EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE VI. 39–45.

39. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?

40. The disciple is not above his mas­ter: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

41. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

42. Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye.

43. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

44. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

45. A good man out of the good trea­sure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bring­eth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, the great danger of listening to false teachers in religion. Our Lord compares such teachers and their hearers to the blind leading the blind, and asks the reasonable question, “Shall they not both fall into the ditch?” He goes on to confirm the importance of His warning by declaring, that “the disciple is not above his master” and the scholar cannot be expected to know more than his teacher. If a man will hear unsound instruction, we cannot expect him to become otherwise than unsound in the faith himself.

The subject which our Lord brings before us here de­serves far more attention than it generally receives. The amount of evil which unsound religious teaching has brought on the Church in every age is incalculable. The loss of souls which it has occasioned is fearful to contem­plate. A teacher who does not know the way to heaven himself, is not likely to lead his hearers to heaven. The man who hears such a teacher runs a fearful risk himself of being lost eternally. “If the blind lead the blind both must fall into the ditch.”

If we would escape the danger against which our Lord warns us, we must not neglect to prove the teaching that we hear by the holy Scriptures. We must not believe things merely because ministers say them. We must not suppose, as a matter of course, that ministers can make no mistakes. We must call to mind our Lord’s words on another occasion, “Beware of false prophets.” (Matt vii. 15.) We must remember the advice of St. Paul and St. John: “Prove all things.” “Try the spirits whether they are of God.” (1 Thess. v. 21; 1 John iv. 1.) With the Bible in our hands, and the promise of guidance from the Holy Ghost to all who seek it, we shall be without excuse if our souls are led astray. The blindness of ministers is no excuse for the darkness of the people. The man who from indolence, or superstition, or affected humility, refuses to distrust the teaching of the minister whom he finds set over him, however unsound it may be, will at length share his minister’s portion. If people will trust blind guides, they must not be surprised if they are led to the pit.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that those who reprove the sins of others should strive to be of blameless life. Our Lord teaches us this lesson by a practical saying. He shows the unreasonableness of a man finding fault with “a mote,” or trifling thing in a brother’s eye, while he himself has “a beam,” or some large and formidable object sticking in his own eye.

The lesson must doubtless be received with suitable and Scriptural qualifications. If no man is to teach or preach to others, until he himself is faultless, there could be no teaching or preaching in the world. The erring would never be corrected, and the wicked would never be reproved. To put such a sense as this on our Lord’s words, brings them into collision with other plain passages of Scripture.

The main object of our Lord Jesus appears to be to impress on ministers and teachers the importance of con­sistency of life. The passage is a solemn warning not to contradict by our lives what we have said with our lips. The office of the preacher will never command attention, unless he practises what he preaches. Episcopal ordination, university degrees, high-sounding titles, a loud profession of doctrinal purity, will never procure respect for a minis­ter’s sermon, if his congregation sees him cleaving to ungodly habits.

But there is much here which we shall all do well to remember. The lesson is one which many besides ministers should seriously consider. All heads of families and masters of households, all parents, all teachers of schools, all tutors, all managers of young people,—should often think of the “mote” and the “beam.” All such should see in our Lord’s words the mighty lesson, that nothing influences others so much as con­sistency. Let the lesson be treasured up and not forgotten.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that there is only one satisfactory test of a man’s religious character. That test is his conduct and conversation.

The words of our Lord on this subject are clear and unmistakeable. He draws an illustration from a tree, and lays down the broad principle, “every tree is known by his own fruit.” But our Lord does not stop here. He proceeds further to show that a man’s conversation is one indication of his state of heart. “Of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” Both these sayings are deeply important. Both should be stored up among the leading maxims of our practical Christianity.

Let it be a settled principle in our religion that when a man brings forth no fruits of the Spirit, he has not the Holy Ghost within him. Let us resist as a deadly error the common idea, that all baptized people are born again, and that all members of the Church, as a matter of course, have the Holy Ghost. One simple question must be our rule. What fruit does a man bring forth? Does he repent? Does he believe with the heart on Jesus? Does he live a holy life? Does he overcome the world? Habits like these are what Scripture calls “fruit.” When these “fruits” are wanting, it is profane to talk of a man having the Spirit of God within him.

Let it be a settled principle again in our religion, that when a man’s general conversation is ungodly, his heart is graceless and unconverted. Let us not give way to the vulgar notion, that no one can know anything of the state of another’s heart, and that although men are living wickedly, they have got good hearts at the bottom. Such notions are flatly contradictory to our Lord’s teach­ing. Is the general tone of a man’s communication carnal, worldly, irreligious, godless, or profane? Then let us understand that this is the state of his heart When a man’s tongue is generally wrong, it is absurd, no less than unscriptural, to say that his heart is right.

Let us close this passage with solemn self-inquiry, and use it for the trial of our own state before God. What fruits are we bringing forth in our lives? Are they, or are they not, fruits of the Spirit?—What kind of evidence do our words supply as to the state of our hearts? Do we talk like men whose hearts are “right in the sight of God?”—There is no evading the doctrine laid down by our Lord in this passage. Conduct is the grand test of character. Words are one great symptom of the condition of the heart.

Notes. Luke VI. 39–45.

39.—[Can the blind lead the blind?] Let it be noted that this is the second occasion on which our Lord uses this saying. Both here, and in the other place where it is used (Matt. xv. 44), the application is manifest. It is a warning against following un­sound religious teachers.

40. —[The disciple is not above his master, *&*c.] It is common to regard this verse as descriptive of the portion of all believers in this world, and as parallel with such sayings as these, “If they have persecuted me they will also persecute you.” “If they have kept my saying they will also keep yours.” The perfection is looked upon as the being made “perfect through sufferings.”

But I feel unable to interpret the verse in this sense. It is good divinity, but not the sense of this passage. The true meaning, I believe, must be sought in connection with the verse which immediately precedes it. In that verse our Lord, under a parable, had been delivering a warning against false teachers. He had been comparing them to blind guides, and showing that if the blind lead the blind, “both must fall into the ditch.” He then seems to foresee the common objection that it does not follow because our teachers go astray that we shall go astray also. “Beware of that delusion,” He seems to say. “Disciples must not be expected to see more clearly than their teachers. The scholar will become as perfect as his master, but not more so. He will certainly copy his errors, and reproduce his faults. If you choose to follow blind guides, do not wonder if you never get beyond them, and if you share in their final ruin.” The marginal reading in the English version appears to bring out this sense more clearly than the text: “Everyone shall be perfected as his master.”

How strikingly true this saying of our Lord is, has been painfully proved in England during the last thirty years. All who know anything of our religious history during that period, must have observed, that the leaders of the various new heresies by which we have been plagued, have generally had many ardent followers. These followers have seldom got beyond their masters, and have seldom been able to copy their good points without their bad ones. On the contrary, they have often slavishly reproduced the worst errors of their teachers, and that in a far worse form, and have not imitated their good points at all. They have thus strictly verified our Lord’s words, “The disciple is not above his master.”

I may remark that the view I have maintained of this text is held by Brentius, Bullinger, Gualter, Stella, and Quesnel.

41.—[The mote.] The word so translated is only used here and in the kindred passage in St. Matthew. It means a small bit of straw, or grass, or dry wood.

[The beam.] This word means a large piece of timber such as is used for the rafter of a roof. The whole expression is evidently a proverb intended to bring into strong contrast by a figure, little faults and great ones.

43—[A good tree bringeth not forth.] Perhaps the sense of the Greek words here would be rendered more literally, if thus paraphrased, “There is no such thing as a good tree bringing forth bad fruit.”

44.—[Men...gather figs.] Here, as well as in the verse previously noticed (38,) the word “men” is not in the Greek. It is a form of expression equivalent to saying, “figs are not gathered of thorns.” It is one that ought to be carefully noted, as it throws light on a difficult passage in another part of St. Luke’s Gospel. (Luke xvi. 9.)