

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 XXII. 54–62.

<p>54 Then took they him, and led <i>him</i>, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.</p> <p>55 And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.</p> <p>56 But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him.</p> <p>57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.</p> <p>58 And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.</p>	<p>59 And about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this <i>fellow</i> also was with him: for he is a Galilæan.</p> <p>60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.</p> <p>61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.</p> <p>62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.</p>
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THE verses we have now read describe the fall of the apostle Peter.—It is a passage which is deeply humbling to the pride of man, but singularly instructive to true Christians. The fall of Peter has been a beacon to the Church, and has probably preserved myriads of souls from destruction: it is a passage which supplies strong proof that the Bible is inspired, and Christianity is from God. If the Christian religion had been the invention of uninspired men, its first historians would never have told us that one of the chiefest apostles denied his Master three times.

The story of Peter's fall teaches us, firstly, *how small and gradual are the steps by which men may go down into great sins.*

The various steps in Peter's fall are clearly marked out by the Gospel-writers. They ought always to be observed in reading this part of the apostle's history. The first step was proud self-confidence. Though all men denied Christ, yet he never would: he was ready to go with Him both to prison and to death!—The second step was indolent neglect of prayer. When his Master told him to pray, lest he should enter into temptation, he gave way to drowsiness, and was found asleep.—The third step was vacillating indecision. When the enemies of Christ came upon Him, Peter first fought, then ran away, then turned again, and finally "followed afar off."—The fourth step was mingling with bad company. He went into the high priest's house and sat among the servants by the fire, trying to conceal his religion, and hearing and seeing all manner of evil.—The fifth and last step was the natural consequence of the preceding four. He was overwhelmed with fear when suddenly charged with being a disciple: the snare was round his neck: he could not escape. He plunged deeper into error than ever: he denied his blessed Master three times. The mischief, be it remembered, had been done before; the denial was only the disease coming to a head.

Let us beware of the beginnings of backsliding, however small. We never know what we may come to, if we once leave the king's high-way. The professing Christian who begins to say of any sin or evil habit, "It is but a little

one,” is in imminent danger. He is sowing seeds in his heart, which will one day spring up and bear bitter fruit. It is a homely saying, that “if men take care of the pence the pounds will take care of themselves;” we may borrow a good spiritual lesson from the saying: the Christian who keeps his heart diligently in little things shall be kept from great falls.

The story of Peter’s fall teaches us, secondly, *how very far a believer may backslide.*

In order to see this lesson clearly, the whole circumstances of Peter’s case ought to be fully weighed. He was a chosen apostle of Christ; he had enjoyed greater spiritual privileges than most men in the world; he had just received the Lord’s supper; he had just heard that wonderful discourse recorded in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of St. John; he had been most plainly warned of his own danger; he had protested most loudly that he was ready for anything that might come upon him,—and yet this very man denies his gracious Master, and that repeatedly, and after intervals giving him space for reflection. He denies Him once, twice, and three times

The best and highest saint is a poor weak creature, even at his best times. Whether he knows it or not, he carries within him an almost boundless capacity of wickedness, however fair and decent his outward conduct may seem. There is no enormity of sin into which he may not run, if he does not watch and pray, and if the grace of God does not hold him up. When we read the falls of Noah, Lot, and Peter, we only read what might possibly befall any of ourselves. Let us never presume: let us never indulge in high thoughts about our own strength, or look down upon others. Whatever else we pray for, let us daily pray that we may walk humbly with God.” (Micah vi. 8.)

The story of Peter’s fall teaches us, thirdly, *the infinite mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is a lesson which is brought out most forcibly by a fact which is only recorded in St. Luke’s Gospel. We are told that when Peter denied Christ the third time, and the cock crew, “the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” Those words are deeply touching! Surrounded by blood-thirsty and insulting enemies, in the full prospect of horrible outrages, an unjust trial, and a painful death, the Lord Jesus yet found time to think kindly of His poor erring disciple: even then He would have Peter know He did not forget him. Sorrowfully no doubt, but not angrily, He “turned and looked upon Peter.” There was deep meaning in that look. It was a sermon which Peter never forgot.

The love of Christ towards His people is a deep well which has no bottom. Let us never measure it by comparison with any kind of love of man or woman: it exceeds all other love, as far as the sun exceeds the rush-light. There is about it a mine of compassion, and patience, and readiness to for-

give sin, of whose riches we have but a faint conception. Let us not be afraid to trust that love, when we first feel our sins: let us never be afraid to go on trusting it after we have once believed. No man need despair, however far he may have fallen, if he will only repent and turn to Christ. If the heart of Jesus was so gracious when He was a prisoner in the judgment hall, we surely need not think it is less gracious when He sits in glory at the right hand of God,

The story of Peter's fall teaches us, lastly, *how bitter sin is to believers, when they have fallen into it and discovered their fall.*

This is a lesson which stands out plainly on the face of the verses before us. We are told that when Peter remembered the warning he had received, and saw how far he had fallen, "he went out and wept bitterly." He found out by experience the truth of Jeremiah's words: "It is an evil thing and a bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord." (Jer. ii. 17.) He felt keenly the truth of Solomon's saying: "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." (Prov. xiv. 14.) No doubt he could have said with Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job xiii. 6.)

Sorrow like this, let us always remember, is an inseparable companion of true repentance. Here lies the grand distinction between "repentance unto salvation," and unavailing remorse. Remorse can make a man miserable, like Judas Iscariot, but it can do no more: it does not lead him to God.—Repentance makes a man's heart soft and his conscience tender, and shows itself in real turning to a Father in heaven. The falls of a graceless professor are falls from which there is no rising again; but the fall of a true saint always ends in deep contrition, self-abasement, and amendment of life.

Let us take heed, ere we leave this passage, that we always make a right use of Peter's fall. Let us never make it an excuse for sin: let us learn from his sad experience, to watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. If we do fall, let us believe that there is hope for us as there was for him. But above all, let us remember, that if we fall as Peter fell, we must repent as Peter repented, or else we shall never be saved.

NOTES. LUKE. XXII. 54-62.

55.—[*Kindled a fire.*] It must be remembered, that although the climate of Palestine is generally very warm, the nights about the Passover season, according to the testimony of all travellers, are intensely cold.

[*The hall.*] The Greek word so rendered is more frequently translated "palace." Parkhurst thinks that here it means "an open court inclosed by buildings: a court-yard exposed to the open air." In Rev. xi. 2, it is translated "court," and can there bear no other sense.

[*Sat down among them.*] Let it be noted that the Greek expression rendered "among them," is the very same that in the former part of the verse is translated, "in the midst."

56.—[*Sat by the fire.*] It is a curious fact that the Greek word here rendered "fire," is a totally different word from the one rendered "fire," in the preceding verse. Here it means literally,

“the light.” The word is found sixty-nine times in the New Testament, and in sixty-seven places is translated “light.” The two exceptions, when it is rendered “fire,” are the passage before us and the parallel passage in St. Mark describing the same transaction. (Mark xiv. 54.)

It is evident that the word was used intentionally by St. Luke, in order to show us, that it was “by the light of the fire” that Peter was recognized and charged with being a disciple. Had he kept in the background, and been content with a darker position, he might have escaped notice.

59.—[*He is a Galilæan.*] It is clear from this expression that Peter had been talking and conversing with those among whom he was sitting. Had he been content to say nothing, and await silently the result of his Master’s trial, he might even now have escaped detection.

61.—[*Looked upon Peter.*] Parkhurst says, that the Greek word rendered “looked,” signifies, “to look with steadfastness and attention.”

Some have thought it strange that our Lord Jesus Christ should have been in a position where He could see Peter, and Peter could see Him, and also that He could hear Peter denying Him.

It is not at all necessary to reply to this that our Lord had a miraculous knowledge of what Peter was saying, or that he was passing through the courtyard, or hall, where Peter was, at the time of the third denial and the cock-crowing.

It is most probable that our Lord was either in the same hall with Peter, or in a room opening out of it. There is no improbability in supposing that He was within sight and hearing of the apostle. Above all it must be remembered that the vehemence of Peter’s third denial, when he even cursed and swore, would most likely make him speak so loud that he might be easily heard at some distance. The crowing of the cock of course would be heard much further even than Peter’s voice.

Augustine, Stella, and others, go so far as to regard the whole transaction as an inward and spiritual one,—a turning of the Lord’s heart towards Peter, and a gracious looking of the Lord’s mind towards him. They consider that our Lord was not in the same room with Peter, and could not literally look at him. But this view seems most unsatisfactory. It is not the natural meaning of the words before us, and there is really no necessity for it in the nature of the event described.