

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XII. 8–12.

8 Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: 9 But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. 10 And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven	him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. 11 And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and <i>unto</i> magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: 12 For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.
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WE are taught, firstly, in these verses, that *we must confess Christ upon earth, if we expect Him to own us as His saved people at the last day.* We must not be ashamed to let all men see that we believe in Christ, and serve Christ, and love Christ, and care more for the praise of Christ than for the praise of man.

The duty of confessing Christ is incumbent on all Christians in every age of the Church. Let us never forget that. It is not for martyrs only, but for all believers, in every rank of life. It is not for great occasions only, but for our daily walk through an evil world. The rich man among the rich, the labourer among labourers, the young among the young, the servant among servants,—each and all must be prepared, if they are true Christians, to confess their Master. It needs no blowing a trumpet. It requires no noisy boasting. It needs nothing more than using the daily opportunity. But one thing is certain: if a man loves Jesus, he ought not to be ashamed to let people know it.

The difficulty of confessing Christ is undoubtedly very great. It never was easy at any period. It never will be easy as long as the world stands. It is sure to entail on us laughter, ridicule, contempt, mockery, enmity, and persecution. The wicked dislike to see any one better than themselves. The world which hated Christ will always hate true Christians. But whether we like it or not, whether it be hard or easy, our course is perfectly clear. In one way or another Christ must be confessed.

The grand motive to stir us up to bold confession is forcibly brought before us in the words which we are now considering. Our Lord declares, that if we do not confess Him before men, He will “not confess us before the angels of God” at the last day. He will refuse to acknowledge us as His people. He will disown us as cowards, faithless, and deserters. He will not plead for us. He will not be our Advocate. He will not deliver us from the wrath to come. He will leave us to reap the consequences of our cowardice, and to stand before the bar of God helpless, defenceless, and unforgiven. What an awful prospect is this! How much turns on this one hinge of “confessing Christ before men!” Surely we ought not to hesitate for a moment. To doubt between two such alternatives is the height of folly. For us to deny Christ or be ashamed of His Gospel may get us a little of man’s good opinion for a few years, though it will bring us no real peace. But for Christ to deny us at

the last day will be ruin in hell to all eternity! Let us cast away our cowardly fears. Come what will, let us confess Christ.

We are taught, secondly, in these verses, *that there is such a thing as an unpardonable sin*. Our Lord Jesus Christ declares, that “unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.”

These awful words must doubtless be interpreted with Scriptural qualification. We must never so expound one part of Scripture as to make it contradict another. Nothing is impossible with God. The blood of Christ can cleanse away all sin. The very chief of sinners have been pardoned in many instances. These things must never be forgotten. Yet notwithstanding all this, there remains behind a great truth which must not be evaded. There is such a thing as a sin “which shall not be forgiven.”

The sin to which our Lord refers in this passage appears to be the sin of deliberately rejecting God’s truth with the heart, while the truth is clearly known with the head. It is a combination of light in the understanding, and determined wickedness in the will. It is the very sin into which many of the Scribes and Pharisees appear to have fallen, when they rejected the ministration of the Spirit after the day of Pentecost, and refused to believe the preaching of the Apostles. It is a sin into which, it may be feared, many constant hearers of the Gospel now-a-days fall, by determined clinging to the world. And, worst of all, it is a sin which is commonly accompanied by utter deadness, hardness, and insensibility of heart. The man whose sins will not be forgiven, is precisely the man who will never seek to have them forgiven. This is exactly the root of his awful disease. He might be pardoned, but he will not seek to be pardoned. He is Gospel-hardened and “twice dead.” His conscience is “seared with a hot iron.” (1 Tim. iv. 2.)

Let us pray that we may be delivered from a cold, speculative, unsanctified head-knowledge of Christianity. It is a rock on which thousands make shipwreck to all eternity. No heart becomes so hard as that on which the light shines, but finds no admission. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay. Whatever light we have, let us use it. Whatever knowledge we possess, let us live fully up to it. To be an ignorant heathen, and bow down to idols and stones, is bad enough. But to be called a Christian, and know the theory of the Gospel, and yet cleave to sin and the world with the heart, is to be a candidate for the worst and lowest place in hell.—It is to be as like as possible to the devil.

We are taught, lastly, in this passage, that *Christians need not be over-anxious as to what they shall say, when suddenly required to speak for Christ’s cause*.

The promise which our Lord gives on this subject has a primary reference no doubt to public trials, like those of Paul before Felix and Festus. It is a promise which hundreds in similar circumstances have found fulfilled to

their singular comfort. The lives of many of the Reformers, and others of God's witnesses, are full of striking proofs that the Holy Ghost can teach Christians what to say in time of need.

But there is a secondary sense, in which the promise belongs to all believers, which ought not be overlooked. Occasions are constantly arising in the lives of Christians, when they are suddenly and unexpectedly called upon to speak on behalf of their Master, and to render a reason of their hope. The home circle, the family fireside, the society of friends, the intercourse with relatives, the very business of the world, will often furnish such sudden occasions. On such occasions the believer should fall back on the promise now before us. It may be disagreeable, and especially to a young Christian, to be suddenly required to speak before others of religion, and above all if religion is attacked. But let us not be alarmed, and flurried, or cast down, or excited. If we remember the promise of Christ, we have no cause to be afraid.

Let us pray for a good memory about Bible promises. We shall find it an inestimable comfort. There are far more, and far wider promises laid down in Scripture for the comfort of Christ's people, than most of Christ's people are aware of. There are promises for almost every position in which we can be placed, and every event that can befall us. Among other promises, let us not forget the one which is now before us. We are sometimes called upon to go into company which is not congenial to us, and we go with a troubled and anxious heart. We fear saying what we ought not to say, and not saying what we ought. At such seasons, let us remember this blessed promise, and put our Master in remembrance of it also. So doing He will not fail us or forsake us. A mouth shall be given to us and wisdom to speak rightly. "The Holy Ghost shall teach us" what to say.

NOTES. LUKE XII. 8-12.

8.—[*Before the angels of God.*] The time referred to in these words as well as in those in the next verse, must doubtless be the day of judgment. The angels shall be specially employed in that day in gathering together God's elect, and separating the wicked from among them.

The time referred to in the expression, "before men," must necessarily be this present life, while we are among men.

The "confessing Christ" in this verse must not be confined merely to confessing Him when placed on our trial, or at the stake. We confess Him whenever we boldly avow ourselves to be His servants and disciples in the midst of an evil world.

9.—[*He that denieth.*] Let it be noted, that the Greek words translated "he that denieth," would be rendered more literally, "he that has denied."

We must be careful not to confine "denying Christ" to such open acts as Peter's denial of Him. We deny Christ when from unbelief, or indolence, or love of the world, or fear of man, we shrink from confessing Him as our Saviour and our King.

10.—[*Whosoever shall speak a word, &c.*] The language of this verse is deep and mysterious. There are sins which are unpardonable.—The distinction drawn between “speaking against the Son of man,” and “blaspheming against the Holy Ghost,” ought not to be overlooked. The explanation is probably something of this kind.—The sin against the Son of man was committed by those who did not know Christ to be the Messiah in the days of His humiliation, and did not receive Him, believe Him, or obey Him, but ignorantly rejected Him, and crucified Him. Many of those who so sinned were pardoned, we cannot doubt; as, for example, on the day of Pentecost, after Peter’s preaching.—The sin against the Holy Ghost was committed by those, who, after the day of Pentecost, and the outpouring of the Spirit, and the full publication of the Gospel, persisted in unbelief and obstinate impenitence, and were given over to a reprobate mind. These especially grieved the Spirit, and resisted the ministration of the Holy Ghost. That this was the state of many of the Jews appears from several places in the Acts, and especially Acts xxviii. 25-28. See also 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost of which those were guilty who said that our Lord cast out devils by Beelzebub, appears to be another form of sin. It is not clear to me that our Lord refers to it in this place.

The great question of the unpardonable sin, and the possibility of falling into it in modern days, is a distinct branch of the subject, and is not the chief point in the passage before us. That there is such a sin is clear. That it consists of the union of the clearest head-knowledge of the Gospel with deliberate rejection of it, and deliberate choice of sin and the world, seems highly probable. That those who are troubled with fear that they have committed it, are just the persons who have not committed it, is the judgment of all the soundest divines. Utter hardness, callousness, and insensibility of conscience, are probably leading characteristics of the man who has sinned the unpardonable sin. He is “let alone,” and given over to a reprobate mind.

Let it be noted, that the word we translate “him that blasphemeth,” would be more literally rendered, “him that has blasphemed.”

11.—[*When they bring you.*] Let it be noted, that the word “they,” in this expression, refers to no persons especially, and must be taken indefinitely. It means, “When ye are brought.” Let the expression be compared with Luke xvi. 9.

[*Unto magistrates and powers.*] We have examples of the disciples being brought before such “powers,” in the case of Peter and John before the council, and Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.

[*Take ye no thought.*] The Greek word so rendered means literally, “Be not anxious,—be not solicitous,—be not careful.” It is the same word that is used in the expressions, “Take no thought for the morrow.” (Matt. vi. 34.) “Careth for the things of the world.” (1 Cor. vii. 34.) “Be careful for nothing.” (Phil. iv. 6.)

We must not suppose that our Lord meant His disciples to neglect study and reading, upon all proper occasions. We might as well forbid all teaching in schools, because of the promise, “They shall not teach every man his neighbour.” (Heb. viii. 11.) St. Paul, at the very end of his ministry, took thought for his “books and parchments.” (2 Tim. iv. 13.)

To apply such promises as this to ministers in modern times, and to justify men in making no preparation for their Sunday sermons, is irreverent and unwarrantable trifling with Scripture.

12.—[*The Holy Ghost shall teach you.*] The fulfilment of this promise is remarkably seen in Paul’s defence of himself before the Jews at Jerusalem, on the steps of the castle, and before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. It has also been seen in modern times, in the histories of

Wickliffe, Huss, Luther, Latimer, Ridley, Cranmer, and others, and especially in the case of some female martyrs, such as Alice Driver, at the English Reformation.