

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE VII 31–35.

31 And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like?

32 They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.

34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!

35 But wisdom is justified of all her children.

We learn in the first place, from these verses, that *the hearts of unconverted men are often desperately perverse as well as wicked.*

Our Lord brings out this lesson in a remarkable comparison, describing the generation of men among whom He lived while He was on earth. He compares them to children. He says, that children at play were not more wayward, perverse, and hard to please, than the Jews of His day. Nothing would satisfy them. They were always finding fault. Whatever ministry God employed among them, they took exception to it. Whatever messenger God sent among them, they were not pleased. First came John the Baptist, living a retired, ascetic, self-denying life. At once the Jews said, “he hath a devil.”—After him the Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and adopting habits of social life like the ordinary run of men. At once the Jews accused Him of being “a gluttonous man, and a winebibber.”—In short, it became evident that the Jews were determined to receive no message from God at all. Their pretended objections were only a cloak to cover over their hatred of God’s truth. What they really disliked was, not so much God’s ministers, as God Himself.

Perhaps we read this account with wonder and surprise. We think that never were men so wickedly unreasonable as these Jews were. But are we sure that their conduct is not continually repeated among Christians? Do we know that the same thing is continually going on around us at the present day? Strange as it may seem at first sight, the generation which will neither “dance” when their companions “pipe,” nor “lament” when they “mourn,” is only too numerous in the Church of Christ.

Is it not a fact that many who strive to serve Christ faithfully, and walk closely with God, find their neighbours and relations always dissatisfied with their conduct? No matter how holy and consistent their lives may be, they are always thought wrong! If they withdraw entirely from the world, and live, like John the Baptist, a retired and ascetic life, the cry is raised that they are exclusive, narrow-minded, sour-spirited, and righteous overmuch. If, on the other hand, they go much into society, and endeavour as far they can to take interest in their neighbour’s pursuits, the remark is soon made that they are no better than other people, and have no more real religion than

those who make no profession at all. Treatment like this is only too common. Few are the decided Christians who do not know it by bitter experience. The servants of God in every age, whatever they do, are blamed.

The plain truth is, that the natural heart of man hates God. The carnal mind is enmity against God. It dislikes His law, His Gospel, and His people. It will always find some excuse for not believing and obeying. The doctrine of repentance is too strict for it! The doctrine of faith and grace is too easy for it! John the Baptist goes too much out of the world! Jesus Christ goes too much into the world! And so the heart of man excuses itself for sitting still in its sins.—All this must not surprise us. We must make up our minds to find unconverted people as perverse, unreasonable, and hard to please as the Jews of our Lord's time. We must give up the vain idea of trying to please everybody. The thing is impossible, and the attempt is mere waste of time. We must be content to walk in Christ's steps, and let the world say what it likes. Do what we will we shall never satisfy it, or silence its ill-natured remarks. It first found fault with John the Baptist, and then with his blessed Master. And it will go on cavilling and finding fault with that Master's disciples, so long as one of them is left upon earth.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that *the wisdom of God's ways is always recognized and acknowledged by those who are wise-hearted.*

This is a lesson which is taught in a sentence of somewhat obscure character: "Wisdom is justified of all her children." But it seems difficult to extract any other meaning from the words, by fair and consistent interpretation. The idea which our Lord desires to impress upon us appears to be, that though the vast majority of the Jews were hardened and unreasonable, there were some who were not,—and that though multitudes saw no wisdom in the ministry of John the Baptist and Himself, there were a chosen few who did. Those few were the "children of wisdom." Those few, by their lives and obedience, declared their full conviction that God's ways of dealing with the Jews were wise and right, and that John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus were both worthy of all honour. In short, they "justified" God's wisdom, and so proved themselves truly wise.

This saying of our Lord about the generation among whom He lived, describes a state of things which will always be found in the Church of Christ. In spite of the cavils, sneers, objections, and unkind remarks with which the Gospel is received by the majority of mankind, there will always be some in every country who will assent to it, and obey it with delight. There will never be wanting a "little flock" which hears the voice of the Shepherd gladly, and counts all His ways right. The children of this world may mock at the Gospel, and pour contempt on the lives of believers. They may count their practice madness, and see no wisdom or beauty in their ways. But God will take care that He has a people in every age. There will be always some who

will assert the perfect excellence of the doctrines and requirements of the Gospel, and will “justify the wisdom” of Him who sent it. And these, however much the world may despise them, are they whom Jesus calls wise. They are “wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. iii. 15.)

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave this passage, whether we deserve to be called children of wisdom? Have we been taught by the Spirit to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have the eyes of our understanding been opened? Have we the wisdom that cometh from above?—If we are truly wise, let us not be ashamed to confess our Master before men. Let us declare boldly that we approve the whole of His Gospel, all its doctrines and all its requirements. We may find few with us and many against us. The world may laugh at us, and count our wisdom no better than folly. But such laughter is but for a moment. The hour cometh when the few who have confessed Christ, and justified His ways before men, shall be confessed and “justified” by Him before His Father and the angels.

NOTES. LUKE VII. 31–35.

32.—[*They are like unto children.*] Let it be noted that the one point to be kept in mind, in the comparison of the generation among whom our Lord lived, to children, is the waywardness and determination not to be pleased, which is often observable in some children. In this respect they were exact types of the Jews when John Baptist and our Lord successively preached to them. Their two ministries were peculiarly unlike one another. But neither pleased the Jews.

To attach deep spiritual meanings to the “market place,” the “piping,” “dancing,” “mourning,” and “weeping,” of the similitude, is, to say the least, unprofitable.

[*Ye have not danced.*] The dancing here mentioned must not be tortured into an excuse for modern dancing-parties and balls. The dancing spoken of in Scripture had no resemblance to the dancing of modern times.

34.—[*Eating and drinking.*] The utmost that can be made of this expression amounts to this, that our Lord’s habits in the matter of eating and drinking were different from those of John the Baptist, that He was less ascetic, and more like other men.

Comparing this verse with the preceding one, and remembering, also, our Lord’s miracle at the marriage in Cana, and the Institution of the Lord’s Supper, I certainly think there is a strong probability that our Lord did not altogether abstain from the use of wine. I say this with the utmost respect for the friends of temperance. But I do not like to see a good cause injured by its advocates taking up untenable ground.

35.—[*But wisdom is justified of all her children.*] There is some obscurity about these words. At any rate, there is much diversity in the interpretations which commentators put upon them.

Some take the expression “children of wisdom” in a bad sense, and consider the meaning to be, “those who ought to have been, or were reckoned children of wisdom, having rejected wisdom’s offers, wisdom is now acquitted and free from all blame at their hands. Divine wisdom tried all things needful for their conversion and salvation, and they would have none of her counsel. She is, therefore, justified, absolved and excused from all blame,

if they are lost.” This is Chrysostom’s view.

Some take the word “justified” in the strange sense of “condemned,” and make out the meaning to be as follows. “Those who professed themselves to be children of wisdom have actually condemned wisdom, by refusing her counsels.” This, according to Paræus and Chemnitius, is the view maintained by Luther.

I believe the right interpretation is to regard the “children of wisdom” as the truly wise, the elect, the believers, the people who are really taught of God. By them “the wisdom of God’s ways is always justified, whatever others may please to think of it. They assent to them, approve of them, and regard them as being entirely right.” This sense will be found ably defended in the commentary of Paræus on St. Matthew,—and well and briefly stated by Euthymius.

The “children of wisdom” is a Hebraism for “those who are wise.” Thus, the “children of rebellion” means the rebellious, Num. xvii. 10., the “children of wickedness” the wicked, 2 Sam. vii. 10, the “children of pride” the proud, Job xli. 34., the “children of transgression” transgressors, Isai. lvii. 4. The “children of this world,” and “children of light,” Luke xvi. 8., are similar expressions.

It seems unnecessary to take “wisdom,” at the beginning of the verse, in the sense of the Personal Wisdom, Christ Himself. It is more likely a general expression for the “wisdom of God’s ways.”

The word “but,” at the beginning of the verse is more commonly translated “and.” Beza and others however show that it should be taken here in the sense of “and yet,” or “but,” as we have rendered it in our version. Alford points out that “and,” should be so rendered in Matt. x. 29. It should be “and yet one,” &c.