EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE XI. 14–20.

14 And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.

15 But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelze­bub the chief of the devils.

16 And others, tempting *him,* sought of him a sign from heaven.

17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth.

18 If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.

19 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? therefore shall they be your judges.

20 But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the king­dom of God is come upon you.

THE connection between these verses and those which immediately precede them, is striking and instructive. In the preceding verses our Lord Jesus Christ had been showing the power and importance of prayer. In the verses before us He delivers a man from a dumb devil. The miracle is evidently intended to throw fresh light on the lesson. The same Saviour who encourages us to pray, is the Saviour who destroys Satan’s power over our mem­bers, and restores our tongues to their proper use.

Let us notice, firstly, in these verses, *the variety of ways in which Satan exhibits his desire to injure man*. We read of a dumb devil. Sometimes in the Gospel we are told of an “unclean” devil. Sometimes we are told of a raging and violent devil. Here we are told of one under whose influence the unhappy person possessed by him became “dumb.” Many are the devices of Satan. It is foolish to suppose that he always works in the same manner. One thing only is the common mark of all his operations: he delights to inflict injury and do harm.

There is something very instructive in the case before us. Do we suppose, because bodily possession by Satan is not so glaringly manifest as it once was, that the great enemy is less active in doing mischief than he used to be? If we think so we have much to learn.—Do we suppose that there is no such thing as the influence of a “dumb” devil in the present day? If we do, we had better think again.—What shall we say of those who never speak to God, who never use their tongues in prayer and praise, who never employ that organ which is a man’s “glory,” in the service of Him who made it? What shall we say, in a word, of those who can speak to every one but God?—What can we say but that Satan has despoiled them of the truest use of a tongue? What ought we to say but that they are possessed with a “dumb devil”? The prayerless man is dead while he lives. His members are rebels against the God who made them. The “dumb devil” is not yet extinct.

Let us watch and pray that we may never be given over to the influence of a dumb spirit. Thanks be to God, that same Jesus still lives, who can make the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak! To Him let us flee for help. In Him let us abide. It is not enough to avoid open profligacy, and to keep clear of glaring sins. It is not enough to be moral, and proper, and respectable in our lives. All this is negative goodness, and nothing more. Is there anything positive about our religion? Do we yield our members as instruments of righteousness to God? (Rom. vi. 13.) Having eyes, do we see God’s kingdom? Having ears, do we hear Christ’s voice? Having a tongue, do we use it for God’s praise? These are very serious inquiries. The number of persons who are deaf and dumb before God is far greater than many suppose.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, *the amazing power of prejudice over the hearts of unconverted men.* We read, that when our Lord cast out the dumb spirit there were some who said, “He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.” They could not deny the miracle. They then refused to allow that it was wrought by divine power. The work before their eyes was plain and indisputable. They then attempted to discredit the character of Him who did it, and to blacken his reputation by saying that He was in league with the devil.

The state of mind here described, is a most formidable disease, and one unhappily not uncommon. There are never wanting men who are determined to see no good in the servants of Christ, and to believe all manner of evil about them. Such men appear to throw aside their common sense. They refuse to listen to evidence, or to attend to plain arguments. They seem resolved to believe that whatever a Christian does must be wrong, and whatever he says must be false!—If he does right at any time, it must be from corrupt motives! If he speaks truth, it must be with sinister views! If he does good works, it is from interested reasons! If he casts out devils, it is through Beelzebub!—Such prejudiced men are to be found in many a congregation. They are the sorest trials of the ministers of Christ. No wonder that St. Paul said, “Pray that we may be delivered from unreasonable as well as wicked men.” (2 Thess. iii. 2.)

Let us strive to be of a fair, and honest, and candid spirit in our judgment of men and things in religion. Let us be ready to give up old and cherished opinions the moment that anyone can show us a “more excellent way.” The honest and good heart is a great treasure. (Luke viii. 15.) A prejudiced spirit is the very jaundice of the soul. It affects a man’s mental eyesight, and makes him see everything in an unnatural colour. From such a spirit may we pray to be delivered!

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, *the great evil of re­ligious divisions.* This is a truth which our Lord impresses on us in the answer He gives to His prejudiced enemies. He shows the folly of their charge that He cast out devils by Beelzebub. He quotes the proverbial saying that “a house divided against itself falleth.” He infers the ab­surdity of the idea that Satan would cast out Satan, or the devil cast out his own agents. And in so doing, He teaches Christians a lesson which they have been mournfully slow to learn in every age of the Church. That lesson is the sin and folly of needless divisions.

Religious divisions of some kind there must always be, so long as false doctrine prevails, and men will cleave to it. What communion can there be between light and darkness? How can two walk together except they be agreed? What unity can there be where there is not the unity of the Spirit? Division and separation from those who adhere to false and unscriptural doctrine is a duty, and not a sin.

But there are divisions of a very different kind, which are deeply to be deplored. Such, for example, are divi­sions between men who agree on main points,—divisions about matters not needful to salvation,—divisions about forms and ceremonies, and ecclesiastical arrangements upon which Scripture is silent. Divisions of this kind are to be avoided and discouraged by all faithful Chris­tians. The existence of them is a melancholy proof of the fallen state of man, and the corruption of his under­standing as well as his will. They bring scandal on religion, and weakness on the Church. “Every king­dom divided against itself is brought to desolation.”

What are the best remedies against needless divisions? A humble spirit, a readiness to make concessions, and an enlightened acquaintance with holy Scripture. We must learn to distinguish between things in religion which are essential, and things which are not essential—things which are needful to salvation, and things which are not needful,—things which are of first rate impor­tance, and things which are of second rate importance. On the one class of things we must be stiff and unbend­ing as the oak tree: “If any man preach any other Gospel than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.” (Gal. i. 8.) On the other we may be yield­ing and compliant as the willow: “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (1 Cor. ix. 22.) To draw such nice distinctions requires no small practical wisdom. But such wisdom is to be had for the asking. “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” (James i. 5.) When Christians keep up needless divisions they show themselves more foolish than Satan himself.

NOTES. LUKE XI. 14–20.

14*.—*[*It was dumb.*]The expression here used should be noted, and compared with the one which follows in the same verse: “the dumb spake.”—It was the *devil* which was dumb. It was the man who spake.—The words would have been more clearly rendered, “The dumb man spake.” The action of the evil spirit making the possessed man dumb, and the action of the man released from his power, should be carefully distinguished.

15*.—*[*Beelzebub.*]The meaning of this name is said to be the “Lord of flies.” Beelzebub is mentioned as “the God of Ekron,” in 2 Kings i. 3. For what reason so peculiar a name was given to the chief of the devils is a question which has never been fully settled. How great the plague of flies is in a hot country those who have travelled there have always men­tioned.

16*.—*[*Sought of Him a sign.*]Let it be noted that it is always one mark of a thoroughly unbelieving heart to pretend to want more evidence of the truth of religion.

17.—[*Every* *kingdom divided...desolation.*]It may be doubted whether our Lord’s words in this place are not meant to refer to the many intestine divisions and dissensions which pre­vailed among the Jews, even to the very day when Titus took Jerusalem. In this light the verse contained a solemn pro­phecy. It is notorious that the divisions of the Jews were one cause of the success of the Roman army.

19.—[*Your* *sons cast them out.*]It is not agreed among commen­tators to whom our Lord refers in this expression. Bishop Jewel thinks that He refers to His own disciples, John, James, Peter, Andrew, and the rest, and calls them “sons of the Jews.” Others, however, think that He refers to certain persons among the Jews who had power to cast out devils, though they were not disciples of Christ. That there were such persons seems likely from Acts xix. 3.

[*Shall they be your judges.*]The meaning of this expression is, “They shall condemn your supposition that I cast out devils by Beelzebub, as unreasonable and absurd. They shall be witnesses that devils are not cast out by devils, but by the power of God.”

20.—[*The* *kingdom of God is come upon you*.] The argument here appears to be this: “If these miracles which I work are really worked by the finger of God, and I am clearly proved by them to be one sent from God, then, whether you will allow it or not, the times of Messiah have evidently arrived. The king­dom of God has come down upon you unawares, and these miracles are signs that it is so.”—This argument reduced the enemies of our Lord to adilemma. Either they must deny that our Lord cast out devils,—this they could not do; or else they must admit that their own sons cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub,—this they would not do.—The nature of the argument appears to show that when our Lord spake of “your sons casting out devils,” He could not have meant His own disciples.