EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE X. 25–28.

25 And, behold, a certain Lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

WE should notice in this passage, *the solemn question which was addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ.* We are told that a certain lawyer asked Him, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The motive of this man was evidently not right. He only asked this question to “tempt” our Lord, and to provoke Him to say something on which His enemies might lay hold. Yet the question he propounded was undoubtedly one of the deepest importance.

It is a question which deserves the principal attention of every man, woman, and child on earth. We are all sinners—dying sinners, and sinners going to be judged after death. “How shall our sins be pardoned? Where­with shall we come before God? How shall we escape the damnation of hell? Whither shall we flee from the wrath to come? What must we do to be saved?”—These are inquiries which people of every rank ought to put to themselves, and never to rest till they find an answer.

It is a question which unhappily few care to consider. Thousands are constantly inquiring, “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed? How can we get money? How can we enjoy ourselves? How can we prosper in the world?” Few, very few, will ever give a moment’s thought to the salvation of their souls. They hate the subject. It makes them uncomfortable. They turn from it and put it away. Faithful and true is that saying of our Lord’s, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto destruc­tion, and many there be that go in thereat.” (Matt. vii. 13.)

Let us not be ashamed of putting the lawyer’s question to our own souls. Let us rather ponder it, think about it, and never be content till it fills the first place in our minds. Let us seek to have the witness of the Spirit within us, that we repent us truly of sin, that we have a lively faith in God’s mercy through Christ, and that we are really walking with God. This is the character of the heirs of eternal life. These are they who shall one day receive the kingdom prepared for the children of God.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, *the high honour which our Lord Jesus Christ places on the Bible.* He refers the lawyer at once to the Scriptures, as the only rule of faith and practice. He does not say in reply to his question,—“What does the Jewish Church say about eternal life? What do the Scribes, and Pharisees, and priests think? What is taught on the subject in the traditions of the elders?”—He takes a far simpler and more direct course. He sends his questioner at once to the writings of the Old Testament:—“What is written in the law? How readest thou?”

Let the principle contained in these words, be one of the foundation principles of our Christianity. Let the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, be the rule of our faith and practice. Holding this principle we travel upon the king’s highway. The road may some­times seem narrow, and our faith may be sorely tried, but we shall not be allowed greatly to err.—Departing from this principle we enter on a pathless wilderness. There is no telling what we may be led to believe or do. For ever let us bear this in mind. Here let us cast anchor. Here let us abide. It matters nothing who says a thing in religion, whether an ancient father, or a modern Bishop, or a learned divine. Is it in the Bible? Can it be proved by the Bible? If not, it is not to be believed.—It matters nothing how beautiful and clever sermons or religious books may appear. Are they in the smallest degree contrary to Scripture? If they are, they are rubbish and poison, and guides of no value.—What saith the Scripture? This is the only rule, and measure, and guage of religious truth. “To the law and to the testimony,” says Isaiah, “if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah viii. 20.)

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, *the clear knowledge of duty to God and man, which the Jews in our Lord’s time possessed.* We read that the lawyer said, in reply to our Lord’s question, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” That was well spoken. A clearer description of daily practical duty could not be given by the most thoroughly instructed Christian in the present day. Let not this be forgotten.

The words of the lawyer are very instructive in two points of view. They throw a strong light on two subjects, about which many mistakes abound.—For one thing, they show us how great were the privileges of religious know­ledge which the Jews enjoyed under the Old Testament, compared to the heathen world. A nation which possessed such principles of duty as those now before us, was immeasurably in advance of Greece and Rome.—For another thing, the lawyer’s words show us how much clear head-knowledge a person may possess, while his heart is full of wickedness. Here is a man who talks of loving God with all his soul, and loving his neighbour as himself, while he is actually “tempting” Christ, and trying to do Him harm, and anxious to justify himself and make himself out a charitable man! Let us ever beware of this kind of religion. Clear knowledge of the head, when accompanied by determined impenitence of heart, is a most dangerous state of soul. “If ye know these things,” says Jesus, “happy are ye if ye do them.” (John xiii. 7.)

Let us not forget, in leaving this passage, to apply the high standard of duty which it contains, to our own hearts, and to prove our own selves. Do we love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind? Do we love our neighbour as ourselves? Where is the person that could say with perfect truth, “I do?” Where is the man that ought not to lay his hand on his mouth, when he hears these questions? Verily we are all guilty in this matter! The best of us, however holy we may be, come far short of perfection. Passages like this, should teach us our need of Christ’s blood and righteousness. To Him we must go, if we would ever stand with boldness at the bar of God. From Him we must seek grace, that the love of God and man may become ruling principles of our lives. In Him we must abide, that we may not forget our principles, and that we may show the world that by them we desire to live.

NOTES. LUKE X. 25–28.

25.***—***[*A**certain Lawyer stood up.*]An English reader must remember that the “Lawyers” spoken of in the Gospels were men who devoted themselves to the study of the law of God.

[*What shall I do, &c.*]The literal rendering of the Greek would be, “What having done, shall I inherit eternal life?” Let us note that this kind of question was asked of our Lord three times. Once it was asked by the rich young ruler, whose case is mentioned in all the three first Gospels. Once it was at the end of our Lord’s ministry, by one who said, “Which is the great commandment?” The third case is the one before us now, which is related only by St. Luke.

It is probable that questions like these were much discussed and disputed among the Jews.

26.—[*How* *readest thou?*]Let the following quotation from Ques­nel, the Roman Catholic writer, he observed. “Jesus Christ himself refers us to the law of God, though he was truth itself, and could give souls holy instruction. In vain do we seek after other lights and ways besides those which we find there. It is the Spirit of God which dictated the law and made it the rule of our life. It is injurious to him for us either not to study it, or to prefer the thoughts of man before it.—The first question which will be put to a Christian at the tribunal of God will be to this effect. ‘What is written in the law? What have you read in the Gospel? What use have you made thereof?’ What answer can that person return who has not so much as read it, though he has sufficient ability and opportunity to do it?”

27*.—*[*Thou shalt love the Lord, &c.*]This seems to have been **a** formulary or confession of faith with which Jews were well ac­quainted.

Vitringa observes, “What the lawyer replies, Thou shalt love the Lord, &c., was daily read in their synagogues.”

Doddridge says, “This passage of Scripture is still read by the whole assembly of a Jewish synagogue, both in their morning and evening prayers, and is called, from the first word of it, the Shemah. Only it is observable that they leave out the clause, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

28*.—*[*This do, and thou shalt live.*]These words must needs mean that if a man really and truly lived up to the standard described in the formulary quoted by the lawyer, he would be justified by his life. But that no man ever did or could so live, and that consequently all need the righteousness of another, evenChrist, is clear from the whole tenor of the Gospel. To this our Lord would gradually lead the lawyer’s conscience.