

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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ST. LUKE. VOL. I.

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

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE VI. 1-5.

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| 1. And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the cornfields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing <i>them</i> in <i>their</i> hands. | when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; |
| 2. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? | 4. How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shew-bread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the Priests alone? |
| 3. And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, | 5. And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. |

We should notice in this passage, *what excessive importance hypocrites attach to trifles*. We are told that on a certain Sabbath day our Lord was passing “through the cornfields.” His disciples, as they followed Him, “plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.” At once the hypocritical Pharisees found fault, and charged them with committing a sin. They said, “Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?” The mere act of plucking the ears of corn of course they did not find fault with. It was an action sanctioned by the Mosaic law. (Deut. xxiii. 25.) The supposed fault with which they charged the disciples, was the breach of the fourth commandment. They had done work on the Sabbath, by taking and eating a handful of food.

This exaggerated zeal of the Pharisees about the Sabbath, we must remember, did not extend to other plain commandments of God. It is evident from many expressions in the Gospels, that these very men, who pretended such strictness on one little point, were more than lax and indifferent about other points of infinitely greater importance. While they stretched the commandment about the Sabbath beyond its true meaning, they openly trampled on the tenth commandment, and were notorious for covetousness. (Luke xvi. 14.) But this is precisely the character of the hypocrite. To use our Lord’s illustration, in some things the hypocrite makes ado about straining out of his cup a gnat, while in other things he can swallow a camel. (Matt. xxiii. 24.)

It is a bad symptom of any man’s state of soul, when he begins to put the second things in religion in the first place, and the first things in the second, or the things ordained by man above the things ordained by God. Let us beware of falling into this state of mind. There is something sadly wrong in our spiritual condition, when the only thing we look at in others is their outward Christianity, and the principal question we ask is, whether they worship in our communion, and use our ceremonial, and serve God in our way.—Do they repent of sin? Do they believe on Christ? Are they living holy lives? These are the chief points to which our attention ought to be directed. The moment we begin to place anything in religion before these things, we are in danger of becoming as thorough Pharisees as the accusers

of the disciples.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, *how graciously our Lord Jesus Christ pleaded the cause of His disciples, and defended them against their accusers*. We are told that He answered the cavils of the Pharisees with arguments by which they were silenced, if not convinced. He did not leave His disciples to fight their battle alone. He came to their rescue, and spoke for them.

We have in this fact a cheering illustration of the work that Jesus is ever doing on behalf of His people. There is one, we read in the Bible, who is called “the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them day and night,” even Satan, the prince of this world. (Rev. xii. 10.) How many grounds of accusation we give him, by reason of our infirmity! How many charges he may justly lay against us before God! But let us thank God that believers “have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” who is ever maintaining the cause of His people in heaven, and continually making intercession for them. Let us take comfort in this cheering thought. Let us daily rest our souls on the recollection of our great Friend in heaven. Let our morning and evening prayer continually be, “Answer for me, answer for me, O Lord my God.”

We should notice lastly, in these verses, *the clear light which our Lord Jesus Christ throws on the real requirements of the fourth commandment*. He tells the hypocritical Pharisees, who pretended to such strictness in their observance of the Sabbath, that the Sabbath was never intended to prevent works of necessity. He reminds them how David himself, when suffering from hunger, took and ate that show bread, which ought only to be eaten by the priests, and how the act was evidently allowed of God, because it was an act of necessity. And He argues from David’s case, that He who permitted His own temple rules to be infringed, in cases of necessity, would doubtless allow work to be done on His own Sabbath days, when it was work for which there was really a need.

We should weigh carefully the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ’s teaching about the observance of the Sabbath, both here and in other places. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away by the common notion that the Sabbath is a mere Jewish ordinance, and that it was abolished and done away by Christ. There is not a single passage of the Gospels which proves this. In every case where we find our Lord speaking upon it, He speaks against the false views of it, which were taught by the Pharisees, but not against the day itself. He cleanses and purifies the fourth commandment from the man-made additions by which the Jews had defiled it, but never declares that it was not to bind Christians. He shows that the seventh day’s rest was not meant to prevent works of necessity and mercy, but He says nothing to imply that it was to pass away, as a part of the ceremonial law.

We live in days when anything like strict Sabbath observance is loudly denounced, in some quarters, as a remnant of Jewish superstition. We are boldly told by some persons, that to keep the Sabbath holy is legal, and that to enforce the fourth commandment on Christians, is going back to bondage. Let it suffice us to remember, when we hear such things, that assertions are not proofs, and that vague talk like this has no confirmation in the word of God. Let us settle it in our minds, that the fourth commandment has never been repealed by Christ, and that we have no more right to break the Sabbath day, under the Gospel, than we have to murder and to steal. The architect who repairs a building, and restores it to its proper use, is not the destroyer of it, but the preserver. The Saviour who redeemed the Sabbath from Jewish traditions, and so frequently explained its true meaning, ought never to be regarded as the enemy of the fourth commandment. On the contrary, He has “magnified it, and made it honourable.”

Let us cling to our Sabbath, as the best safeguard of our Country’s religion. Let us defend it against the assaults of ignorant and mistaken men, who would fain turn the day of God into a day of business and pleasure. Above all, let us each strive to keep the day holy ourselves. Much of our spiritual prosperity depends, under God, on the manner in which we employ our Sundays.

NOTES. LUKE VI. 1–5.

1.—[*Second Sabbath after the first.*] The meaning of this expression has entirely puzzled all commentators. It is nowhere used in Scripture, excepting in this place. All explanations of it are nothing better than conjectures. Cornelius à Lapide gives a summary of these conjectures, which, if it proves nothing else, is a clear proof that there is no such thing as “unanimous consent of the Fathers” in the interpretation of Scripture. He mentions, among other things, that Jerome once asked Gregory Nazianzen what this Sabbath was, and received for answer, that he would teach him in church when it would be impossible to contradict him.

Some think that this second-first Sabbath (for so the Greek expression would be translated more correctly) was the Pentecost Sabbath. They suppose that the Jews had three principal Sabbath days in the year,—the first at the Feast of the Passover, the second at the Feast of Pentecost, and the third at the Feast of Tabernacles. And they consider that the Sabbath here mentioned is the “second great Sabbath,” or Pentecost Sabbath.

Some think that this second-first Sabbath, was the first Sabbath after the second day of unleavened bread in the Jewish Passover week. This second day in the passover week was the day when the first ripe sheaf of barley was waved by the priest before the Lord, to consecrate the harvest. (Levit. xxiii. 10–12.) The Sabbath here spoken of would then be the first Sabbath after the first sheaf of harvest had been cut.

I offer no opinion on the difficulty. It is probably one that will never be settled till the Lord comes. If the ears of corn which the disciples plucked were wheat, the first explanation seems most probable. If, on the other hand, they were barley, the second seems most likely to be correct. The question, happily, is one which affects no point of doctrine, and may safely be left alone.

3.—[*What David did.*] Here, as in other places, let us not fail to observe how our Lord refers to

things recorded in Old Testament Scriptures, as well-attested and acknowledged historical facts. The infidel notion, that the Old Testament narratives are nothing better than amusing fables, and fictions invented to convey useful lessons, is a notion that finds no foot-hold, or countenance in the New Testament. He that strikes at the authority of the Old Testament, will find at last, whether he means it or not, that he is striking also at the authority of the New.

[*When himself was an hungered.*] This is an expression which should be carefully noted in considering passages like that now before us, in which our Lord teaches the true spirit of Sabbath observance. The case of positive necessity, it should be observed, is carefully shown. It was a case of “hunger.” This, and this only, justified the departure from a divine law. In this spirit we ought to consider the often mooted question, what may and what may not be done on the Christian Sunday. When Sunday is deliberately made a day for doing secular things which need not necessarily be done on Sunday, and might easily have been done before Sunday, there is an open breach of the fourth commandment. Neither here, nor elsewhere, does our Lord Jesus Christ sanction such use of the Sunday. The works that He sanctions, are works of necessity and mercy, not of money-making, business, pleasure-seeking, and amusement.

5.—[*The Son of man...Lord of the sabbath.*] The meaning of this expression has been already fully considered in my note on St. Mark. At present it may suffice to say, that I consider “the Son of man” to mean what the expression always means in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.—The words, “Lord of the Sabbath,” were not meant to imply that our Lord, by virtue of His divine authority, would alter, abrogate, or let down the law of the fourth commandment. They mean that Jesus is “Lord of the Sabbath,” to deliver it from Jewish traditions, to protect it from superstitious views of its observance, and to show the true spirit and manner in which it was always intended to be kept.