

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XI. 37–44.

37 And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.

38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.

40 Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?

41 But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and behold, all things are clean unto you.

42 But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

43 Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.

44 Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over *them* are not aware *of them*.

LET us notice in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's readiness, when needful, to go into the company of the unconverted*. We read that "a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him." The man was evidently not one of our Lord's disciples. Yet we are told that "Jesus went in and sat down to meat."

The conduct of our Lord on this occasion, as on others, is meant to be an example to all Christians. Christ is our pattern as well as our propitiation. There are evidently times and occasions when the servant of Christ must mix with the ungodly and the children of this world. There may be seasons when it may be a duty to hold social intercourse with them, to accept their invitations, and sit down at their tables. Nothing, of course, must induce the Christian to be a partaker in the sins or frivolous amusements of the world. But he must not be uncourteous. He must not entirely withdraw himself from the society of the unconverted, and become a hermit or an ascetic. He must remember, that good may be done in the private room as well as in the pulpit.

One qualification however should never be forgotten when we act upon our Lord's example in this matter. Let us take heed that we go down into the company of the unconverted in the same spirit in which Christ went. Let us remember His boldness in speaking of the things of God. He was always "about His Father's business." —Let us remember His faithfulness in rebuking sin. He spared not even the sins of those that entertained Him, when His attention was publicly called to them. Let us go into company, in the same frame of mind, and our souls will take no harm. If we feel that we dare not imitate Christ in the company which we are invited to join, we may be sure that we had better stay at home.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, *the foolishness which accompanies hypocrisy in religion*. We are told that the Pharisee with whom our Lord dined marvelled that our Lord "had not first washed before dinner." He

thought, like most of his order, that there was something unholy in not doing it, and that the neglect of it was a sign of moral impurity. Our Lord points out the absurdity of attaching such importance to the mere cleansing of the body, while the cleansing of the heart is overlooked. He reminds His host that God looks at the inward part of us, the hidden man of the heart, far more than at our skins. And He asks the searching question, "Did not He that made that which is without, make that which is within also?" The same God who formed our poor dying bodies, is the God who gave us a heart and soul.

For ever let us bear in mind that the state of our hearts is the principal thing that demands our attention, if we would know what we are in religion. Bodily washings, and fastings, and gestures, and postures, and self-imposed mortification of the flesh, are all utterly useless if the heart is wrong. External devoutness of conduct, a grave face, and a bowed head, and a solemn countenance, and a loud "Amen," are all abominable in God's sight, so long as our hearts are not washed from their wickedness and renewed by the Holy Ghost. Let this caution never be forgotten. The idea that men can be devout before they are converted, is a grand delusion of the devil, and one against which we all need to be on our guard. There are two Scriptures which are very weighty on this subject. In one it is written, "Out of the heart are the issues of life." (Prov. iv. 23.) In the other it is written, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart." (1 Sam. xvi. 7.) There is a question which we should always ask ourselves in drawing near to God, whether in public or private. We should say to ourselves, "Where is my heart?"

Let us notice, thirdly, in this passage, *the gross inconsistency which is often exhibited by hypocrites in their religion*. We read that our Lord says to the Pharisees, "Ye tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God." They carried to an extreme their zeal to pay tithes for the service of the temple;— and yet they neglected the plainest duties towards God and their neighbours. They were scrupulous to an extreme about small matters in the ceremonial law;—and yet they were utterly regardless of the simplest first principles of justice to man and love toward God. In the one direction they were rigidly careful to do even more than was needful. In the other direction they would do nothing at all. In the secondary things of their religion they were downright zealots and enthusiasts. But in the great primary things they were no better than the heathen.

The conduct of the Pharisees in this matter, unhappily, does not stand alone. There have never been wanting religious professors who have exalted the second things of Christianity far above the first, and in their zeal for the second things have finally neglected the first things entirely. There are thousands at the present day who make a great ado about daily services, and

keeping Lent, and frequent communion, and turning to the East in churches, and a gorgeous ceremonial, and intoning public prayers,—but never get any further. They know little or nothing of the great practical duties of humility, charity, meekness, spiritual-mindedness, Bible reading, private devotion, and separation from the world. They plunge into every gaiety with greediness. They are to be seen at every worldly assembly and revel, at the race, the opera, the theatre, and the ball. They exhibit nothing of the mind of Christ in their daily life. What is all this but walking in the steps of the Pharisees? Well says the wise man, “There is no new thing under the sun.” (Eccles. i. 9.) The generation which tithed mint, but passed over “judgment and the love of God,” is not yet extinct.

Let us watch and pray that we may observe a scriptural proportion in our religion. Let us beware of putting the second things out of their place, and so by degrees losing sight of the first entirely. Whatever importance we attach to the ceremonial part of Christianity, let us never forget its great practical duties. The religious teaching which inclines us to pass them over has something about it which is radically defective.

Let us notice, lastly, the *falseness and hollowness which characterize the hypocrite in religion*. We read that our Lord compared the Pharisees to “graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.” Even so these boasting teachers of the Jews were inwardly full of corruption and uncleanness, to an extent of which their deluded hearers had no conception.

The picture here drawn is painful and disgusting. Yet the accuracy and truthfulness of it have often been proved by the conduct of hypocrites in every age of the Church. What shall we say of the lives of monks and nuns, which were exposed at the time of the Reformation? Thousands of so called “holy” men and women were found to be sunk in every kind of wickedness. What shall we say of the lives of some of the leaders of sects and heresies who have professed a peculiarly pure standard of doctrine? Not unfrequently the very men who have promised to others liberty have turned out to be themselves “servants of corruption.” The morbid anatomy of human nature is a loathsome study. Hypocrisy and unclean living have often been found side by side.

Let us leave the whole passage with a settled determination to watch and pray against hypocrisy in religion. Whatever we are as Christians, let us be real, thorough, genuine, and sincere. Let us abhor all canting, and affectation, and part-acting in the things of God, as that which is utterly loathsome in Christ’s eyes. We may be weak, and erring, and frail, and come far short of our aims and desires. But at any rate, if we profess to believe in Christ, let us be true.

- 37.—[*A certain Pharisee.*] We do not know who this Pharisee was. It seems clear that he was not a disciple of Christ. Yet our Lord accepted his invitation, and dined with him. From this circumstance the conclusion is often drawn by weak believers that it is lawful and desirable to keep up social intercourse with unconverted people. As to the lawfulness there can be no doubt. As to the desirableness and expediency, everyone must judge for himself, and consider what he can do, and what he cannot. Those Christians who plead our Lord's example as an argument for dining with unconverted people, would do well to mark our Lord's conduct and conversation at the tables of those with whom He dined. Let them copy Him in His conversation as well as in the acceptance of invitations. Unhappily, there are many who will accept the invitation as our Lord accepted, but will not talk at table as our Lord talked.
- 38.—[*That he had not first washed.*] Let this expression be carefully noted. The Greek word literally translated would be rendered, "that he had not first been baptized" before dinner. It is clear that the washing spoken of cannot be a washing of the whole body, but a partial washing, as of the hands and feet, or a sprinkling of water on the hands, after the manner of Eastern nations. (2 Kings iii. 11.) The opinion held by some Baptists that the Greek word to "baptize" is never used except in the sense of a total immersion of the body, is one that cannot be reconciled with the expression used in this text.
- 39.—[*Your inward part.*] This of course means your inward man—your heart. It is what St. Peter calls "the hidden man of the heart." (1 Pet. iii. 4.)
- 40.—[*Ye fools.*] The literal meaning of the Greek word so translated is, "persons without mind or understanding." It is the same word that St. Paul uses. (1 Cor. xv. 36.) It is not the word that our Lord forbids to be used in the sermon on the mount. (Matt. v. 22.)

[*Did not he that made that which is without, &c.*] Our Lord's meaning in this verse appears to be that it is absurd and unreasonable to suppose that God can be pleased with mere external and ceremonial purity, while inward purity and the cleansing of the heart are neglected. He who made all things, made the inner man as well as the outward, and requires the heart to be washed from its wickedness, as well as the hands from uncleanness.

- 41.—[*But rather give alms, &c.*] This is a very difficult verse. The variety of interpretations of it shows plainly that it has perplexed the commentators.

Some think that the whole verse is ironical, and that our Lord means, "Go on in your practice of giving alms of such things as ye have, and then indeed ye are very holy people! All things are clean unto you!—Give alms and keep up the ceremonial law, and then no doubt ye are the people! None so holy as ye!" This is the opinion of Lightfoot, who thinks that our Lord is quoting the tenets of the Pharisees "in mere scoff and displeasure." However it does not seem a satisfactory mode of explaining the verse, and is unlike our Lord's usual mode of speaking. This interpretation may therefore be dismissed at once.

The real difficulty of the verse no doubt lies in the words which we translate "such things as ye have." Some think that this expression is elliptical, and that it means, "Give alms every one according to his ability." This is the view of Euthymius, Maldonatus, Cocceius, Hammond, Whitby, Schottgen, and Doddridge.—Others think that the expression means, "Give as alms to the poor those things that ye have:" that is, the things that ye have obtained by avarice and plunder, as Zacchæus did.—Others think that the expression means, "All that ye have: all your property."—Others think that it means, "That which is over and above; your superfluities; give them as alms."—Others think that it means, "Give alms with all your might." Others think that it means, "Give alms, which is the only remedy left to you."

All these interpretations appear very unsatisfactory. None of them meets the grave objection, that, taken in connection with the concluding sentence of the verse, they teach false

doctrine. Alms do not make our souls clean, and all our actions pure, no matter how, or in what way, or to what extent we give them.

I take leave to suggest another explanation, which seems to me to deserve consideration. The literal meaning of the Greek words is as follows: "But rather give *the things that are in*, as alms."—The simplest sense of this sentence appears to be, "Give first the offering of the inward man. Give your heart, your affections, and your will to God, as the first great alms which you bestow, and then all your other actions, proceeding from a right heart, are an acceptable sacrifice, and a clean offering in the sight of God.—Give the inner man first, and then the gifts and service of the external man will be acceptable.—Give yourselves first to the Lord, and then He will be pleased with your gifts. See that your persons are first accepted, and then your works will be acceptable. To the pure all things are pure." Let the expression in this sense be compared with Rom. xii. 1; Psalm li. 17; 2 Cor. viii. 5.

42.—[*Woe unto you.*] Here, as in other places, the stern and severe language of our Lord deserves notice. Gracious and loving as He was, He could rebuke when there was need. Nothing seems so odious in His eyes as hypocrisy.

[*Ye tithe mint, &c.*] This expression means that the Pharisees pretended to such excessive scrupulosity about giving a tenth of all their possessions to the service of the temple and to the maintenance of the ceremonial law, that they were not content with tithing their corn. They even tithed their garden herbs. Yet all this time they entirely neglected the plain duties of justice to man, and real love to God.

The neglect of distinction between that which is great and that which is small, that which is first and that which is second, that which is essential and that which is non-essential, has been the source of enormous evil in every age of the Church. It is a distinction which the never-dying school of the Pharisees is unable to draw.

43.—[*Ye love the uppermost seats, &c.*] Let it be noted, that ambition and the love of precedence are common marks of the formalist and the self-righteous. To exalt themselves under pretence of honouring the *Church*, and to obtain power under cover of obtaining respect for their own *order*, has been the practice of Pharisees all over the world and in every age of the Church of Christ.

Our Lord, in this verse, exposes the hollowness of the motives by which His enemies were actuated. Self, and self-aggrandizement, were the true spring of all their conduct.

44.—[*Ye are as graves which appear not.*] There is a remarkable difference between the comparison which our Lord draws here and that which He draws in St. Matthew xxiii. 27, where He likens the Pharisees to whitened sepulchres.

In the comparison before us He rebukes the cunning with which they concealed their own inward corruption, so that men were not aware of it.—In the one in St. Matthew He exposes the false profession which they made outwardly to the eye, in having a beautiful semblance of religion, while there was nothing corresponding in the state of their hearts.—In the case before us He exposes what men did not see in the Pharisees. In the case in St. Matthew He rather exposes what men did see.—In the one case it was a grave full of corruption, but a grave concealed from the eye. In the other it was a grave equally full of corruption, but outwardly beautiful and white, so as to deceive a beholder as to the nature of its contents.—In the one case there was corruption, but made outwardly beautiful and harmless. In the other there was corruption hidden, concealed, and entirely kept back from the eye.—In both cases the heart was the same. The whitened sepulchre and the sepulchre concealed were both sepulchres full of corruption.