

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN VI. 66-71.

66 From that <i>time</i> many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.	69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.
67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?	70 Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?
68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.	71 He spake of Judas Iscariot, <i>the</i> son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

THESE verses form a sorrowful conclusion to the famous discourse of Christ which occupies the greater part of the sixth chapter. They supply a melancholy proof of the hardness and corruption of man's heart. Even when the Son of God was the preacher many seem to have heard in vain.

Let us mark, in this passage, *what an old sin backsliding is*. We read that when our Lord had explained what He meant by "eating and drinking His flesh and blood," "From that time many went back and walked no more with Him."

The true grace of God no doubt is an everlasting possession. From this men never fall away entirely, when they have once received it. "The foundation of God standeth sure." "My sheep shall never perish." (2 Tim. ii. 19; John x. 28.) But there is counterfeit grace and unreal religion in the Church, wherever there is true; and from counterfeit grace thousands may and do fall away. Like the stony ground hearers, in the parable of the sower, many "have no root in themselves, and so in time of temptation fall away." All is not gold that glitters. All blossoms do not come to fruit. All are not Israel which are called Israel. Men may have feelings, desires, convictions, resolutions, hopes, joys, sorrows in religion, and yet never have the grace of God. They may run well for a season, and bid fair to reach heaven, and yet break down entirely after a time, go back to the world, and end like Demas, Judas Iscariot, and Lot's wife.

It must never surprise us to see and hear of such cases in our own days. If it happened in our Lord's time, and under our Lord's teaching, much more may we expect it to happen now. Above all, it must never shake our faith and discourage us in our course. On the contrary, we must make up our minds that there will be backsliders in the Church as long as the world stands. The sneering infidel, who defends his unbelief by pointing at them, must find some better argument than their example. He forgets that there will always be counterfeit coin where there is true money.

Let us mark, secondly, in this passage, *the noble declaration of faith which the Apostle Peter made*. Our Lord had said to the twelve, when many went back, "Will ye also go away?" At once Peter replied, with characteristic zeal and fervour, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

The confession contained in these words is a very remarkable one. Living in a professedly Christian land, and surrounded by Christian privileges, we can hardly form an adequate idea of its real value. For a humble Jew to say of one whom Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees agreed in rejecting, "Thou hast the words of eternal life; thou art the Christ," was an act of mighty faith. No wonder that our Lord said, in another place, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. xvi. 17.)

But the question with which Peter begins is just as remarkable as his confession. "To whom shall we go?" said the noble-hearted Apostle. "Whom shall we follow? To what teacher shall we betake ourselves? Where shall we find any guide to heaven to compare with Thee? What shall we gain by forsaking Thee? What Scribe, what Pharisee, what Sadducee, what Priest, what rabbi can show us such words of eternal life as Thou showest?"

The question is one which every true Christian may boldly ask, when urged and tempted to give up his religion and go back to the world. It is easy for those who hate religion to pick holes in our conduct, to make objections to our doctrines, to find fault with our practices. It may be hard sometimes to give them any answer. But after all, "To whom shall we go," if we give up our religion? Where shall we find such peace, and hope, and solid comfort as in serving Christ, however poorly we serve Him? Can we better ourselves by turning our back on Christ, and going back to our old ways? We cannot. Then let us hold on our way and persevere.

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, *what little benefit some men get from religious privileges*. We read that our Lord said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." And it goes on, "He spake of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon."

If ever there was a man who had great privileges and opportunities, that man was Judas Iscariot. A chosen disciple, a constant companion of Christ, a witness of His miracles, a hearer of His sermons, a commissioned preacher of His kingdom, a fellow and friend of Peter, James, and John,—it would be impossible to imagine a more favourable position for a man's soul. Yet if anyone ever fell hopelessly into hell, and made shipwreck at last for eternity, that man was Judas Iscariot. The character of that man must have been black indeed, of whom our Lord could say, He is "a devil."

Let us settle it firmly in our minds, that the possession of religious privileges alone is not enough to save our souls. It is neither place, nor light, nor company, nor opportunities, but grace that man needs to make him a Christian. With grace we may serve God in the most difficult position,—like Daniel in Babylon, Obadiah in Ahab's court, and the saints in Nero's household. Without grace we may live in the full sunshine of Christ's countenance, and yet, like Judas, be miserably cast away. Then let us never rest till we have grace reigning in our souls. Grace is to

be had for the asking. There is One sitting at the right hand of God who has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." (Matt. vii. 7.) The Lord Jesus is more willing to give grace than man is to seek it. If men have it not, it is because they do not ask it.

NOTES. JOHN VI. 66-71.

66.—[*From that time.*] It is doubtful whether the Greek words here might not have been better translated, "Upon this,"— "After this conversation."

[*Many of His disciples.*] This expression shows that the number of persons who followed our Lord about, and professed themselves His disciples, must have been large.

[*Went backward.*] This is a metaphorical expression, signifying "retreat, desertion, forsaking a position once occupied." It is the same that is rendered in the account of the Jews coming to take our Lord in the garden, "they went backward, and fell to the ground." (John xviii. 6.)

[*Walked no more with Him.*] The simplest view of this expression is that these deserters from our Lord walked no longer in His company as He went about teaching, as they had done, but returned to their own homes. No minister of the Gospel should feel surprised if the same thing happens to him.

Not a few of these very "disciples" probably had been forward in wishing to make our Lord a "king," the day before. Such is popularity: here to-day and gone to-morrow!

67.—[*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?*] We cannot suppose that our Lord asked this as if He did not know what the Apostles were going to do. We may be sure that He who "knew from the beginning who they were that believed not" (verse 64), knew the hearts of His Apostles. The question was evidently asked to prove His chosen followers, and to draw forth from them an expression of feeling. (See John vi. 6.)

The word "will" here, would be more accurately rendered, "Do you wish?" "Have you a will?"

We should note that this is the first time St. John speaks of "the twelve." We know, from the other Gospels, that "the twelve" were employed in distributing the loaves and fishes to the five thousand. (Luke ix. 12, 17.)

68.—[*Then Simon Peter answered Him.*] The fervour and impetuosity of Peter's character, come out here, as in other places in the Gospels. He is the first to speak, and to speak for his brethren as well as himself. Only the night before this very scene, he had been the first, in the storm on the lake to say, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me to come unto Thee on the water." (Matt. xiv. 28.) And here, in like manner, he is the first to profess loudly his determination not to go away, and his faith in Christ.

[*To whom shall we go?*] This question is a strong burst of feeling. "To what teacher, to what master, to what leader shall we go, if we leave Thee? Where are we to find anyone like Thee? What could we gain by leaving Thee?" The question was one which might well be asked, when we remember the state of the Jewish nation, and the universal prevalence of Pharisaism or Sadduceeism. But this is not all. It may always be asked by true Christian men, when tempted to give up Christ's service. True Christianity undoubtedly has its cross. It entails trial and persecution. But to whom shall we go, if we give up Christ? Will Infidelity, Deism, Socinianism, Romanism, Formalism, Rationalism, or Worldliness give us anything better? There is but one answer! They cannot.

[*Thou hast the words of eternal life.*] This would be more literally rendered, "Thou hast words of eternal life." "Thou possessest instruction about everlasting life, such as we can hear nowhere else, and such as we find soul-comforting and edifying. The sayings that fall continually from Thy

lips, about eternal life, are such as we cannot leave.” Our Lord’s expression should be remembered, “I have given unto them *the words* which Thou gavest Me.” (John xvii. 8.)

69.—[*And we believe and are sure.*] This would be more literally rendered, “We have believed and have known.” Moreover, the “we” is emphatic.—“Whatever others may please to think, however many may go away and forsake Thee, after following Thee for a little, it is not so with us. We have believed and known, and do believe and know.”

[*Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*] This might equally well have been rendered, “Thou art the Christ.” The sentence is a noble confession, when we remember the time in which it was made, and the universal unbelief of the leaders of the Jewish nation. We may remember that it is precisely the same confession that is recorded to have been made by Peter, after which our Lord said to him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. xvi. 17.)

We must not, however, misunderstand the extent of Peter’s confession. He declared his faith that our Lord was the Anointed Messiah, the Son of the living God. The Messiahship and divinity of Christ were the points on which he and the other apostles laid firm hold. But the sacrifice and death of Christ, and His substitution for us on the cross, were not things which he either saw or understood at present. (See Matt. xvi. 22, 23.)

(a) We should notice that a man’s heart may be right towards God, while he remains very ignorant of some great doctrines of the Christian faith. It certainly was so with Peter and the apostles, at this time.

(c) We should also notice that there is nothing man is so backward to see as the sacrifice of the death of Christ, the substitution, and the atonement. It is possible to be right about Christ’s divinity and Messiahship, and yet be in the dark about His death.

(c) We should notice how ignorant Christians often are of the state of others’ souls. Peter never suspected any one of the twelve to be a false apostle. It is a fearful proof that Judas must have been, in all outward demeanour and profession, just like the rest of the apostles.

70.—[*Have not I chosen you twelve?*] I do not think that the “choosing” here spoken of, means anything more than selection for office. The word is evidently used in this simple sense, in Luke vi. 13: “Of them He chose twelve, whom He called apostles.” Acts vi. 5: “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith.” Acts xv. 22: “It pleased the apostles,—to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch.” I say confidently that in each one of these cases the Greek word rendered “chosen,” the very same word that is used here, can mean nothing more than “chosen or selected for an office.” This I believe, with Poole, Henry, and Hutcheson, is the meaning here.

I disagree with Alford’s remark, that “the selection of the twelve was the consequence of the giving of them to Him by the Father,” and that Christ’s “selecting, and the Father’s giving, and the Father’s giving and drawing, do not exclude final falling away.”—This remark is built on the gratuitous assumption that Christ’s “choosing,” here spoken of, is the same as that “choosing unto salvation “which is the special privilege of believers. Of that “choosing unto salvation,” our Lord speaks in another place, where He carefully draws the distinction between the true disciples and the false: “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen.” (John xiii. 18.) Of that choosing unto salvation Judas was not a partaker. Of the other choosing unto office, as in the verse before us, undoubtedly he was a partaker.

Burgon, and many others, agree with Alford, and dwell on the expression before us as an apparent proof that men “chosen to salvation” may fall away. But their reasoning appears to me inconclusive.

Even Quesnel, the Romanist Commentator, remarks, “The being duly called to the ecclesiastical office is not sufficient, if a man live not suitably to that holy vocation.” Toletus, the Spanish Jesuit, says much the same.

[*One of you is a devil.*] This is a singularly strong expression, and gives an awfully vivid impression of the wickedness of Judas. Of course, he was not literally and really “a devil,” but a man. The meaning is, “One out of your number is so completely under the influence of the devil, such a servant of the devil, that he deserves to be called nothing less than a devil.” Our Lord, in another place, says of the wicked Jews, “Ye are of your father, the devil.” (John viii. 44.) So St. Paul says to Elymas, “Thou child of the devil.” (Acts xiii. 10.) When we read at a later period, “The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him” (John xiii. 2), it must mean the final working out of a wicked purpose, which under the influence of the devil Judas had long had in his heart.

Let us note that even now Judas is called “a devil,” long before our Lord’s betrayal and crucifixion. This helps to show that he never was a faithful disciple, even from the first.

Let us note that the only other expression of our Lord which at all approaches the one before us in strength, is the one which on another occasion our Lord applies to His zealous apostle Peter: “Get thee behind Me, Satan.” (Matt. xvi. 23.) While we condemn the wickedness of Judas, let us not forget that even a true-hearted apostle may so far err and be mistaken that he needs to be sharply rebuked and called “Satan.” A thoroughly bad man is “a devil;” but even a good man may need to be called “Satan!”

Rollock observes that Jesus never used so strong an expression about His open enemies who went about to slay Him. It was a hypocrite and a false apostle whom He called “a devil.” Nothing is so wicked as false profession.

[*He spake of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.*] The word “Iscariot,” according to some, means “a man, of Kerioth.” Kerioth was a town of Judah. (Josh. xv. 25.)—According to others, it means “a man of Issachar.”—According to Lampe, and others, it is a Syriac word, meaning “the bearer of the purse.”—We are told that “he had the bag.” (John xiii. 29.)

It is remarkable that St. John four times in his Gospel calls Judas “the son of Simon.” We do not exactly know why, unless it is that Simon was a person well-known by name, or that St. John wished to make it quite clear that Judas Iscariot was not St. Jude, the faithful apostle and cousin of Christ, by naming his father. There is no proof whatever that Judas was the son of “Simon the Canaanite,” the apostle; though it is somewhat curious that in the list of apostles given by Matthew and Mark, Simon and Judas Iscariot are named in close juxtaposition. (Matt. x. 4; Mark iii. 18.)

[*He it was that should betray Him.*] This would be more literally rendered, “He was about to betray Him.” The expression seems to imply that to betray such a master as Christ was so eminently a work of the devil that the betrayer ought to be spoken of as “a devil.”

The frequency of our Lord’s warnings and hints addressed to Judas Iscariot is very remarkable. Rollock observes what an awful proof it is of the hardness of the heart that a man so warned should not be conscience-stricken and repent.

END OF VOL. 1.