

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. I.

LONDON:

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

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUXE IX. 46–50.

46 Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.	you all, the same shall be great.
47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him,	49 And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us.
48 And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among	50 And Jesus said unto him, Forbid <i>him</i> not: for he that is not against us is for us.

THE verses we have now read contain two most important warnings. They are directed against two of the commonest evils which are to be found in the Church of Christ. He who gave them knew well what was in the heart of man. Well would it have been for the Church of Christ, if His words in this passage had received more attention!

In the first place, the Lord Jesus gives us *a warning against pride and self-conceit*. We are told that “there arose a reasoning among the disciples which of them should be the greatest.” Wonderful as it may seem, this little company of fishermen and publicans was not beyond the plague of a self-seeking and ambitious spirit. Filled with the vain notion that our Lord’s kingdom was to appear immediately, they were ready to wrangle about their place and precedency in it. Each thought his own claim the strongest. Each thought his own deserts and right to honour most unquestionable. Each thought that, whatever place was assigned to his brethren, a principal place ought to be assigned to himself. And all this happened in the company of Christ Himself, and under the noon-tide blaze of His teaching. Such is the heart of man!

There is something very instructive in this fact. It ought to sink down deeply into the heart of every Christian reader. Of all sins there is none against which we have such need to watch and pray, as pride. It is a pestilence that walketh in darkness, and a sickness that destroyeth at noon day.—No sin is so deeply rooted in our nature. It cleaves to us like our skin. Its roots never entirely die. They are ready, at any moment, to spring up, and exhibit a most pernicious vitality.—No sin is so specious and deceitful. It can wear the garb of humility itself. It can lurk in the hearts of the ignorant, the ungifted, and the poor, as well as in the minds of the great, the learned, and the rich. It is a quaint and homely saying, but only too true, that no pope has ever received such honour as pope “self.”

Let a prayer for humility, and the spirit of a little child, form part of our daily supplications. Of all creatures none has so little right to be proud as man, and of all men none ought to be so humble as the Christian. Is it really true that we confess ourselves to be “miserable sinners,” and daily debtors to mercy and grace? Are we the followers of Jesus, who was “meek and lowly of heart,” and “made Himself of no reputation” for our sakes? Then

let that same mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus. Let us lay aside all high thoughts and self-conceit. In lowliness of mind, let us esteem others better than ourselves. Let us be ready, on all occasions, to take the lowest place. And let the words of our Saviour ring in our ears continually, "He that is least among you all, the same shall be great."

In the second place, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us a *warning against a bigoted and illiberal spirit*. As in the preceding verses, so here, the occasion of the warning is supplied by the conduct of His own disciples. We read that John said to Him, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name: and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." Who this man was, and why he did not consort with the disciples, we do not know. But we do know that he was doing a good work in casting out devils, and that he was doing what he did in the name of Christ. And yet John says, "we forbade him."—Very striking is the reply which the Lord at once gave him: "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."

The conduct of John and the disciples on this occasion is a curious illustration of the oneness of human nature, in every age. Thousands, in every period of Church history, have spent their lives in copying John's mistake. They have laboured to stop every man who will not work for Christ in their way, from working for Christ at all. They have imagined, in their petty self-conceit, that no man can be a soldier of Christ, unless he wears their uniform, and fights in their regiment. They have been ready to say of every Christian who does not see everything with their eyes, "Forbid him! Forbid him! for he followeth not with us."

The solemn remark of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this occasion, demands our special notice. He pronounces no opinion upon the conduct of the man of whom John speaks. He neither praises nor blames him for following an independent course, and not working with His disciples. He simply declares that he must not be forbidden, and that those who work the same kind of work that we do, should be regarded not as enemies, but allies. "He that is not against us is for us."

The principle laid down in this passage is of great importance. A right understanding of it will prove most useful to us in these latter days. The divisions and varieties of opinion which exist among Christians are undeniably very great. The schisms and separations which are continually arising about Church-government, and modes of worship, are very perplexing to tender consciences.—Shall we approve those divisions? We cannot do so. Union is strength. The disunion of Christians is one cause of the slow progress of vital Christianity.—Shall we denounce, and hold up to public reprobation, all who will not agree to work with us, and to oppose Satan in our way? It is useless to do so. Hard words never yet made men of one mind. Unity was never yet brought about by force.—What then ought we to do?

We must leave alone those who do not agree with us, and wait quietly till God shall think fit to bring us together. Whatever we may think of our divisions, the words of our Lord must never be forgotten: "Forbid them not."

The plain truth is, that we are all too ready to say, "We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us." (Job xii. 2.) We forget that no Church on earth has an absolute monopoly of all wisdom, and that people may be right in the main, without agreeing with us. We must learn to be thankful if sin is opposed, and the Gospel preached, and the devil's kingdom pulled down, though the work may not be done exactly in the way we like. We must try to believe that men may be true-hearted followers of Jesus Christ, and yet for some wise reason may be kept back from seeing all things in religion just as we do. Above all, we must praise God if souls are converted, and Christ is magnified,—no matter who the preacher may be, and to what Church he may belong. Happy are those who can say with Paul, "If Christ be preached, I rejoice, yea and will rejoice," (Phil. i. 18.) and with Moses, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that all did prophecy." (Num. xi. 29.)

NOTES. LUXE IX. 46–50.

46.—[A *reasoning*.] The word so translated is the same that is rendered "thought" in the following verse.

[*Which of them should be the greatest*.] The expectation of a temporal kingdom about to be set up by the Messiah, must have been the foundation of this desire of pre-eminence.

48.—[*This child*.] We must beware that we do not wrest our Lord's language about children here and elsewhere, into the false notion that children are naturally innocent, and without sin. The simplicity, unworldliness, and dependent spirit of a little child, arising from its sense of weakness, and feebleness, and ignorance of the world's standard of good, are the real points in which the child is to be the Christian's pattern.

50.—[*Forbid him not*.] It is curious to observe the various practical applications of the great principle contained in this passage, which men have made at various periods of the Church's history.

Bucer directs the passage against the Anabaptists and fanatics of his own time in Germany. He argues that it justifies Christians making use of the support and countenance of kings, princes, and other great persons in the world, if they are disposed to help the Gospel, even though they are not converted to God themselves.

Scott applies the passage to religious revivals, and argues that it should teach us neither lightly to condemn nor lightly to approve them.

Our own times appear to point out plainly that we should apply the passage to the subject of our relations with other religious denominations. In the face of such a Scripture as this, Churchmen should beware how they condemn and reprobate Dissenters, and Dissenters should beware how they denounce and revile Churchmen. Both parties would do well to leave off contention, and to learn to rejoice in any good that is doing in the world, by whatsoever means it may be done. If devils are cast out, we ought to be glad, though those who cast them out follow not with us.

One qualification only should always accompany our use of this passage of Scripture. We must not allow it to make us indifferent to sound doctrine. We must not think and talk as if it mattered nothing whether men are Jews, Socinians, Papists, or Protestants, so long as they seem earnest-minded men. The persons to whom the passage specially applies, are persons who do apostolic work in the name of Jesus,—who labour to pull down the kingdom of Satan by the use of Gospel weapons. Let us beware how we ever forbid such persons, or hinder them in their work.