

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS. ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

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LUKE XI. 21–26.

<p>21 When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace:</p> <p>22 But when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.</p> <p>23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.</p> <p>24 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a</p>	<p>man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.</p> <p>25 And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.</p> <p>26 Then goeth he, and taketh to <i>him</i> seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last <i>state</i> of that man is worse than the first.</p>
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THE subject of these words of Christ is mysterious, but deeply important. They were spoken concerning Satan and his agency. They throw light on the power of Satan, and the nature of his operations. They deserve the close attention of all who would war the Christian warfare with success. Next to his friends and allies, a soldier ought to be well acquainted with his enemies. We ought not to be ignorant of Satan's devices.

Let us observe in these verses *what a fearful picture our Lord draws of Satan's power*. There are four points in His description, which are peculiarly instructive.

Christ speaks of Satan as a "strong man." The strength of Satan has been only too well proved by his victories over the souls of men. He who tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God, and brought sin into the world,—he who has led captive the vast majority of mankind, and robbed them of heaven;—that evil one is indeed a mighty foe. He who is called the "Prince of this world," is not an enemy to be despised. The devil is very strong.

Christ speaks of Satan as a "strong man, armed." Satan is well supplied with defensive armour. He is not to be overcome by slight assaults, and feeble exertions. He that would overcome him must put forth all his strength. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."—And Satan is also well supplied with offensive weapons. He is never at a loss for means to injure the soul of man. He has snares of every kind, and engines of every description. He knows exactly how every rank, and class, and age, and nation, and people can be assailed with most advantage. The devil is well armed.

Christ speaks of man's heart as being Satan's "palace." The natural heart is the favourite abode of the evil one, and all its faculties and powers are his servants and do his will. He sits upon the throne which God ought to occupy, and governs the inward man. The devil is the "spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." (Ephes. ii. 2.)

Christ speaks of Satan's "goods being at peace." So long as a man is dead in trespasses and sin, so long his heart is at ease about spiritual things. He has no fear about the future. He has no anxiety about his soul. He has no dread of falling into hell. All this is a false peace no doubt. It is a sleep which cannot last, and from which there must be one day an awful waking.

But there is such a peace beyond question. Thoughtless, stolid, reckless insensibility about eternal things is one of the worst symptoms of the devil reigning over a man's soul.

Let us never think lightly of the devil. That common practice of idle jesting about Satan which we may often mark in the world, is a great evil. A prisoner must be a very hardened man who jests about the executioner and the gallows. The heart must be in a very bad state when a man can talk with levity about hell and the devil.

Let us thank God that there is One who is stronger even than Satan. That one is the Friend of sinners, Jesus the Son of God. Mighty as the devil is, he was overcome by Jesus on the cross, when He triumphed over him openly. Strong as the devil is, Christ can pluck his captives out of his hands, and break the chains which bind them. May we never rest till we know that deliverance by experience, and have been set free by the Son of God!

Let us observe, for another thing in these verses, *how strongly our Lord teaches the impossibility of neutrality*. He says, "he that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth."

The principle laid down in these words should be constantly remembered by all who make any profession of decided religion. We all naturally love an easy Christianity. We dislike collisions and separation. We like if possible, to keep in with both sides. We fear extremes. We dread being righteous overmuch. We are anxious not to go too far.—Such thoughts as these are full of peril to the soul. Once allowed to get the upper hand, they may do us immense harm. Nothing is so offensive to Christ as lukewarmness in religion. To be utterly dead and ignorant, is to be an object of pity, as well as blame. But to know the truth and yet "halt between two opinions," is one of the chiefest of sins.

Let it be the settled determination of our minds that we will serve Christ with all our hearts, if we serve Him at all. Let there be no reserve, no compromise, no half-heartedness, no attempt to reconcile God and mammon in our Christianity. Let us resolve, by God's help, to be "with Christ," and "gather" by Christ's side, and allow the world to say and do what it will.—It may cost us something at first. It will certainly repay us in the long run. Without decision there is no happiness in religion. He that follows Jesus most fully will always follow Him most comfortably.—Without decision in religion there is no usefulness to others. The half-hearted Christian attracts none by the beauty of his life, and wins no respect from the world.

Let us observe finally, in these verses, *how dangerous it is to be content with any change in religion short of thorough conversion to God*. This is a truth which our Lord teaches by an awful picture of one from whom a devil has been cast forth, but into whose heart the Holy Spirit has not entered. He describes the evil spirit, after his expulsion, as seeking rest and finding

none.—He describes him planning a return to the heart which he once inhabited, and carrying his plan into execution.—He describes him finding that heart empty of any good, and like a house “swept and garnished” for his reception.—He describes him as entering in once more, with seven spirits worse than himself, and once more making it his abode. And he winds up all by the solemn saying, “the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

We must feel in reading these fearful words, that Jesus is speaking of things which we faintly comprehend. He is lifting a corner of the veil which hangs over the unseen world. His words, no doubt, illustrate the state of things which existed in the Jewish nation during the time of His own ministry. But the main lesson of His words, which concerns us, is the danger of our own individual souls. They are a solemn warning to us never to be satisfied with religious reformation without heart conversion.

There is no safety excepting in thorough Christianity. To lay aside open sin is nothing, unless grace reigns in our hearts. To cease to do evil is a small matter, if we do not also learn to do well.—The house must not only be swept and whitewashed; a new tenant must be introduced, or else the leprosy may yet appear again in the walls.—The outward life must not only be garnished with the formal trappings of religion; the power of vital religion must be experienced in the inward man.—The devil must not only be cast out; the Holy Ghost must take his place. Christ must dwell in our hearts by faith. We must not only be moralized, but spiritualized. We must not only be reformed, but born again.

Let us lay these things to heart. Many professing Christians, it may be feared, are deceiving themselves. They are not what they once were, and so they flatter themselves, they are what they ought to be. They are no longer sabbath-breaking, daring sinners, and so they dream that they are Christians. They see not that they have only changed one kind of devil for another. They are governed by a decent, Pharisaic devil, instead of an audacious, riotous, unclean devil.—But the tenant within is the devil still. And their last end will be worse than their first. From such an end may we pray to be delivered! Whatever we are in religion, let us be thorough. Let us not be houses swept and garnished, but uninhabited by the Spirit. Let us not be potsherds covered with silver: fair without, but worthless within. Let our daily prayer be, “Search me, O God;—and see whether there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm cxxxix. 24.)

NOTES. LUKE. XI. 21–26.

21.—[A *strong man*.] The Greek expression so translated, would be more literally rendered “the strong one.” The word “man” is not in the Greek. The same remark applies to Matt. xii. 29, and Mark iii. 27. The literal translation brings out the character of the devil, and the applicability of the whole passage to him with much force.

[*His goods*.] The literal meaning of the Greek expression so translated is, “the things that

are his,—that belong to him.”

22.—[*A stronger than he.*] This expression again would be more literally rendered, “the One stronger than he.” It evidently refers to our Lord, the great conqueror of Satan. There is a probable reference to Isaiah liii. 12. John the Baptist calls our Lord “the mightier one,” in Mark i. 7, and Luke iii. 16. In both these places the Greek is the same as it is here.

[*Divideth his spoils.*] It admits of a question whether our Lord did not mean us to put a literal sense on these words, and to interpret them of that new application of man’s faculties and powers which He makes when He converts a soul. He takes possession of the affections and intellectual capacities, over which the devil once exercised dominion, and uses them for His own glory. Ford quotes a saying of Bishop Reynolds: “God maketh use of that art, wealth, power, learning, wisdom, intellect, which Satan used against Christ’s kingdom, as instruments and ornaments unto the Gospel; as, when a magazine in war is taken, the General makes use of those arms, which were provided against him, for his own service.”

23.—[*He that is not with me is against me.*] The application of this expression is differently interpreted by different commentators. Some think that it should be confined strictly to the subject of which our Lord is speaking: that is, the utter division which exists between His kingdom and that of the devil. They think our Lord is enforcing the absurdity of the idea that He cast out devils by Beelzebub, and that his argument is “There can be no alliance between me and Satan: he is not with me, and so he is against me: he is not gathering with me, and so he scatters.”—Others think that the expression is of much wider application, and that it is a general truth concerning all waverers, and doubters, and half-hearted, and excuse-making people, of whom no doubt there were many among our Lord’s hearers. They argue that our Lord is exposing the awful danger of many of His Jewish hearers, who had been a little roused by John the Baptist, and seemed likely to receive Christ when He appeared. And yet, when He did appear, they hung back and affected to be troubled with doubts, and so continued neutral and undecided.—This last opinion appears to me by far the most probable, and is confirmed by the passage which immediately follows. The sentence is directed against undecided Jews, who were like the man from whom the unclean spirit had gone forth. Their hesitating neutrality was a most dangerous position. Their last end was likely to be worse than their first.

At first sight it seems difficult to reconcile our Lord’s words in this verse with His words in another place. We find Him saying of one who cast out devils in His name, but did not follow His disciples, “Forbid him not; for he that is not against us, is for us.” (Luke ix. 50.) Here, however, we find him saying, “He that is not with us is against us.”

The reconciliation of the two sentences in reality is not difficult. They were spoken of two entirely different classes of persons. In the former case, our Lord was speaking of one who was really working for Christ, and against the devil, and was doing good, though perhaps not in the wisest way. Of him He says, “He that is not against us, is for us.” He works against the same enemy that we work against, and therefore he is on our side.—In the case before us, our Lord is speaking of men who refused to join Him and become His disciples, who held aloof from Him, and were afraid or ashamed of His service. Of them He says, “He that is not with us is against us.” He does not avow himself our friend, and so he becomes practically one of our foes.

24.—[*He walketh through dry places.*] The expression translated “walketh,” is more frequently rendered, “passeth, or goeth through.” Let it be noted, that it is the “spirit,” and not the man, of whom this is said.—The expression, “dry places,” is a difficult one. The literal signification of the Greek words would be,—“places without water.” According to some, it means “uninhabited or wilderness places,” where the devil finds no rest, finding no one to injure.—According to others it signifies the *Gentiles*, over whom Satan exercised special

power before the Gospel was preached to them, and the *heathen*, over whom Satan specially reigns now.—Our inability to make out clearly the meaning of the expression, arises, in a great measure, from our ignorance of what is going on in the unseen world of spirits, both evil and good. To an immaterial creature, like a devil, the expression would probably be quite plain.

[*Seeking rest.*] This is an awful expression! It shows the restless unwearied craving to do mischief, and inflict injury on God's creatures, which seems at present a special attribute of the devil, during the period that he is permitted to do evil.

[*He saith, I will return unto my house.*] This is another most awful expression. How many men and women are being daily watched by the devil, and mischief planned against them, while they, in their folly, never dream of what Satan is doing!

25.—[*And when he cometh, he findeth.*] Let it be carefully noted both here and in the following verse, that it is the evil spirit, and not the man, of whom those things are said. Literally translated, the Greek words should be, "When it cometh, it findeth," &c.

[*Swept and garnished.*] These expressions must of course be regarded as figurative. They are borrowed from the condition of a house, and applied to the state of a reformed, but unconverted, people or heart.

Let it be remembered that there may be much moral cleanliness, and even much "garnishing," about one who is unsanctified. There may be much that is fair to the eye, and yet no grace.

26.—[*Seven other Spirits.*] The number seven is often used in Scripture proverbially, to denote great increase in number, or size, or quantity, or intensity. Thus, Psalm cxix. 164; Prov. xxiv. 16; Matt. xviii. 21; Daniel iii. 19.

[*Worse than himself.*] This expression seems to denote that even among devils there are degrees of wickedness and malice. Just so there are degrees of glory in heaven, grace on earth, and punishment in hell.

[*Last state...worse than the first.*] The Greek expressions so rendered mean literally "the last things," and the "first things."

The tendency of a backslider, or a man who has at one time professed religion, but afterwards turned back to the world, to become worse than he ever was before, is a painful fact, but a notorious one.—The possession of clear knowledge of the Gospel combined with deliberate choice of sin and the world, seems the parent of the most hardened state of soul to which mortal man can attain. Ford quotes a striking sentence from "Cowper's Letters" on this subject: "I have observed that when a man who once seemed a Christian has put off that character, and resumed his old one, he loses, together with the grace which he seemed to possess, the most amiable parts of the character that he resumes. The best features of his natural face seem to be struck out, that after having worn religion only as a mask, he may make a more disgusting appearance than he did before he assumed it."

The story of the unclean spirit in this passage admits of a threefold application. 1.—It describes the history of the Jewish nation before Christ came upon earth. For a time after the giving of the law they seemed better than the Gentiles, and like a house swept and garnished. But when they became proud, self-righteous, and unholy, the evil spirit returned to them. They were cast off by God, and given over to be oppressed and scattered by the Babylonians, Syrians, and the Romans. And forty years after our Lord was upon earth, their last state was worse than their first. 2.—It describes the history of the Gentile Churches since the time when Christ was on earth. For many centuries they seemed like a house swept and garnished. The evil spirit seemed cast out. But in the vast majority of cases they have departed from their first things. The Spirit of God has left them. The evil spir-

it has returned. Their end seems likely to be worse than their beginning. 3.—Above all, the passage describes the state of individuals who are content with reformation without conversion. This is a sense which ought never to be lost sight of. Historical and prophetic interpretations are useful, but they must not be allowed to overlay and bury the lessons that concern each one of ourselves.