EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE XII. 1–7.

1 In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumer­able multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.

3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But l will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?

7 But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

THE words which begin this chapter are very striking when we consider its contents. We are told that “an innumerable multitude of people were gathered together, insomuch that they trode one upon another.” And what does our Lord do? In the hearing of this multitude He delivers warnings against false teachers, and denounces the sins of the times in which He lived unsparingly, unflinchingly, and without partiality. This was true charity. This was doing the work of a physician. This was the pattern which all His ministers were intended to follow. Well would it have been for the Church and the world if the ministers of Christ had always spoken out as plainly and faithfully as their Master used to do! Their own lives might have been made more uncomfort­able by such a course of action. But they would have saved far more souls.

The first thing that demands our attention in these verses is *Christ’s warning against hypocrisy.* He says to His disciples, “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

This is a warning of which the importance can never be overrated. It was delivered by our Lord more than once, during His earthly ministry. It was intended to be a standing caution to His whole Church in every age, and in every part of the world. It was meant to remind us that the principles of the Pharisees are deeply engrained in human nature, and that Christians should be always on their guard against them. Pharisaism is a subtle leaven which the natural heart is always ready to receive. It is a leaven which once received into the heart infects the whole character of a man’s Christianity. Of this leaven says our Lord, in words that should often ring in our ears,—of this leaven, beware!

Let us ever nail this caution in our memories, and bind it on our hearts. The plague is about us on every side. The danger is at all times. What is the essence of Romanism, and semi-Romanism, and formalism, and sacrament-worship and church-adorning, and ceremoni­alism? What is it all but the leaven of the Pharisees under one shape or another? The Pharisees are not extinct. Pharisaism lives still.

If we would not become Pharisees, let us cultivate a heart religion. Let us realize daily that the God with whom we have to do, looks far below the outward surface of our profession, and that He measures us by the state of our hearts. Let us be real and true in our Christianity. Let us abhor all part-acting, and affectation, and semblance of devotion, put on for public occasions, but not really felt within. It may deceive man, and get us the reputation of being very religious, but it cannot deceive God. “There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed.” Whatever we are in religion, let us never wear a cloak or a mask.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses is *Christ’s warning against the fear of man.* “Benot afraid,” He says, “of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” But this is not all. He not only tells us whom we ought not to fear, but of whom we ought to be afraid. “Fear him,” He says, “which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” The manner in which the lesson is conveyed is very striking and im­pressive. Twice over the exhortation is enforced. “Fear him,” says our Lord,—“yea I say unto you, fear him.”

The fear of man is one of the greatest obstacles which stand between the soul and heaven.—“What will men say of me? What will they think of me? What will they do to me?”—How often these little questions have turned the balance against the soul, and kept men bound hand and foot by sin and the devil! Thousands would never hesitate a moment to storm a breach or face a lion, who dare not face the laughter of relatives, neighbours, and friends. Now if the fear of man has such influence in these times, how much greater must its influence have been in the days when our Lord was upon earth! If it be hard to follow Christ through ridicule and ill-natured words, how much harder must it have been to follow Him through prisons, beatings, scourgings, and violent deaths! All these things our Lord Jesus knew well. No wonder that He cries, “Be not afraid.”

But what is the best remedy against the fear of man? How are we to overcome this powerful feeling, and break the chains which it throws around us? There is no remedy like that which our Lord recommends. We must supplant the fear of man by a higher and more powerful principle,—the fear of God. We must look away from those who can only hurt the body to Him who has all dominion over the soul. We must turn our eyes from those who can only injure us in the life that now is, to Him who can condemn us to eternal misery in the life to come. Armed with this mighty principle, we shall not play the coward. Seeing Him that is invisible, we shall find the lesser fear melting away before the greater, and the weaker before the stronger. “I fear God,” said Colonel Gardiner, “and therefore there is no one else that I need fear.”—It was a noble saying of martyred Bishop Hooper, when a Roman Catholic urged him to save his life by recanting at the stake: “Life is sweet and death is bitter. But eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death is more bitter.”

The last thing that demands our attention in these verses, is *Christ’s encouragement to persecuted believers.* He reminds them of God’s providential care over the least of His creatures: “Not one sparrow is forgotten before God.” He goes on to assure them that the same Fatherly care is engaged on behalf of each one of them­selves: “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer, without God’s ordering and permission.

The providential government of God over everything in this world is a truth of which the Greek and Roman philosophers had no conception. It is a truth which is specially revealed to us in the Word of God. Just as the telescope and microscope show us that there is order and design in all the works of God’s hand, from the greatest planet down to the least insect, so does the Bible teach us that there is wisdom, order, and design in all the events of our daily life. There is no such thing as “chance,” “luck,” or “accident” in the Christian’s journey through this world. All is arranged and ap­pointed by God; and all things are “working together” for the believer’s good. (Rom. viii. 28.)

Let us seek to have an abiding sense of God’s hand in all that befalls us, if we profess to be believers in Jesus Christ. Let us strive to realize that a Father’s hand is measuring out our daily portion; and that our steps are ordered by Him. A daily practical faith of this kind is one grand secret of happiness, and a mighty antidote against murmuring and discontent. We should try to feel in the day of trial and disappointment, that all is right and all is well done. We should try to feel on the bed of sickness, that there must be a “needs be.” We should say to ourselves, “God could keep away from me these things if He thought fit. But He does not do so, and therefore they must be for my advantage. I will lie still, and bear them patiently. I have an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure.’ (2 Sam. xxiii. 5.) What pleases God shall please me.”

NOTES. LUKE XII. 1-7.

1.—[*An* *innumerable multitude.*]The Greek word so translated means literally, “The myriads,” or tens of thousands of the people. Lightfoot thinks that these words are an evidence of the success of the seventy disciples.

[*He began to say.*]Let it be observed, that the discourse which follows these words is remarkable for the great num­ber of sayings which it contains which were also said by our Lord upon other occasions. It is clear that our Lord repeated the same words in different places, and taught the same lessons on different occasions. All teachers and instructors repeat their lessons over and over again, in order to impress them on the minds of those they teach. It is absurd and unreasonable to suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ did not do so. To maintain, as some do, that St. Luke, in this chapter, is only stringing together, for convenience sake, sayings which our Lord used on many different occasions, appears to me a very irreverent mode of dealing with an inspired writing, and a very needless explanation of the repetitions which the chapter con­tains. The things repeated are things which it is especially important for Christians to know, and therefore our Lord repeats them, and Luke was inspired to write them.

Burgon remarks: “Of the fifty-nine verses which compose the present chapter, no less than thirty-five prove to have been delivered on quite distinct occasions; not in single verses only, but by seven, eight, and even ten verses at a time.”

An excessive desire to harmonize the various Gospel his­tories has led to many strange dealings with Scripture. “Harmonies,” however well meant, have done little good to the Church of Christ.

[*Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees.*]This is a warning which is given in another place, on a totally distinct occasion. It is a great standing caution to the Church against formality and hypocrisy. Few warnings have been so much needed and so much overlooked. “Leaven” is the word used to express false doctrine, because it works secretly and silently,—because its quantity is small compared to the whole mass of dough,—and because, once mingled, it alters the whole character of the bread. This is precisely the case with false doctrine. It seems “a little one.” It works stealthily and noiselessly. Insensibly it poisons the whole Gospel. If men will add to or take away from the great prescription for the cure of souls, the divine medicine is spoiled.

2*.—*[*Nothing covered...revealed.*]This verse seems to admit of two interpretations. It is a general statement of the useless­ness of hypocrisy. Everything shall appear in its true colours at last. It is an injunction to the disciples to reserve and keep back nothing in their teaching. They are to “declare all the counsel of God.” The distinction between interior and exterior doctrines, inward truths for the learned and outward truths for the unlearned, however approved by some philosophers, finds no countenance in the Gospel.

3*.—*[*Darkness...light...closets...housetops.*]These expressions all seem to be proverbial. They all teach the duty of keeping nothing back in teaching the Gospel. To understand the “housetops,” we should remember that Eastern houses gener­ally had flat roofs, which were much used by the inhabitants.

4.—[*Them* *that kill the body, &c.*]The distinction between body and soul, and the separate existence of the soul after the body is dead, are clearly brought out in this passage. The use which martyrs have often made of this verse at the moment of death, is a striking and remarkable fact in Church history.

5*.—*[*Fear him...hath power...hell.*]Some commentators think, with Stier, that this means the devil. This however seems very unlikely. The power of life and death is not in the hands of the devil. Most think that it means God, who alone kills and makes alive, casts down and raises up. This view is fully and clearly set forth by Chemnitius.

The reality and fearfulness of hell stand out awfully on the face of this verse. There is a hell after death. The state of the wicked man after this life is not annihilation. There is a hell which ought to be feared. There is a just God who will finally cast into hell the obstinately impenitent and unbelieving.

Let us not fail to notice that “fear” is an argument that ought sometimes to be pressed on professing Christians. Christ Himself used it. Burkitt says, “It is good to raise a friend’s fear, when that fear is for his good.” To say, as some ignorantly do, that love, and not fear, is the only argument which should be addressed to believers, is a modern and unscriptural notion.

6*.—*[*Not one of them is forgotten.*]The providential care of God over all His creatures is strikingly taught in this and the follow­ing verse. Nothing was too little for God to create. Nothing is too little for God to preserve. Nothing that concerns God’s people is too little for Him to manage, or for them to bring before Him in prayer. Our least matters are in God’s hands. Major remarks, that this providence of God over the least things was a truth of which the heathen philosophers had no conception. The Epicureans, the Academics, the followers of Aristotle and others, maintained that the gods regarded the universe in general, but not particular persons and things.