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. 45–54.

45 Then answered one of the law­yers, and said unto him Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.

46 And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

47 Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

48 Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.

49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they shall slay and persecute:

50 That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation;

51 From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which per­ished between the altar and the temple: verily Isay unto you, It shall be required of this generation.

52 Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye enter not in your­selves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

53 And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge *him* vehe­mently, and to provoke him to speak of many things:

54 Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

THE passage before us is an example of our Lord Jesus Christ’s faithful dealing with the souls of men. We see Him without fear or favour rebuking the sins of the Jewish expounders of God’s law. That false charity which calls it “unkind” to say that anyone is in error, finds no encouragement in the language used by our Lord. He called things by their right names. He knew that acute diseases need severe remedies. He would have us know that the truest friend to our souls, is not the man who is always “speaking smooth things,” and agreeing with everything we say, but the man who tells us the most truth.

We learn, firstly, from our Lord’s words, *how great is the sin of professing to teach others what we do not practise ourselves.* He says to the lawyers, “Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, while ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.” They required others to observe wearisome ceremonies in religion which they themselves neglected. They had the impudence to lay yokes upon the consciences of other men, and yet to grant exemptions from these yokes for themselves. In a word, they had one set of measures and weights for their hearers, and another set for their own souls.

The stern reproof which our Lord here administers should come home with special power to certain classes in the Church. It is a word in season to all teachers of young people. It is a word to all masters of families and heads of households. It is a word to all fathers and mothers. Above all, it is a word to all clergymen and ministers of religion. Let all such mark well our Lord’s language in this passage. Let them beware of telling others to aim at a standard which they do not aim at themselves. Such conduct, to say the least, is gross inconsistency.

Perfection, no doubt, is unattainable in this world. If nobody is to lay down rules, or teach, or preach, until he is faultless himself, the whole fabric of society would be thrown into confusion. But we have a right to expect some agreement between a man’s words and a man’s works, between his teaching and his doing, between his preaching and his practice. One thing at all events is very certain: no lessons produce such effects on men as those which the teacher illustrates by his own daily life. Happy is he who can say with Paul, “Those things which ye have heard and seen in me, do.” (Philip. iv. 9.)

We learn, secondly, from our Lord’s words, *how much more easy it is to admire dead saints than living ones.* He says to the lawyers, “Ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.” They professed to honour the memory of the prophets, while they lived in the very same ways which the prophets had con­demned! They openly neglected their advice and teach­ing, and yet they pretended to respect their graves!

The practice which is here exposed has never been without followers in spirit, if not in the letter. Thou­sands of wicked men in every age of the Church have tried to deceive themselves and others by loud professions of admiration for the saints of God after their decease. By so doing they have endeavoured to ease their own consciences, and blind the eyes of the world. They have sought to raise in the minds of others the thought, “If these men love the memories of the good so dearly, they must surely be of one heart with them.” They have forgotten that even a child can see that “dead men tell no tales,” and that to admire men when they can neither reprove us by their lips, nor put us to shame by their lives, is a very cheap admiration indeed.

Would we know what a man’s religious character really is? Let us inquire what he thinks of true Chris­tians while they are yet alive.—Does he love them, and cleave to them, and delight in them, as the excellent of the earth?—Or does he avoid them, and dislike them, and regard them as fanatics, and enthusiasts, and ex­treme, and righteous over-much?—The answers to these questions are a pretty safe test of a man’s true character. When a man can see no beauty in living saints, but much in dead ones, his soul is in a very rotten state. The Lord Jesus has pronounced his condemnation. He is a hypocrite in the sight of God.

We learn, thirdly, from our Lord’s words, *how surely a reckoning day for persecution will come upon the persecutors.* He says that the “blood of all the prophets shall be required.”

There is something peculiarly solemn in this statement. The number of those who have been put to death for the faith of Christ in every age of the world, is exceedingly great. Thousands of men and women have laid down their lives rather than deny their Saviour, and have shed their blood for the truth. At the time they died they seemed to have no helper. Like Zacharias, and James, and Stephen, and John the Baptist, and Ignatius, and Huss, and Hooper, and Latimer, they died without resistance. They were soon buried and forgotten on earth, and their enemies seemed to triumph utterly. But their deaths were not forgotten in heaven. Their blood was had in remembrance before God. The persecutions of Herod, and Nero, and Diocletian, and bloody Mary, and Charles IX., are not forgotten. There shall be a great assize one day, and then all the world shall see that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm cxvi. 15.)

Let us often look forward to the judgment day. There are many things going on in the world which are trying to our faith. The frequent triumphing of the wicked is perplexing. The frequent depression of the godly is a pro­blem that appears hard to solve. But it shall all be made clear one day. The great white throne and the books of God shall put all things in their right places. The tangled maze of God’s providences shall be unravelled. All shall be proved to a wondering world to have been “well done.” Every tear that the wicked have caused the godly to shed shall be reckoned for. Every drop of righteous blood that has been spilled shall at length be required.

We learn, lastly, from our Lord’s words, *how great is the wickedness of keeping back others from religious know­ledge.* He says to the lawyers, “Ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and those that were entering in ye hindered.”

The sin here denounced is awfully common. The guilt of it lies at far more doors than at first sight many are aware. It is the sin of the Romish priest who forbids the poor man to read his Bible.—It is the sin of the unconverted Protestant minister who warns his people against “extreme views,” and sneers at the idea of conversion.—It is the sin of the ungodly, thoughtless husband who dislikes his wife becoming “serious.”—It is the sin of the worldly-minded mother who cannot bear the idea of her daughter thinking of spiritual things, and giving up theatres and balls. All these, wittingly or unwittingly, are bringing down on themselves our Lord’s emphatic “woe.” They are hindering others from entering heaven!

Let us pray that this awful sin may never be ours. Whatever we are ourselves in religion, let us dread dis­couraging others, if they have the least serious concern about their souls. Let us never check any of those around us in their religion, and specially in the matter of reading the Bible, hearing the Gospel, and private prayer. Let us rather cheer them, encourage them, help them, and thank God if they are better than ourselves. “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness,” was a prayer of David’s. (Psalm li. 14.) It may be feared that the blood of relatives will be heavy on the heads of some at the last day. They saw them about to “enter” the kingdom of God, and they “hindered “them.

NOTES. LUKE XI. 45–54.

45.—[*One* *of the lawyers.*]The lawyers, be it remembered, were a class of men among the Jews who devoted themselves to the study of the law of God. We generally find them in league with the Scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel history.

46*.—*[*Woe unto you also, ye lawyers.*]These words are a striking instance of our Lord’s boldness in rebuking sinners. He is appealed to in an angry tone, and He tells those who appeal to Him their sins and wickedness to their face.

[*Ye* *lade men, with burdens.*]These burdens mean the many vexatious and trifling rules laid down by the Jewish expounders of the law, as requiring men’s attention, if they would be saved. Chemnitius remarks the close resemblance between these Jewish teachers and the Roman Catholic priests, who hedged up the way to heaven with a long list of things to be observed, penances, pilgrimages, fastings, flagellations, contritions, attritions, confessions, and the like.

47.—[*Ye* *build the sepulchres of the prophets.*]Let it be remem­bered that in every age of the Church, true Christians have been more admired and praised when they were dead than when they were alive. Chemnitius observes that the conduct of these lawyers related in this verse is that of the Roman Catholic Church. No people can be more zealous than the Romish priests in honouring the tombs and relics of saints and martyrs, and building costly churches in honour of them. And yet the doctrines of these saints are not believed, and their lives are not imitated!

48.—[*Ye* *bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers.*]The meaning of these words can only be that the lives of the Jewish teachers were clear evidence that they agreed with those who murdered the prophets more than with the prophets. A man’s life is the best proof of a man’s opinions. It is absurd and hypocritical to pretend admiration of dead saints, if we do not at the same time endeavour to walk in their steps. Poole remarks, “It is gross hypocrisy for men to magnify the servants of God in former ages, and in the mean time to malign and persecute the servants of the same God in a present age, owning the same truth, and living by the same rule.

49*.—*[*Said the wisdom of God.*]It is a disputed question what these words mean. Alford thinks that they simply refer to the description of the death of Zechariah, in the book of Chronicles (2 Chron. xxiv. 18-22), and that our Lord gives a paraphrase and summary of the lessons contained in that passage. The more common opinion is that our Lord speaks of himself under the name of “Wisdom,” and that comparing the passage with Matt. xxiii. 34, it means, “I, the eternal wisdom of God, have said.”

50.—[*Of* *this generation.*]Both here and in the following verse, it seems probable that the word generation means nation or people, as in Matt. xxiv. 34. It is a certain fact that the greater part of the men who were alive when our Lord said these things, must have been dead forty years after, when the great inquisi­tion for blood took place, at the destruction of Jerusalem.

51*.—*[*Zacharius.)* There can be little doubt that this Zacharias was the son of Jehoiada, who was murdered in the days of Joash. (2 Chron. xxiv. 20.) Lightfoot gives some remarkable quotations from Rabbinical writers, proving how very great a crime this murder was regarded by the Jews themselves.

[*The temple.*]Let it be noted, that the Greek word so translated, is commonly rendered, “The house.”

[*It shall be required.*]This is one of those fearful passages of Scripture which teach us that sins are not forgotten by God because not punished at the time of commission. There are evidently many sins recorded in the book of God’s remembrance which will all be brought to light and reckoned for one day.

52.—[*Ye* *have taken away the key of knowledge.*]It is a doubtful question whether these words should not have been rendered “Ye have borne, or taken up, and carried the key of knowledge.” Let the expression be compared with John i. 29, and the mar­ginal reading in that place; and with such phrases as that translated, “Take up his cross,” in Luke xi. 23. The meaning would then be, “Ye have been by profession the instructors of the Jews in spiritual knowledge. Ye have, so to speak, carried the keys. Yet ye made no use of them yourselves, and allowed nobody else to use them.” According to Watson, the Jewish teachers of the law had a key formally given to them, when they were ordained or set apart for the office of teaching.

Baxter remarks on this verse, “This is just the description of a wicked clergy.”—It certainly describes the Church of Rome.

53.—[*To* *provoke him to speak of many things.*]The Greek verb in this expression is remarkable, and is only found here in the New Testament. Parkhurst says that it means “To draw or force words from the mouth of another, to question magister­ially, as a master does his scholars.” Hammond says on this text, “They did ask questions to hear what Christ would say, as an angry schoolmaster that seeks occasion against a scholar.” Hesychius says it is “to require another to recite from memory.” The meaning is obvious. Our Lord’s enemies knew that “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin,” and they hoped to find occasion against Him.

54.—[*To* *catch.*]The original idea of the Greek word so tran­slated is “to hunt,” or to lay hold of and catch in hunting.

We should remember the words of St. James, “He that offendeth not in word, the same is a perfect man.” The per­fect meekness of our Lord is strikingly shown in His never losing His temper under abounding provocations, and His perfect wisdom in never saying a word on which His deadliest enemies could justly lay hold.