

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 XVI. 13–18.

13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.	highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.
14 And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.	16 The law and the prophets <i>were</i> until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.
15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is	17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.
	18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from <i>her</i> husband committeth adultery.

THESE verses, teach us, firstly, *the uselessness of attempting to serve God with a divided heart*. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

The truth here propounded by our Lord appears, at first sight, too obvious to admit of being disputed. And yet the very attempt which is here declared to be useless is constantly being made by many in the matter of their souls. Thousands on every side are continually trying to do the thing which Christ pronounces impossible. They are endeavouring to be friends of the world and friends of God at the same time. Their consciences are so far enlightened, that they feel they must have *some* religion. But their affections are so chained down to earthly things, that they never come up to the mark of being true Christians. And hence they live in a state of constant discomfort. They have too much religion to be happy in the world, and they have too much of the world in their hearts to be happy in their religion. In short, they waste their time in labouring to do that which cannot be done. They are striving to “serve God and mammon.”

He that desires to be a happy Christian, will do well to ponder our Lord’s sayings in this verse. There is perhaps no point on which the experience of all God’s saints is more uniform than this, that *decision* is the secret of comfort in Christ’s service. It is the half-hearted Christian who brings up an evil report of the good land. The more thoroughly we give ourselves to Christ, the more sensibly shall we feel within “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” (Phil. iv. 7.) The more entirely we live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, the more powerfully shall we realize what it is to have “joy and peace in believing.” (Rom. xv. 13.) If it is worthwhile to serve Christ at all, let us serve Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Life, eternal life, after all, is the matter at stake, no less than happiness. If we cannot make up our minds to give up everything for Christ’s sake, we must not expect Christ to own us at the last day. He will have all our hearts or none. “Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the

enemy of God.” (James iv. 4.) The end of undecided and half-hearted Christians will be to be cast out for ever.

These verses teach us, secondly, *how widely different is the estimate set on things by man from that which is set on things by God.* Our Lord Jesus Christ declares this in a severe rebuke which He addresses to the covetous Pharisees who derided Him. He says, “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

The truth of this solemn saying appears on every side of us. We have only to look round the world and mark the things on which most men set their affections, in order to see it proved in a hundred ways. Riches and honours, and rank, and pleasure, are the chief objects for which the greater part of mankind are living. Yet these are the very things which God declares to be “vanity,” and of the love of which He warns us to beware! Praying, and Bible-reading, and holy living, and repentance, and faith, and grace, and communion with God, are things for which few care at all. Yet these are the very things which God in His Bible is ever urging on our attention!—The disagreement is glaring, painful, and appalling. What God calls good, that man calls evil! What God calls evil, that man calls good!

Whose words, after all, are true? Whose estimate is correct? Whose judgment will stand at the last day? By whose standard will all be tried, before they receive their eternal sentence? Before whose bar will the current opinions of the world be tested and weighed at last? These are the only questions which ought to influence our conduct; and to these questions the Bible returns a plain answer. The counsel of the Lord,—it alone shall stand for ever. The word of Christ,—it alone shall judge man at the last day. By that word let us live. By that word let us measure everything, and every person in this evil world. It matters nothing what man thinks. “What saith the Lord?”—It matters nothing what it is fashionable or customary to think. “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” (Rom. iii. 4.) The more entirely we are of one mind with God, the better we are prepared for the judgment day. To love what God loves, to hate what God hates, and to approve what God approves, is the highest style of Christianity. The moment we find ourselves honouring anything which in the sight of God is lightly esteemed, we may be sure there is something wrong in our souls.

These verses teach us, lastly, *the dignity and sanctity of the law of God.* Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail.”

The honour of God’s holy law was frequently defended by Christ during the time of His ministry on earth. Sometimes we find Him defending it against man-made additions, as in the case of the fourth commandment. Sometimes we find Him defending it against those who would lower the

standard of its requirements, and allow it to be transgressed, as in the case of the law of marriage. But never do we find Him speaking of the law in any terms but those of respect. He always “magnified the law and made it honourable.” (Isaiah xlii. 21.) Its ceremonial part was a type of His own gospel, and was to be fulfilled to the last letter. Its moral part was a revelation of God’s eternal mind, and was to be perpetually binding on Christians.

The honour of God’s holy law needs continually defending in the present day. On few subjects does ignorance prevail so widely among professing Christians. Some appear to think that Christians have nothing to do with the law, that its moral and ceremonial parts were both of only temporary obligation, and that the daily sacrifice and the ten commandments were both alike put aside by the gospel. Some on the other hand think that the law is still binding on us, and that we are to be saved by obedience to it,—but that its requirements are lowered by the gospel, and can be met by our imperfect obedience. Both these views are erroneous and unscriptural. Against both let us be on our guard.

Let us settle it in our minds that “the law is good if a man use it lawfully.” (1 Tim. i. 8.) It is intended to show us God’s holiness and our sinfulness, to convince us of sin and to lead us to Christ, to show us how to live after we have come to Christ, and to teach us what to follow and what to avoid. He that so uses the law will find it a true friend to his soul. The established Christian will always say, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” (Rom. vii. 22.)

NOTES. LUKE XVI. 13–18.

13.—[*No servant can serve two masters.*] These words are evidently connected with the preceding verses, in which our Lord had taught the duty of faithfulness in money matters. They were intended to answer the secret objection of some, that a man might divide his diligence between the things of this world and the things of the world to come, and so reap the full benefit of both. Against this secret thought the proverbial saying of this verse is a testimony.

[*Hate the one and love the other.*] The remark made on a similar expression about “hating,” in a former chapter (Luke xiv. 26), applies to this expression. The meaning appears to be that the man will love one more than the other.

14.—[*Derided.*] This word is only found in one other place in the New Testament. (Luke xxiii. 35.) Our English word “sneered” answers to it more closely than any other.

The consciences of the Pharisees were evidently pricked by our Lord’s remarks about money, and the necessity of faithfulness in the management of it.

15.—[*Justify yourselves before men.*] The Pharisees made great professions of righteousness and holiness before men, while their hearts were full of wickedness and covetousness. Our Lord warns them solemnly of the uselessness of all such professions while the heart is unrenewed and cleaving to the world. And the state of their hearts, He reminds them, is known to God. They might deceive the eye of man, but they could not deceive God.

[*Highly-esteemed.*] The Greek word so translated means literally, “high.” This is the only place in the New Testament where it is rendered as it is here.

- 16.—[*The law and the prophets were until John*] This verse seems rather elliptical. Its connection with the preceding verse is not at first sight very clear. It is probably something like this: “You make your boast of the law and the prophets, oh, ye Pharisees, and you do well to give them honour. But you forget that the dispensation of the law and prophets was only intended to pave the way for the better dispensation of the kingdom of God, which was to be ushered in by John the Baptist. That dispensation has come. John the Baptist has appeared. The kingdom of God is among you. While you are ignorantly deriding Me and my doctrine, multitudes of publicans and sinners are pressing into it. Your boasting is not good. With all your professed zeal for the law and the prophets, you are utterly blind to that kingdom into which the law and the prophets were meant to guide you.”

[*Every man presseth into it.*] The Greek word translated “presseth,” is only found in one other place in the New Testament. It is there rendered, “suffereth violence.” (Matt. xi. 12.)

By “every man,” we must of course not understand literally every Jew. It either means, “a very large number press in while you stand still deriding;” or else, “Every one who enters the kingdom, enters it with much exertion and labour, under a conviction that it is worth while to use exertion. And yet you stand still.”

- 17.—[*Easier...heaven and earth pass.*] This is a proverbial expression, indicating the perpetual dignity and obligation of God’s law.

[*One tittle.*] The Greek word so translated means the slight mark which distinguishes some Hebrew letters, which are much alike, one from another.

[*To fail.*] The word here means literally “to fall.” It is like the expression about the words of Samuel, “The Lord did not let any of them fall to the ground.” (1 Sam. iii. 19.)

The connection between this verse and the preceding one is somewhat abrupt at first sight. The chain of thought is probably this: “Think not because I say that the law and the prophets have introduced a better dispensation, the kingdom of God, that I count the law and the prophets of no value. On the contrary, I tell you that they are of eternal dignity and obligation. They have paved the way to a clearer revelation, but they have not been cast aside.”

- 18.—[*Whosoever putteth away his wife, &c.*] The connection of this verse with the preceding is again somewhat abrupt. The chain of thought seems as follows: “So far from coming to destroy the law, oh, ye Pharisees, I would have you know that I am come to magnify it, and reassert its righteous demands. With all your boasted reverence for the law, you are yourselves breakers of it in the law of marriage. You have lowered the standard of the law of divorce. You have allowed divorce for trivial and insufficient causes. And hence while you make your boast of the law, you are by your unfair dealing with it, encouraging adultery.”

We must take care that we do not misinterpret the language used about divorce and re-marriage in this verse. It is perfectly clear from another passage that our Lord allowed divorce in cases of adultery. (Matt. v. 33.) The act of adultery dissolves the marriage tie, and makes those who were one, become again two. Neither here nor elsewhere can I see that our Lord regards the re-marriage of one who has been divorced for the cause of fornication, as adultery. It is divorce for frivolous causes which He denounces, and marriage after such frivolous divorce which He pronounces to be adultery.