

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXII. 31–38.

31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired <i>to have</i> you, that he may sift <i>you</i> as wheat:	lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing.
32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.	36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take <i>it</i> , and likewise <i>his</i> scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.
33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.	37 For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.
34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.	38 And they said, Lord, behold here <i>are</i> two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.
35 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes,	

WE learn, from these verses, *what a fearful enemy the devil is to believers*. We read that “the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” He was near Christ’s flock, though they saw him not; he was longing to compass their ruin, though they knew it not. The wolf does not crave the blood of the lamb more than the devil desires the destruction of souls.

The personality, activity, and power of the devil are not sufficiently thought of by Christians. This is he who brought sin into the world at the beginning, by tempting Eve; this is he who is described in the book of Job as “going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it;” this is he whom our Lord calls “the prince of this world,” a “murderer” and a “liar;” this is he whom Peter compares to a “roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;” this is he whom John speaks of as “the accuser of the brethren;” this is he who is ever working evil in the Churches of Christ, catching away good seed from the hearts of hearers, sowing tares amidst the wheat, stirring up persecutions, suggesting false doctrines, and fomenting divisions. The world is a snare to the believer; the flesh is a burden and a clog: but there is no enemy so dangerous as that restless, invisible, experienced enemy, the devil.

If we believe the Bible, let us not be ashamed to believe that there is a devil. It is an awful proof of the hardness and blindness of unconverted men, that they can jest and speak lightly of Satan.

If we profess to have any real religion, let us be on our guard against the devil’s devices. The enemy who overthrew David and Peter, and assaulted Christ Himself, is not an enemy to be despised: he is very subtle; he has studied the heart of man for six thousand years: he can approach us under the garb of an “angel of light.” We have need to watch and pray, and put on the whole armour of God. It is a blessed promise, that if we resist him he will flee from us; it is a still more blessed thought, that when the Lord

comes He will bruise Satan under our feet, and bind him in chains. (James iv. 7; Rom. xvi. 20.)

We learn, secondly in these verses, *one great secret of a believer's perseverance in the faith*. We read that our Lord said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." It was owing to Christ's intercession that Peter did not entirely fall away.

The continued existence of grace in a believer's heart is a great standing miracle. His enemies are so mighty, and his strength is so small, the world is so full of snares, and his heart is so weak, that it seems at first sight impossible for him to reach heaven. The passage before us explains his safety: he has a mighty Friend at the right hand of God, who ever lives to make intercession for him; there is a watchful Advocate, who is daily pleading for him, seeing all his daily necessities, and obtaining daily supplies of mercy and grace for his soul. His grace never altogether dies, because Christ always lives to intercede. (Heb. vii. 25.)

If we are true Christians we shall find it essential to our comfort in religion to have clear views of Christ's priestly office and intercession. Christ lives, and therefore our faith shall not fail. Let us beware of regarding Jesus only as one who died for us: let us never forget that He is alive for evermore. St. Paul bids us specially remember that He is risen again, and is at the right hand of God, and also maketh intercession for us. (Rom. viii. 34.) The work that He does for His people is not yet over; He is still appearing in the presence of God for them, and doing for their souls what He did for Peter. His present life for them is just as important as His death on the cross eighteen hundred years ago. Christ lives, and therefore true Christians "shall live also."

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, *the duty incumbent on all believers who receive special mercies from Christ*. We read that our Lord said to Peter, "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren."

It is one of God's peculiar attributes, that He can bring good out of evil. He can cause the weaknesses and infirmities of some members of His Church to work together for the benefit of the whole body of His people; He can make the fall of a disciple the means of fitting him to be the strengthener and upholder of others.—Have we ever fallen, and by Christ's mercy been raised to newness of life? Then surely we are just the men who ought to deal gently with our brethren. We should tell them from our own experience what an evil and bitter thing is sin; we should caution them against trifling with temptation; we should warn them against pride, and presumption, and neglect of prayer; we should tell them of Christ's grace and compassion, if they have fallen. Above all, we should deal with them humbly and meekly, remembering what we ourselves have gone through.

Well would it be for the Church of Christ if Christians were more ready to good works of this kind! There are only too many believers who in conference add nothing to their brethren: they seem to have no Saviour to tell of, and no story of grace to report; they chill the hearts of those they meet, rather than warm them; they weaken rather than strengthen. These things ought not so to be. The words of the apostle ought to sink down into our minds: "Having received mercy we faint not. We believe, and therefore we speak." (2 Cor. iv. 1, 13.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that *the servant of Christ ought to use all reasonable means in doing his Master's work*. We read that our Lord said to His disciples, "He that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one."

It is safest to take these remarkable words in a proverbial sense. They apply to the whole period of time between our Lord's first and second advents. Until our Lord comes again believers are to make a diligent use of all the faculties which God has implanted in them: they are not to expect miracles to be worked, in order to save them trouble; they are not to expect bread to fall into their mouths, if they will not work for it; they are not to expect difficulties to be surmounted, and enemies to be overcome, if they will not wrestle, and struggle, and take pains. They are to remember that it is "the hand of the diligent which maketh rich." (Prov. x. 4.)

We shall do well to lay to heart our Lord's words in this place, and to act habitually on the principle which they contain. Let us labour, and toil, and give, and speak, and act, and write for Christ, as if all depended on our exertions. And yet let us never forget that success depends entirely on God's blessing! To expect success by our own "purse" and "sword" is pride and self-righteousness; but to expect success without the "purse and sword" is presumption and fanaticism. Let us do as Jacob did when he met his brother Esau. He used all innocent means to conciliate and appease him; but when he had done all, he spent all night in prayer. (Gen. xxxii. 1-24.)

NOTES. LUKE XXII. 31-38.

- 31.—[*Simon, Simon.*] The repetition of Simon's name implies solemnity and importance in the statement about to be made, and deep concern on behalf of Simon's soul. It is like the address to Martha, when she was "careful about many things," and to Saul, when he was persecuting disciples. (Luke x. 41; Acts ix. 4.)

Our Lord's addressing Peter in this place seems to make it probable that Peter was one of those who were most forward in contending for the pre-eminence, in the verses preceding those we are now considering. Our Lord tells him that while he is seeking greatness, he is on the very point of making a grievous fall.

[*Satan hath desired to have you.*] There is something very awful in this expression. It shows us that the devil is often "desiring" to accomplish our ruin, and striving to accomplish it, while we know nothing of his doings, because he is invisible. On the other hand,

there is some comfort in the expression. It teaches us that Satan can do nothing without God's permission. However great his "desire" to do mischief, he works in chains.

The distinction should be marked between "you" in the verse before us and "thee" in the verse following. Satan desired to have all the apostles. Christ's intercessory prayer was specially on behalf of Peter.

[*Sift you as wheat.*] This expression signifies that Satan desired to shake, toss to and fro, and harass the apostle, just as corn is shaken to and fro when it is dressed and winnowed, to separate the grain from the chaff. It aptly describes the effect of temptation on a believer. Whatever Satan's intention may be, the result of temptation is to bring out the chaff, or infirmity of a believer, and generally in the long run to purify his soul. It was strikingly so with Peter and the other apostles in the present instance.

32.—[*I have prayed for thee.*] We need not hesitate to regard this as an example of our Lord's exercise of His office as an intercessor for His people. What He did for Peter, when Peter knew nothing of his danger, He is daily and hourly doing for all who believe on His name.

[*That thy faith fail not.*] The Greek word translated "fail" is the root of our English word "eclipse." The object of our Lord's intercession was that Peter's faith might not altogether die, though for a time it might be very weak. Let it be noted that "faith" is the root of the whole Christian character, and the part which Satan specially labours to overthrow. In the temptation of Eve, of Peter, and of our Lord Himself, the assault was in each case directed against the same point, and the object sought was to produce unbelief.

The Roman Catholic commentators, Cornelius à Lapide, Maldonatus, and Stella, endeavour to prove from the words before us, that the Roman Catholic Church, of which, they say, Peter was the head, was never to depart from the faith, and that our Lord gave a prophetic intimation of its perpetuity and fidelity. It is because of the words before us, we are told, that the Church of Rome has never fallen, while the Churches of Alexandria, Constantinople, and Antioch, have gone to decay!

A more gratuitous and baseless application of Scripture it is difficult to conceive. For one thing, there is not the slightest proof that Peter was the founder or head of the Roman Church; or indeed that he was Bishop of Rome at all. For another thing, the words before us apply most clearly to Peter only as an individual, and have no reference whatever to any Church. Above all, the words were not spoken as indicating any special honour put upon Peter. They were meant, on the contrary, to teach that Peter was about to fall more shamefully than any of the apostles, and that nothing but Christ's special intercession would save him from total ruin. The faith of all the apostles was about to prove very weak, but no one would be so near a complete eclipse of faith as Peter!

Lightfoot says, "Certainly it was Peter's advantage, that Christ prayed for him: but it was not so much for Peter's honour, that he, beyond all others, should stand in need of such a prayer."

Wordsworth says, "The Roman divines say that the prayer and precept of our Lord extends to all the Bishops of Rome, as St. Peter's successors, and that in speaking to St. Peter, our Lord spoke to them. Will they complete the parallel, and say that the Bishops of Rome specially need prayer, because they deny Christ? Let them not take a part and leave the rest."

[*When thou art converted.*] This expression is somewhat remarkable, and has occasioned difference of opinion among commentators. For one thing, the word translated "art converted," would be rendered more literally "hast converted." For another thing, to speak of an apostle like Peter being "converted," seems a strange saying to some. The following explanations of the expression have been given.

1. Some think that the word rendered “converted” was not intended to bear so strong a meaning. They regard it as a Hebrew form of speech, and a kind of expletive word. They compare it to such phrases as this in the New Testament, “Then God *turned*, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven.” (Acts vii. 42.) They would then render it, as Bengel does, like an adverb: “Do thou in thy turn strengthen thy brethren.”

2. Some think, with Sir Norton Knatchbull, that the word translated “art converted,” should have been rendered in an active sense, and that it means, “When thou hast converted thy brethren, strengthen them.”

3. Some think that the conversion here spoken of means simply “recovery from a fall,” and that it does not necessarily mean that first conversion to God which takes place when an unconverted person becomes a Christian. This is by far the most satisfactory interpretation of the expression. For the Greek word being rendered, “art converted,” though an active verb, there is authority in Acts iii. 19.

Burkitt remarks, “This conversion was not from a state of sin: Peter was so converted before; but it was from an act of sin into which he should lapse and relapse.

[*Strengthen thy brethren.*] There seems a tacit reference here to the dispute about pre-eminence, which had just taken place among the apostles. “Instead of wasting time in wrangling about primacy, give thyself to the better work of raising up, confirming, and doing good to thy brethren. Warn the unruly. Comfort the feeble minded. Teach all the beauty of humility. Show them by thine own sad experience the danger of pride and high thoughts.”

Most commentators think that the general tone of the Epistles of St. Peter shows special marks of the effect of this command. They are pre-eminently hortatory, direct, and instructive to believers.

Alford calls attention to the fact that the Greek word for “strengthen” in this place, is twice used by Peter in his two epistles, and the word “steadfastness,” which is also used, is directly derived from it. (1 Pet. v.10; 2 Pet. i.12; 2 Pet. iii. 17.)

I would add to this the interesting fact that it is Peter who describes the devil under the vivid figure of a “roaring lion, walking about, and seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Pet. v. 8.)

[*Thy brethren.*] This expression probably contains a tacit reference to the dispute for pre-eminence. Peter is reminded that he must regard the other disciples, not as his inferiors, but as his “brethren.”

33.—[*I am ready to go, &c.*] This profession was the language of a self-confident, inexperienced disciple, who had not yet found out the weakness of his own faith, and the deceitfulness of his own heart. Men little know what they will do, till the time of temptation actually comes. “Is thy servant a dog,” said Hazeal, “that he should do this great thing?” (2 Kings viii. 13.)

34.—[*Peter.*] Burgon remarks that this is the only place in which our Lord addresses Peter by this name, the name which signified “stone.” It was surely meant to remind him how weak even the strongest disciples are.

[*Thrice deny ...knowest me.*] This, be it remembered, was a very remarkable prediction, and a striking evidence of our Lord’s foreknowledge. That Peter should deny his Master at all,—that he should actually deny Him that very night after receiving the Lord’s supper,—that he should deny him after plain warnings, and after strong protestations that he would rather die,—and that he should deny his Master three times,—were all most improbable events. Yet they all took place!

- 35.—[*When I sent you, &c.*] This verse refers to the occasion when our Lord sent out the apostles, two and two, to preach the kingdom of God. It is evident from the expression before us, that in these first excursions our Lord exercised a miraculous superintendence over the disciples, and so ordered things that friends were raised up for them wherever they went, and they “lacked nothing.” This was doubtless done in condescension to their inexperience and infirmity, and to enable them to attend on their work without distraction.
36. [*But now, &c.*] The general drift of this verse is to teach that from the time of Christ’s ascension into heaven, the disciples must not expect such a constant miraculous interposition of God on their behalf as would make them independent of the use of means. On the contrary they must diligently employ all lawful and reasonable means for their support and protection. They were to “work with their own hands,” as St. Paul did at tent making. They were to have regular gatherings of money for the support of those that wanted, as the Corinthians had. They were not to despise their rights as subjects and citizens, but to use them in their own defence, as St. Paul did before Lysias, and Festus, and at Philippi.

The general purport of the verse appears to be a caution against the indolent and fanatical notion that diligence in the use of means is “carnal,” and an unlawful dependence on an arm of flesh. To my own mind the whole verse supplies an unanswerable argument against the strange notions maintained by some in the present day, who tell us that making provision for our families is wrong,—and insuring our lives is wrong,—and collecting money for religious societies is wrong,—and studying for the work of the ministry is wrong,—and taking part in civil government is wrong,—and supporting police, standing armies, and courts of law is wrong. I respect the conscientiousness of those who maintain these opinions; but I am utterly unable to reconcile them with our Lord’s language in this place.

[*A purse...scrip...sword.*] I regard all these three expressions as proverbial and symbolical. They contain a general lesson for the guidance of the Church of Christ, until the Lord comes again. We are not to neglect human instrumentality, in doing Christ’s work, or to expect Christ’s blessing if we do not diligently use all lawful means within our reach.

[*He that hath no sword...buy one.*] This expression is undoubtedly a difficult one.

1. Some think that our Lord meant literally that the disciples were to get a sword, in order that the scene in the garden when Peter struck Malchus, and the miraculous healing of Malchus’s ear, might take place. This explanation is eminently bald, tame, and unsatisfactory.

2. Some think, with Olshausen, that the sword which our Lord means is the “sword of the Spirit:” the Word of God. This explanation seems far-fetched. Moreover we surely cannot suppose that the disciples had never used this “sword of the Spirit” before this time.

3. The most satisfactory interpretation is that which regards the whole verse as proverbial and symbolical. The words “purse, scrip, and sword,” are not to be pressed too closely. They are parabolic expressions, indicating that a time was drawing near when all human means, of which the “purse,” the “scrip,” and the “sword” are emblems, must be diligently used by the apostles. In Romans xiii. 4, Suicer shows that “the sword” is evidently an emblematic expression.

This view is ably stated by Theophylact in his commentary on the passage.

Stella calls attention to the remarkable parallel between the condition of the apostles before and after our Lord’s ascension, and the condition of Israel before and after they entered Canaan. Before the Jews entered Canaan, they were miraculously fed with manna daily, and miraculously guided by the pillar of cloud and fire. From the time they entered Canaan, they were thrown upon their own exertions. It was much the same with the apostles. They were not to expect constant miracles to be worked on their behalf from the time that Christ left the world.

37.—[*This...written...accomplished, &c.*] Let it be noted here, that when our Lord speaks of His approaching crucifixion, He does not speak of it as His “death” merely; He specially describes it as His being “reckoned among the transgressors.” The expression was evidently meant to remind us that the chief end of His death was not to be an example of self-denial, but to be a substitute for us,—a sacrifice for us,—to become sin for us, and be made a curse for us.

[*The things concerning me have an end.*] This expression means, “The work I came to do is well-nigh finished. The great sacrifice is going to be offered. I am going to leave the world, and go to my Father.” It is like the saying on the cross: “It is finished.”

38.—[*Here are two swords...It is enough.*] The general opinion of all the best commentators on this verse appears to be correct: that the disciples did not understand aright our Lord’s meaning, and that our Lord seeing their dullness of understanding, dismissed the subject He had been speaking of, and said no more about it. The disciples took His words about the sword literally: He meant them to be taken figuratively. If they could not see His meaning now, they would hereafter. At present He had said “enough,” and for wise reasons would say no more. “Speak no more to me of this matter.” (Deut. iii. 26.)

The idea maintained by some, that our Lord used the words “it is enough,” ironically, is not satisfactory. It may be doubted whether our Lord ever used irony. Those who hold this view maintain that our Lord meant, “Truly two swords are enough! This is a sufficient defence indeed!”

The Roman Catholic writers, Maldonatus and Cornelius à Lapide, interpret the two swords mentioned in this verse of the temporal and spiritual power which they claim for the Church of Rome. It is almost needless to say that the passage does not afford the least ground for the doctrine which they try to support from it. Even Stella, the Spanish Roman Catholic, is ashamed of such an interpretation, and denounces it as “wrested, and discordant with the passage.”

Chrysostom thinks, that the expression, “here are two swords,” may refer to the two sacrificial knives or swords, which the disciples had got because of the passover Lamb. The explanation seems needless. In the days when our Lord was upon earth it was common for men to carry weapons of offence and defence.