fullest sense of the word, “makes intercession” for the wicked. I believe that such intercession is a peculiar privilege of the saints, and one grand reason of their continuance in grace. They stand, because there is One in heaven who actively and effectually intercedes.

I will give place to no one in maintaining that Jesus loves all mankind, came into the world for all, died for all, provided redemption sufficient for all, calls on all, invites all, commands all to repent and believe; and ought to be offered to all—freely, fully, unreservedly, directly, unconditionally—without money and without price. If I did not hold this, I dare not get into a pulpit, and I should not understand how to preach the Gospel.

But while I hold all this, I maintain firmly that Jesus does special work for those who believe, which He does not do for others. He quickens them by His Spirit, calls them by His grace, washes them in His blood—justifies them, sanctifies them, keeps them, leads them, and continually intercedes for them—that they may not fall. If I did not believe all this, I should be a very miserable, unhappy Christian.

Holding this opinion, I regard the text before us as one which describes our Lord’s special intercession for His people; and I take the meaning to be simply, “I pray for them, as my peculiar people, that they may be kept, sanctified, united, and glorified; but I do not pray for the world.”

The famous text, “Father, forgive them” (Luke xxiii. 34), is at best a doubtful one. Will any one undertake to say, that those for whom our Lord prayed were never forgiven and saved?—Have we forgotten that within fifty days after that prayer 3,000 souls were converted at Pentecost, of whom Peter said, “By wicked hands ye crucified and slew Jesus of Nazareth”? (Acts ii. 23.) Who can prove that the very men who crucified our Lord were
not among the number converted, and were thus the answer to our Lord’s prayer?—These however are conjectures at the very best. The matter is one which is not necessary to salvation, and one about which Christians must agree to differ, and must not excommunicate one another. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” (Rom. xiv. 5.)

Hengstenberg remarks, “The world may be viewed under two aspects. First, there is the susceptibility of grace, which, despite the depths of the sinful depravation of Adam’s race, still remains in it. Of the world in this sense Jesus says, I came not into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world.’ (John i. 29; iii. 17.) Viewed under this aspect, the world is the subject of Christ’s intercession. The disciples themselves were won from the world. But the world may also be viewed as ruled by predominantly ungodly principles. Of the world in this sense we read that it cannot receive the Spirit of truth. (John xiv. 27.) To pray for the world, thus viewed, would be as vain as to pray for the prince of this world.”

Manton suggests that we must draw some distinction between the intercession of Christ as a Divine Mediator, and the prayers of Christ as a man, wherein He is an example to His people. Yet, however just this remark, it hardly seems to apply to this peculiarly solemn prayer.

[For them...given Me...thine.] Our Lord here repeats the description of His disciples which He had given before. They were men whom “the Father had given Him” to teach and feed, and save. They were His Father’s sheep, intrusted to His charge. Therefore, He seems to argue, “I am specially bound to pray for them, and ask for them everything that their souls need. Like a good Shepherd, I must give an account of them one day.”

10.—[And all mine...thine...mine.] This sentence seems to come in parenthetically, and to be a reassertion of the great truth of the perfect unity of the Father and the Son. The words in the Greek mean literally “things,” and not “persons.” “All my things are Thy things, and all Thy things are my things. As with everything else, these eleven disciples are not mine more than Thine, or Thine more than mine.” This continual assertion of the doctrine of the perfect unity of the Godhead, and the distinction of the Persons in the Trinity, is very remarkable and instructive.

[I am glorified in them.] In this sentence our Lord seems to return to the disciples. “I have been and am glorified in them, by their faith, and obedience and love, when the vast majority of their countrymen have hated and rejected Me. They have honoured Me and brought glory to Me, by continuing with Me in my tribulation. Therefore I now make special prayer and intercession for them.”

Let us mark here that the weakest faith and love to Christ brings Him some glory, and is not overlooked by Him.

11.—[And now I am...come to Thee.] In the beginning of this verse our Lord describes the position of the disciples, and shows the special reason why they required prayer and intercession to be made for them. They were about, for the first time, to be left alone like orphans, and thrown on their own resources, in a certain sense. Hitherto they had always had their Master at their side, and could turn to Him in every case of need. Now they were about to enter on a totally different condition of things.—“The time of my departure from the world is at hand. I am very soon about to ascend into heaven and come to Thee. But these few sheep, these weak disciples, are not coming to heaven with Me. They are going to be left alone in a wicked, cold, persecuting world.”

Poole observes, “Christ here speaks of Himself as one who had already died, and was already risen, and ascended, though none of all these things were past, because they were so soon and suddenly to come.”

Let us not fail to note how our Lord remembers the position of His people here on
earth,—cares tenderly for them, and will make all needful provision for their safety and comfort. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest." (Rev. ii. 13.)

[Holy Father.] This is the only place in the Gospel where we find our Lord addressing the Father by this epithet. There is doubtless some good reason for it. It may be that there is a fitness in asking the "Holy" Father to keep the disciples holy and free from the dominion of evil. "As Thou art holy, so keep these my disciples holy."

[Keep through Thine...name...given Me.] Here is the first petition that our Lord puts up for His disciples. He asks that they may be kept and preserved from evil, from falling away, from false doctrine, from being overcome by temptation, from being crushed by persecution, from every device and assault of the devil. Danger was around them on every side. Weakness was their present characteristic. Preservation was what He asked.

The expression, “Keep through Thine own name,” is remarkable. I take it to mean, “Through Thine own attributes of power, love, and wisdom.” The “name” of God, as before remarked, is frequently used in Scripture to signify His character and attributes.

[That they may be one, as we are.] Here our Lord mentions one special object for which He desires that His people may be kept: viz., their unity: that they may be one.—"Keep them, that they may be of one heart and one mind, striving together against common foes and for common ends, and not broken up, weakened, and paralyzed by internal quarrels and divisions."

He adds the highest model and pattern of unity,—“one, as we are,”—the unity of the Father and the Son. Of course there cannot be literally such union between Christian and Christian, as there is between two Persons in the Trinity. But the unity which Jesus prays the disciples may aim at, should be a close, intimate, unbroken unity of mind, and will, and opinion, and feeling.

Burgon remarks here, “The word rendered ‘as,’ both here and in ver. 21, does not denote strict correspondence, but only general resemblance; as in the Athanasian Creed, where the union of two natures in the one Person of Christ, is popularly illustrated by the union of the reasonable soul and flesh in man.” (Comp. Matt. v. 48; Luke vi. 36.)

The importance attached by our Lord to “unity” among Christians, is very strikingly illustrated by the prominent place assigned to it in this verse. The very first object for which He desires the preservation of the disciples, is that they may be kept from division. Nor can we wonder at this, when we consider the interminable divisions of Christians in every age, the immense harm they have done in the world, and the astounding indifference with which many regard them, as if they were perfectly innocent things, and as if the formation of new sects was a laudable work!

12.—[While...with them...kept...Thy name.] Our Lord here recites what He had done for the disciples during His ministry: “Throughout the three years in which I have been with these eleven disciples in the world, I used to keep them from all harm, through Thy power and name.”—I can see no reason why the same Greek words should not be rendered “through Thy name,” in this verse, as well as in the preceding one. In both cases the idea seems the same,—a preservation through the grace, power, and attributes of God the Father.

[Thou...gavest...kept...none...lost.] The word rendered “kept” in this clause, is quite different from the word so rendered in the first part of the verse. There it means simply, “I have preserved.” Here it means, “I have guarded,” like a shepherd guarding a flock, or a soldier guarding a treasure. “I have so carefully guarded those disciples whom Thou hast given Me, that not one of them has perished, or is lost.”

[But the son of perdition.] This remarkable expression of course refers to Judas Iscariot, the traitor, the only one of the Apostles who was lost and cast away in hell. The name
given to Judas is a strong Hebraism, and means “a person worthy of perdition, or only fit to be lost and cast away, by reason of his wickedness.” David says to Saul’s servants, “Ye are worthy to die;” or, as the margin says, “sons of death.” (1 Sam. xxvi. 16.) Again, he says to Nathan, “The man that hath done this thing shall surely die,” or, “is a son of death.” (2 Sam. xxvi. 5; see also Ps. lxix. 11; Matt. xiii. 88; Luke xvi. 8.) It is a tremendously strong expression to come from the lips of our merciful and loving Saviour. It shows the desperate helplessness of any one who, living in great light and privileges like Judas, misuses his opportunities, and deliberately follows the bent of his own sinful inclinations. He becomes the “child of hell.” (Matt. xxiii. 15.)

A question of very grave importance arises out of the words before us. Did our Lord mean that Judas was originally one of those that the Father “gave to him,” and was primarily a true believer? Did he therefore fall away from grace?—Many maintain, as Hammond, Alford, Burgon, and Wordsworth, that Judas was at one time a true believer, like Peter, James, and John,—that the text is an unanswerable proof that grace may be lost,—and that a man may be converted, and have the Holy Ghost, and yet finally fall away, and perish forever in hell.—This is not only a very uncomfortable doctrine, but one which it is hard to reconcile with many plain texts of Scripture, to say nothing of the seventeenth Article of our own Church.—But does the text before us clearly prove that Judas was one of those who were “given” to Christ by the Father? I believe firmly that it does not. I maintain that the “but” in the text is not an “exceptive” word, but an “adversative” one. I hold the right meaning to be, “Those whom Thou gavest Me I have kept, and out of them not one is lost. But there is one man who is lost, even Judas, the son of perdition; not one who was ever given to Me, but one whom I declared long ago to be a devil, a man whose hardened heart fitted him for destruction.”

It is easy of course to say that this view is a far-fetched and non-natural one. I ask those who say this to observe, that the same Greek words here rendered “but,” are used in other places in the New Testament, where it is impossible to put an “exceptive” sense on them, and where the “adversative” meaning is the only one they can possibly bear.—I challenge any one to deny that “but,” in such texts as Matt. xii. 4, “but only for the priests,”—Mark xiii. 32, “but the Father,”—Rev. ix. 4, “but only those men,”—Rev. xxi. 27, “but they which are written,”—must be interpreted as an “adversative,” and cannot possibly be an “exceptive” word. (See also Acts xxvi. 22 and 2 Kings v. 17.) And so it is here. Our Lord does not mean, “No one of those given to Me is lost EXCEPT the son of perdition.”—What He does mean is, “Not one of those given to Me is lost. On the other hand, and in contrast, Judas, a man not given to Me, a graceless man, is lost.”

Let me add, in confirmation of the view I maintain, that in the very next chapter the expression here used is referred to by St. John, in his account of our Lord’s capture. He says, “The saying was fulfilled which He spake: Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none” (John xviii. 9); and not one hint does he give of any exception having been made by our Lord, when he heard Him use the expression before.

The view I advocate is maintained by De Dieu, Gomarus, Lampe, Hutcheson, and Manton.

It is a curious fact that even in our own English language, Milton, writing in the seventeenth century, when the last revision of our Bible took place, has used the word “except” in the same way. He says of Satan, in “Paradise Lost:”—

God and His Son except, created thing
Nought valued He or shunned.”

“Except” there must clearly be “adversative.” God and His Son are not created things! Both Brown (on xvii. John) and Doddridge quote this sentence of Milton.
Bishop Beveridge, quoted by Ford, remarks, “Judas, here called the son of perdition, though he seemed to be given to Christ, and to come to Him, yet really did not. Therefore, though he was lost, as the Scripture had foretold, yet Christ’s word is still true, that He never casts out, nor loseth any, that really come to Him.”

[That Scripture fulfilled.] Here, as in many places, it does not mean that Judas was lost in order to fulfil Scripture, but that the Scripture was fulfilled by the loss of Judas. The place referred to is Psalm cix. 8.

Let us not fail to note the high honour put on Scripture in this place. Even in a prayer of the utmost solemnity addressed by the Son to the Father, we find reverent allusion to the written word of the Old Testament, and to that oft-quoted book, the Psalms.

13.—[And now I come to Thee, etc.] This is a somewhat elliptical verse. I take the meaning to be something of this kind: “I am now soon leaving the world, and coming to Thee. Before leaving the world, I speak these things openly in prayer in the hearing of these my disciples, in order that they may be cheered and comforted, and feel the joy which I give to them filled up and abounding in their hearts.”

I can hardly think that our Lord is referring to the discourse which preceded this prayer. It seems more natural to apply “these things I speak” to His prayer.

The expression, “my joy,” occurs before, in chapter xv. 11. It must mean that peculiar, inward sense of comfort that Christ imparts to believers, and which no one knows excepting him who receives it.

14.—[I have given them Thy Word, etc.] In this verse our Lord appears to describe more fully the position of the disciples as an introduction to a more full repeated prayer for their preservation. It is as though He said, “I do not pray that my disciples may be kept without good reason. I have given them the Word of the Gospel, and they have received it, and have been at once persecuted and ill-treated for receiving it. In short, the world has hated them ever since they became my disciples, because, like myself, they are not of the world, neither holding the world’s principles, nor walking in the world’s ways.”

Let us not fail to remark that true believers must expect the hatred and enmity of the wicked in every age. They must not be surprised at it. Christ and His disciples had to endure it, and all real Christians must endure it too. The reason of this enmity is the continual testimony which believers bear against the world’s opinions and practices. The world feels itself condemned, and hates those whose faith and lives condemn it. If believers were more bold, decided, and consistent, they would soon find these things out more than they do now. The good opinion of the world is about the last thing a true Christian should expect or desire. If all men, speak well of his opinions and ways in religion, he may well doubt whether there is not something very wrong and defective about them. We are not to court the world’s enmity. A narrow, morose, uncourteous, and exclusive spirit, is downright wrong. But we are never to be the least surprised by the world’s enmity if we meet with it; and the more holy we are, the more we shall meet with it. Christ was perfect in holiness; but the world hated Him.

15.—[I pray not that Thou, etc., etc.] In this verse our Lord repeats, and develops more fully, His prayer that His disciples may be kept. His meaning appears to be this:—“Wicked and persecuting as the world is, “pray not that Thou wouldst take my disciples immediately out of it. Such removal would be bad for themselves and bad for the world. What I do pray is, that remaining in the world, Thou wouldst keep them from the evil of the world. Though in it, let them not be spoiled or corrupted by it.”

The deep wisdom of this prayer is very instructive. There are few Christians who would not like to go to heaven without trouble, conflict, and persecution. Yet it would not
be for their own sanctification, and it would deprive the world of the benefit of their teaching and example. Believers would never value Christ and heaven as much as they will do one day, if they were not kept here on earth a good deal, taught to know their own hearts, and, like their Master, “perfected by suffering.” (Heb. ii. 10.)

Hutcheson remarks, “However much we ought to have our eye upon our rest, and make ready for it, yet we are not anxiously to long for it till God’s time come, nor to be weary of life because of any trouble, persecution, or inconvenience we meet with in His service.”

There is a strong indirect argument here, as Bullinger and Gaulter remark, against the favourite theory of many, that entire retreat from the world, by going into monasteries and convents, is the secret of eminent holiness. Eminent holiness is most seen by publicly winning a victory over evil, and not by a cowardly desertion of our post in society.

Three of the only prayers not granted to saints, recorded in Scripture, are the prayers of Moses, Elijah, and Jonah, to be “taken out of the world.”

Gerhard remarks that the Apostles were to be the first preachers of the Gospel and the light of the world. If they had been taken away immediately after their Lord, the world would have been left in darkness. Moreover, the cross is the school of faith and patience, and without remaining in the world they could not have become eminent saints.

George Newton remarks, “The world is the place where we bring glory to the Lord; in the world to come we are glorified by Him. Oh, let us be so ingenuous as to desire to be awhile where we may glorify God, rather than where we may have glory from Him. Let us not be so eager for our wages and our rest, till we have finished our work and served our generation. When we have done so God will glorify us with Himself for ever.”

The meaning of the phrase, “the evil,” is a point on which there is much difference of opinion.

Some think that it means simply, as our translation of the Bible has it,—evil in the abstract,—all evil of every kind,—like “deliver us from evil” in the Lord’s prayer; and they think that it includes all evil that may assail us from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Others think that the words would have been better rendered, “the evil one,” and apply the expression to the devil, as the first great cause and beginner of evil. The word is so rendered in Matt. xiii. 19-33; 1 John ii. 13, 14; iii. 12; v. 18.

The question is one which will probably never be settled, and the Greek phrase may be translated either way. Nevertheless I decidedly incline to think that our translation is right. It is “evil “in the abstract, and not the devil, that our Lord means. I think so, partly because the devil is not anywhere brought forward in this prayer, and partly because it is more consistent to reason to suppose our Lord would have His disciples kept from all kind of “evil,” than from the devil only. This is the more clear to my mind, from the fact that it is “the world,” and its hatred and enmity, which our Lord has just been speaking of, and not the devil. However, I freely admit that it is an open question.

16.—[They are not of the world, etc.] These words are a literal repetition of the end of the fourteenth verse, and need no further comment. Our Lord seems to repeat them in order to add emphasis to the request He has just made; and the repetition strengthens my opinion that it is “the evil in the world” which He specially desires His people to be kept from. “They need to be specially kept and preserved, because, I repeat, there is an entire want of harmony, a gulf of separation between them and this wicked world, in which I leave them. They are much hated, and need to be much kept.”

Repetitions in real, earnest prayer, we may observe, are not wrong: Christ’s example warrants them. It is “vain repetitions,” such as were common among the heathen, repeating
the same words over and over again, without thought or feeling, against which we are warned in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. vi. 7.)