

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE VI. 6–11

6. And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered.

7. And the Scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him.

8. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth.

9. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy *it*?

10. And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

11. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.

THESE verses contain another example of our Lord Jesus Christ's mode of dealing with the Sabbath question. Once more we find Him coming into collision with the vain traditions of the Pharisees, about the observance of the fourth commandment. Once more we find Him clearing the day of God from the rubbish of human traditions, and placing its requirements on the right foundation.

We are taught in these verses, *the lawfulness of doing works of mercy on the Sabbath day*. We read that before all the Scribes and Pharisees our Lord healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. He knew that these enemies of all righteousness were watching to see whether He would do it, in order that they might "find an accusation against him." He boldly asserts the right of doing such works of mercy, even on the day when it is said, "thou shalt do no manner of work." He openly challenges them to show that such a work was contrary to the law. "I will ask you one thing," He says, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good, or to do evil?— to save life or to destroy?" To this question His enemies were unable to find an answer.

The principle here laid down, is one of wide application. The fourth commandment was never meant to be so interpreted, as to inflict injury on man's body. It was intended to admit of adaptation to that state of things which sin has brought into the world. It was not meant to forbid showing kindness on the Sabbath to the afflicted, or attending to the wants of the sick. We may drive in a carriage to minister comfort to the dying. We may stay away from public worship, in order to fetch a doctor, or be useful in a sick room. We may visit the fatherless and widow in trouble. We may preach, and teach, and instruct the ignorant. These are works of mercy. We may do them, and yet keep the Sabbath holy. They are not breaches of God's law.

One thing, however, we must carefully remember. We must take heed that we do not abuse the liberty which Christ has given us. It is in this direction that our danger chiefly lies in modern times. There is little risk of our committing the error of the Pharisees, and keeping the Sabbath more strictly

than God intended. The thing to be feared is the general disposition to neglect the Sabbath, and to rob it of that honour which it ought to receive. Let us take heed to ourselves in this matter. Let us beware of making God's day a day for visiting, feasting, journeying, and pleasure parties. These are not works of necessity or mercy, whatever a self-willed and unbelieving world may say. The person who spends his Sundays in such ways as these, is sinning a great sin, and proving himself entirely unprepared for the great rest in heaven.

We are taught, secondly, in these verses, *the perfect knowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ possesses of men's thoughts*. We see this in the language used about Him, when the Scribes and Pharisees were watching Him. We read that "He knew their thoughts."

Expressions like this are among the many evidences of our Lord's divinity. It belongs to God only to read hearts. He who could discern the secret intents and imaginations of others, must have been more than man. No doubt He was man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. This we may freely grant to the Socinian, who denies the divinity of Christ. The texts the Socinian quotes, in proof of our Lord's manhood, are texts which we believe and hold as fully as himself. But there are other plain texts in Scripture which prove that our Lord was God as well as man. Of such texts the passage before us is one. It shows that Jesus was "God over all blessed for ever." (Rom. ix. 5.)

Let the remembrance of our Lord's perfect knowledge always exercise a humbling influence upon our souls. How many vain thoughts, and worldly imaginations, pass through our minds every hour, which man's eye never sees! What are our own thoughts at this moment? What have they been this very day, while we have been reading, or listening to this passage of Scripture? Would they bear public examination? Should we like others to know all that passes in our inner man? These are serious questions, and deserve serious answers. Whatever we may think of them, it is a certain fact that Jesus Christ is hourly reading our hearts. Truly we ought to humble ourselves before Him, and cry daily, "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?"—"Cleanse thou me from secret faults."—"God be merciful to me a sinner!"

We are taught, lastly, in these verses, *the nature of the first act of faith, when a soul is converted to God*. The lesson is conveyed to us in a striking manner, by the history of the cure which is here described. We read that our Lord said to the man whose hand was withered, "Stretch forth thy hand." The command, at first sight, seems unreasonable, because the man's obedience was apparently impossible. But the poor sufferer was not stopped by any doubts or reasonings of this kind. At once we read that he made the attempt to stretch forth his hand, and, in making it, was cured. He had faith enough to believe that He who bade him stretch forth his hand, was not

mocking him, and ought to be obeyed. And it was precisely in this act of implicit obedience, that he received a blessing. “His hand was restored whole as the other.”

Let us see in this simple history, the best answer to those doubts, and hesitations, and questionings, by which anxious inquirers often perplex themselves, in the matter of coming to Christ.—“How can they believe?” they ask us,—“How can they come to Christ? How can they lay hold on the hope set before them?”—The best answer to all such inquiries, is to bid men do as he did who had the withered hand. Let them not stand still reasoning, but act. Let them not torment themselves with metaphysical speculations, but cast themselves, just as they are, on Jesus Christ. So doing, they will find their course made clear. How, or in what manner, we may not be able to explain. But we may boldly make the assertion, that in the act of striving to draw near to God, they shall find God drawing near to them, but that if they deliberately sit still, they must never expect to be saved.

NOTES. LUKE VI. 6–11.

- 8.—[*Stand forth in the midst.*] Here we have a striking example of the publicity of our Lord’s miracles. He performs the cure of a disease with a few words, in the presence of a large assembly of persons unfriendly to Him, and in the face of open day. He does not do it suddenly or hurriedly. He does it in such a manner that the attention of the whole assembly is necessarily concentrated on the thing done.
9. These things should be carefully noted. Herein lies the great difference between the miracles wrought by Christ and His apostles, and the pretended miracles of Mahomet, or the lying miracles of the Church of Rome. Those who wish to see this point fully worked out should read Leslie’s “Short and easy method with Deists.”
- 10.—[*Stretch forth thy hand.*] Ford gives a quotation from Fuller on this passage, which is worth reading. “God’s commands are grants. When He enjoins us, Repent, or Believe, it is only to draw from us a free acknowledgement of our impotence to perform His commands. This confession being made, what He enjoins, He will enable us to do. Man’s owning his weakness is the only stock for God to graft thereon the grace of His assistance.”
- 11.—[*Madness.*] The word so translated, is only used in one other place, 2 Tim. iii. 9., and is there translated “folly.” The sense we now put on the word “madness,” is probably stronger than the Greek word here bears.