

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS. ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XII. 49–53.

49 I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?	52 For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.
50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!	53 The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.
51 Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:	

THE sayings of the Lord Jesus in these five verses are peculiarly weighty and suggestive. They unfold truths which every true Christian would do well to mark and digest. They explain things in the Church, and in the world, which at first sight are hard to be understood.

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, *how thoroughly the heart of Christ was set on finishing the work which He came into the world to do*. He says, “I have a baptism to be baptized with,”—a baptism of suffering, of wounds, of agony, of blood, and of death. Yet none of these things moved Him. He adds, “How am I straitened till this baptism is accomplished!” The prospect of coming trouble did not deter Him for a moment. He was ready and willing to endure all things in order to provide eternal redemption for His people. Zeal for the cause He had taken in hand was like a burning fire within Him. To advance His Father’s glory, to open the door of life to a lost world, to provide a fountain for all sin and uncleanness by the sacrifice of Himself, were continually the uppermost thoughts of His mind. He was pressed in spirit till this mighty work was finished.

For ever let us bear in mind that all Christ’s sufferings on our behalf were endured willingly, voluntarily, and of His own free choice. They were not submitted to patiently, merely because He could not avoid them. They were not borne without a murmur merely because He could not escape them. He lived a humble life for thirty-three years because He loved to do so. He died a death of agony with a willing and a ready mind. Both in life and death He was carrying out the eternal counsel whereby God was to be glorified and sinners were to be saved. He carried it out with all His heart, mighty as the struggle was which it entailed on His flesh and blood. He delighted to do God’s will. He was straitened till it was accomplished.

Let us not doubt that the heart of Christ in heaven is the same that it was when He was upon earth. He feels as deep an interest now about the salvation of sinners as He did formerly about dying in their stead. Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. There is in Him an infinite willingness to receive, pardon, justify and deliver the souls of men from hell. Let us strive to realize that willingness, and learn to believe it without doubting, and repose on it without fear. It is a certain fact, if men

would only believe it, that Christ is far more willing to save us than we are to be saved.

Let the zeal of our Lord and Master be an example to all His people. Let the recollection of His burning readiness to die for us be like a glowing coal in our memories, and constrain us to live to Him, and not to ourselves. Surely the thought of it should waken our sleeping hearts, and warm our cold affections, and make us anxious to redeem the time, and do something for His praise. A zealous Saviour ought to have zealous disciples.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, *how useless it is to expect universal peace and harmony from the preaching of the Gospel*. The disciples, like most Jews of their day, were probably expecting Messiah's kingdom immediately to appear. They thought the time was at hand when the wolf would lie down with the lamb, and men would not hurt or destroy any more. (Isaiah xi. 9.) Our Lord saw what was in their hearts, and checked their untimely expectations with a striking saying: "Suppose ye that I am come to send peace on earth? I tell you, Nay, but rather division."

There is something at first sight very startling in this saying. It seems hard to reconcile it with the song of angels, which spoke of "peace on earth" as the companion of Christ's Gospel. (Luke ii. 14.) Yet startling as the saying sounds, it is one which facts have proved to be literally true. Peace is undoubtedly the result of the Gospel wherever it is believed and received. But wherever there are hearers of the Gospel who are hardened, impenitent, and determined to have their sins, the very message of peace becomes the cause of division. They that are after the flesh will hate those that are after the Spirit. They that are resolved to live for the world will always be evil affected towards those that are resolved to serve Christ. We may lament this state of things, but we cannot prevent it. Grace and nature can no more amalgamate than oil and water. So long as men are disagreed upon first principles in religion, there can be no real cordiality between them. So long as some men are converted and some are unconverted, there can be no true peace.

Let us beware of unscriptural expectations. If we expect to see people of one heart and one mind before they are converted, we shall continually be disappointed. Thousands of well-meaning persons now-a-days are continually crying out for more "unity" among Christians. To attain this they are ready to sacrifice almost anything, and to throw overboard even sound doctrine, if, by so doing, they can secure peace. Such people would do well to remember that even gold may be bought too dear, and that peace is useless if purchased at the expense of truth. Surely they have forgotten the words of Christ: "I came not to send peace, but division."

Let us never be moved by those who charge the Gospel with being the cause of strife and divisions upon earth. Such men only show their igno-

rance when they talk in this way. It is not the Gospel which is to blame, but the corrupt heart of man. It is not God's glorious remedy which is in fault, but the diseased nature of Adam's race, which, like a self-willed child, refuses the medicine provided for its cure. So long as some men and women will not repent and believe, and some will, there must needs be division. To be surprised at it is the height of folly. The very existence of division is one proof of Christ's foresight, and of the truth of Christianity.

Let us thank God that a time is coming when there shall be no more divisions on earth, but all shall be of one mind. That time shall be when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, comes again in person, and puts down every enemy under His feet. When Satan is bound, when the wicked are separated from the righteous, and cast down to their own place: then, and not till then, will be perfect peace. For that blessed time let us wait, and watch, and pray. The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Our divisions are but for a little season. Our peace shall endure to eternity.

NOTES. LUKE XII. 49-53.

49.—[*I am come to send fire.*] Commentators differ widely about the meaning of the word "fire" in this verse.

1. Some think that it means the Holy Spirit, and refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost which was bestowed on the day of Pentecost. This, in the main, is the opinion of Chrysostom, Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, Ambrose, Gregory, Bede, Bernard, Cocceius, Cornelius à Lapide, Alford, and Stier.

2. Some think that it means the "preaching of the Gospel." This is the opinion of Theophylact, Cyril, Bucer, and Chemnitius.

3. Some think that it means the "word of God." This is the opinion of Bullinger, Gualter and Watson.

4. Some think that it means "love." This is the opinion of Jansenius, Stella, Bengel, and, in part, of Euthymius.

5. Some think that it means the persecutions, afflictions, dissensions, and strifes which were to accompany the introduction of the Gospel into the world. This is the opinion of Tertullian, Brentius, Beza, Poole, Calovius, Trapp, Maldonatus, Hammond, Lightfoot, Whitby, Burkitt, Henry, Pearce, Scott, Barnes, and Burgon.

I decidedly adhere to this last opinion. The other four interpretations appear to me far-fetched and inconsistent with the context. Fire is an expression not unfrequently used in Scripture as an emblem of trouble and affliction. See Psalm lxvi. 12, and Isaiah xliii. 2. Moreover, it is worthy of remark, that "to send fire" is a common figure of speech in the Old Testament, to express sending trouble and affliction. Let the following passages be examined Lam. i. 13; Ezek. xxxix. 6; Hosea viii. 14; Amos ii. 2, 5.

[*What will I, if it be already kindled?*] The Greek words so translated, are so remarkable, that some have thought they ought to be rendered, "What will I, Oh, that it were already kindled!" This is the opinion of Cocceius and Hammond. But I see no reason for disputing the correctness of our received translation.

Trapp's paraphrase is a fair exposition of the meaning of the sentence: "Let the fire kindle as soon as it will, I am contented. I know much good will come of it."

Barnes paraphrases the sentence thus: "What would I, but that it were kindled. Since it is necessary for the advancement of religion that such divisions should take place,—since the Gospel cannot be established without conflicts, strifes, and hatreds, I am even desirous that they should come."

Lightfoot says: "What will I," seems to be used after the manner of the schools, where "what do I say," is the same with "I do say this;" and "what do I decree," the same with "I do decree this." So, "what will I," is the same with "this I will." The meaning is, "This I will: that it be already kindled."

50.—[*A baptism.*] This baptism is plainly not that of water, nor that of the Holy Ghost, but the baptism of suffering. It is the same baptism of which our Lord said to James and John, "Ye shall be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."

The expression is one of those which shows the wisdom of our translators of the Bible in adhering to the word "baptism," and not rendering it either "immersion," or "sprinkling."

The effect of either of these words in the present verse, instead of "baptism," needs only to be tried. Few would like to substitute for our present translation, "I have an immersion to be immersed with; "or, "I have a sprinkling to be sprinkled with."

[*How am I straitened.*] The Greek work so translated is the same that is rendered in Acts xviii. 5, "pressed;" and in 2 Cor. v. 14, "constrains." It is supposed by some that the feeling our Lord meant to express, was that of pain and distress in the prospect of His coming sufferings and crucifixion. This is the opinion of Stier. It seems, however, highly improbable.—It is supposed by others that the expression is like John xii. 27 and Luke xxii. 42, and is meant to imply the conflict between our Lord's human will which naturally shrunk from suffering, and His divine will which was set on accomplishing the work He came to do. This opinion is supported by many. Yet it does not seem quite to harmonize with the context, and is not altogether satisfactory.—The most probable view appears to be that which I have ventured to maintain in the exposition. The expression, "I am straitened," was intended to show us the burning desire by which our Lord was constrained to accomplish the work of our redemption. It is like the saying, "With desire I have desired to eat the passover with you." Theophylact and Euthymius both support this view.

51.—[*Nay; but rather division, &c.*] The words of Burkitt on this passage are worth reading, "Our Saviour declares what will be the accidental event and effect, but not the natural tendency of His religion. We must distinguish between the intentional aim of Christ's coming, and the accidental event of it. Christ's intentional aim was to plant, propagate, and promote peace in the world. But through the lust and corruption of man's nature, the issue and event of His coming is war and division; not that these are the genuine and natural fruits of the Gospel, but occasional and accidental only."

52.—[*Five in one house divided, &c.*] The expressions in this and the following verse must not be pressed too literally. In some houses there are not five persons. In others there are many more than five.—In some families, where the work of conversion begins, the father and son are entirely of one mind, and so also are the mother and daughter.—The expressions are manifestly proverbial. The plain lesson they are meant to convey is this,—that the Gospel will often produce divisions in families, and that even two persons who are most nearly related may become estranged from one another, in consequence of one being converted and the other not. That this is constantly the case is well known to all who know anything of true religion. Few believers can look round the circle of their relatives and acquaintances, and not see striking illustrations of the truth of our Lord's prophecy in this passage. Melancholy as it seems, it is a fact that nothing annoys some persons so much as the conversion of their relatives.