

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.

ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XIV. 25–35.

<p>25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,</p> <p>26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.</p> <p>27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.</p> <p>28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have <i>sufficient</i> to finish it?</p> <p>29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish <i>it</i>, all that behold <i>it</i> begin to mock him,</p> <p>30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.</p>	<p>31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?</p> <p>32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.</p> <p>33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.</p> <p>34 Salt <i>is</i> good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?</p> <p>35 It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; <i>but</i> men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.</p>
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WE learn, firstly, from this passage, that *true Christians must be ready, if need be, to give up everything for Christ's sake.* This is a lesson which is taught in very remarkable language. Our Lord says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

This expression must doubtless be interpreted with some qualification. We must never explain any text of Scripture in such a manner as to make it contradict another. Our Lord did not mean us to understand that it is the duty of Christians to hate their relatives. This would have been to contradict the fifth commandment. He only meant that those who follow Him must love Him with a deeper love even than their nearest and dearest connections, or their own lives.—He did not mean that it is an essential part of Christianity to quarrel with our relatives and friends. But He did mean that if the claims of our relatives and the claims of Christ come into collision, the claims of relatives must give way. We must choose rather to displease those we love most upon earth, than to displease Him who died for us on the cross.

The demand which our Lord makes upon us here is peculiarly stringent and heart-searching. Yet it is a wise and a necessary one. Experience shows, both in the Church at home, and in the mission-field abroad, that the greatest foes to a man's soul are sometimes those of his own house. It sometimes happens that the greatest hindrance in the way of an awakened conscience is the opposition of relatives and friends. Ungodly fathers cannot bear to see their sons "taking up new views" of religion. Worldly mothers are vexed to see their daughters unwilling to enter into the gaities of the world. A collision of opinion takes place frequently, as soon as grace enters into a family. And then comes the time when the true Christian must remember the spirit

of our Lord's words in this passage. He must be willing to offend his family, rather than offend Christ.

The line of duty in such cases is doubtless very painful. It is a heavy cross to disagree with those we love, and specially about spiritual things. But if this cross be laid upon us, we must remember that firmness and decision are true kindness. It can never be true love to relatives to do wrong in order to please them. And, best of all, firmness accompanied by gentleness and consistency, in the long run of life, often brings its own reward. Thousands of Christians will bless God at the last day that they had relatives and friends who chose to displease them rather than Christ. That very decision was the first thing that made them think seriously, and led finally to the conversion of their souls.

We learn, secondly, from this passage, that *those who are thinking of following Christ should be warned to "count the cost."* This is a lesson which was intended for the multitudes who followed our Lord without thought and consideration, and was enforced by examples drawn from building and from war. It is a lesson which will be found useful in every age of the Church.

It costs something to be a true Christian. Let that never be forgotten. To be a mere nominal Christian, and go to church is cheap and easy work. But to hear Christ's voice, and follow Christ, and believe in Christ, and confess Christ, requires much self-denial. It will cost us our sins, and our self-righteousness, and our ease, and our worldliness. All—all must be given up. We must fight an enemy, who comes against us with twenty thousand followers. We must build a tower in troublous times. Our Lord Jesus Christ would have us thoroughly understand this. He bids us "count the cost."

Now, why did our Lord use this language? Did He wish to discourage men from becoming His disciples? Did He mean to make the gate of life appear more narrow than it is? It is not difficult to find an answer to these questions. Our Lord spoke as He did to prevent men following Him lightly and inconsiderately, from mere animal feeling or temporary excitement, who in time of temptation would fall away. He knew that nothing does so much harm to the cause of true religion as backsliding, and that nothing causes so much backsliding as enlisting disciples without letting them know what they take in hand. He had no desire to swell the number of His followers by admitting soldiers who would fail in the hour of need. For this reason He raises a warning voice. He bids all who think of taking service with Him to count the cost before they begin.

Well would it be for the Church and the world if the ministers of Christ would always remember their Master's conduct in this passage. Often, far too often, people are built up in self-deception, and encouraged to think they are converted when in reality they are not converted at all. Feelings are supposed to be faith. Convictions are supposed to be grace. These things ought

not so to be. By all means let us encourage the first beginnings of religion in a soul. But never let us urge people forward without telling them what true Christianity entails. Never let us hide from them the battle and the toil. Let us say to them "Come with us:" but let us also say "Count the cost."

We learn, lastly, from this passage, *how miserable is the condition of backsliders and apostates*. This is a lesson which is intimately connected with the preceding one. The necessity of "counting the cost" is enforced by a picture of the consequences of neglecting to do so. The man who has once made a profession of religion, but has afterwards gone back from it, is like salt which has "lost its savour." Such salt is comparatively useless. "It is neither fit for the land, nor fit for the dunghill: but men cast it out." Yet the state of that salt is a lively emblem of the state of a backslider. No wonder that our Lord said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The truth which our Lord brings out in this place is very painful, but very useful and needful to be known. No man, be it remembered, is in so dangerous a state as he who has once known the truth and professed to love it, and has afterwards fallen away from his profession, and gone back to the world. You can tell such a man nothing that He does not know. You can show him no doctrine that he has not heard. He has not sinned in ignorance, like many. He has gone away from Christ with his eyes open. He has sinned against a known, and not an unknown God. His case is well-nigh desperate. All things are possible with God. Yet it is written, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." (Heb. vi. 4-6.)

Let us ponder these things well. The subject is one which is not sufficiently considered. Let us never be afraid of beginning to serve Christ. But let us begin seriously, thoughtfully, and with a due consideration of the step we take. And having once begun, let us pray for grace that we may persevere, and never fall away.

NOTES. LUKE. XIV. 25-35.

25.—[*Great multitudes...he turned and said, &c.*] The conduct of Our Lord on this occasion stands out in strong contrast to that of many ministers of the Gospel, in the present day.

The temptation to admit people to full communion, and endorse and approve them as true Christians, before they have given evidence of decided grace, is very strong. The inclination to set before young inquirers the joys and comforts of the Gospel, without any proportionate exhibition of the cross and the fight, requires constant watching against.

The close imitation of our Lord's conduct in this passage would probably greatly lessen the number of our communicants. But it may be doubted whether we should not gain in quality what we lost in quantity, and whether we should not be freed from many of those disgraceful backslidings, and gross inconsistencies, which so often now-a-days bring discredit on religion.

It may be laid down as a general rule that communicants cheaply admitted are worth little, and that to call people Christians upon lower terms than those which our Lord sets forth, in the long run does more harm than good.

- 26.—[*Come to me, and hate not.*] The expression “hate,” in this verse, must evidently be taken comparatively. The following quotation from Pearce deserves reading.

“ Besides the proof from Matt. x. 37, that the word ‘hate’ here means ‘love less,’ it may be added, that in Matt. vi. 24, the word ‘hate’ is used after the same manner. So also when we read in Rom. ix. 13, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,’ the meaning is, that I have loved Jacob more than Esau. That this is no arbitrary interpretation of the word ‘hate,’ but one agreeable to the Hebrew idiom, appears from what is said in Gen. xxix. 30, 31, where Leah being ‘hated,’ is explained by Rachael being loved more than Leah. See also Deut. xxi. 15, 16, 17.”

- 28.—[*To build a tower.*] The following note from Doddridge deserves reading.

“The phrase, ‘build a tower,’ naturally suggests to us the idea of a more magnificent edifice than our Lord’s hearers might probably think of on this occasion. It is plain that towers were frequently run up, probably of slight materials, to lodge those who had the care of keeping vineyards or flocks; and they were built pretty high in proportion to their base, that they might command the larger prospect.”

There is reason in this comment, when we mark our Lord’s words, “which of you.”

- 31.—[*What king, &c.*] Some regard this “king” as an emblem of a believer, and the king coming “with twenty thousand,” as Satan. I am quite unable to see this. Both here and in the preceding three verses, I believe our Lord is only borrowing an illustration from familiar subjects, and that we are not meant to look further.

- 33.—[*Forsaketh.*] The Greek word so rendered is more commonly translated, “bid farewell,” or “take leave.” The meaning evidently is that a man cannot be Christ’s disciple unless he is deliberately prepared to give up everything for His sake, if need be, and to encounter any enemy, and make any sacrifice.

- 34.—[*Salt have lost his savour.*] The following quotation from Maundrell deserves reading. He is describing the valley of salt, in his travels, and he says, “Along, on one side, there is a small precipice, occasioned by the continual taking away of the salt. I broke a piece of it, of which the part exposed to the rain, sun, and air, though it had the sparks and particles of salt, had completely lost its savour. The inner part, which was connected with the rock, retained its savour.”

Schottgen speaks of a species of salt in Judæa, brought from the Dead Sea, and called bituminous salt, which was easily rendered vapid, and of no other use but to “spread in a part of the temple, on the pavement, to prevent slipping in wet weather.”

This striking and solemn saying about the “salt which has lost its savour,” is found on no less than three distinct occasions in the Gospels. (See Matt. v. 13, and Mark ix. 50.) The spiritual lesson of the passage is fearfully overlooked. The sinfulness of sins against light and knowledge, and the possibility of being given over to a reprobate mind, are points not sufficiently dwelt upon by preachers, or considered by hearers. Men seem to forget that there is such a thing as an unpardonable sin,—and that if salt has once lost its savour it cannot be seasoned again.

I should not like to be mistaken in saying this. I cannot find in Scripture any clear proof that there is any decreed reprobation. I hold that the destruction of those who are lost is the consequence of their own sins, and not of God’s predestination. I believe that we have no right to say of any sinner, that he is too bad to be saved.

But the general teaching of the New Testament appears to be that nothing is so displeasing to God as the misuse of knowledge, and the wilful turning away from truth once seen and acknowledged, to the service of sin and the world. The Bible teaches, in fact, that no sinner is so unlikely to be saved as the man who after making a high spiritual profession, falls away and returns to the world, and no heart so unlikely to be changed as the heart which once professed to love the Gospel, but afterwards became cold and indifferent to it.

I can certainly testify, after sixteen years ministry, that by far the most hopeless and painful death-beds I have attended have been those of backsliders. I have seen some such persons go out of the world without hope, whose conscience really appeared dead, buried and gone, and on whom every truth and doctrine, and argument appeared alike thrown away. They seemed to have lost the power of feeling, and could only lie still and despair. I fear the true account of such persons' state of soul was the sentence of our Lord on which I have now been dwelling.