

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And many Explanatory Notes.

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MDCCCLIX.

MARK XII. 1–12.

1 And he began to speak unto them by parables. A *certain* man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about *it*, and digged *a place for* the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.

2 And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard.

3 And they caught *him*, and beat him, and sent *him* away empty.

4 And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully handled.

b And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some.

6 Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.

7 But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.

8 And they took him, and killed *him*, and cast *him* out of the vineyard.

9 What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.

10 And have ye not read this Scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:

11 This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

12 And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

THE verses before us contain an historical parable. The history of the Jewish nation, from the day that Israel left Egypt down to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, is here set before us as in a glass. Under the figure of the vineyard and the husbandman, the Lord Jesus tells the story of God's dealings with his people for fifteen hundred years. Let us study it attentively, and apply it to ourselves.

Let us observe, in the first place, *God's special kindness to the Jewish Church and nation*. He gave to them peculiar privileges. He dealt with them as a man deals with a piece of land which he separates and hedges in for "a vineyard." He gave them good laws and ordinances. He planted them in a goodly land, and cast out seven nations before them. He passed by greater and mightier nations to show them favour. He let alone Egypt, and Assyria, and Greece, and Rome, and showered down mercies on a few millions of people in Palestine. The vineyard of the Lord was the house of Israel. No family under heaven ever received so many signal and distinguishing privileges as the family of Abraham.

And we too, who live in Great Britain, can we say that we have received no special mercies from God? We cannot say so. Why are we not a heathen country, like China? Why are we not a land of idolaters, like Hindustan? We owe it all to the distinguishing favour of God. It is not for our goodness and worthiness, but of God's free grace, that England is what England is among the nations of the earth. Let us be thankful for our mercies, and know the hand from which they come. Let us not be high-minded, but humble, lest we provoke God to take our mercies

away. If Israel had peculiar national privileges, so also has England. Let Englishmen mark this well, and take heed, lest that which happened to Israel should happen also to them.

Let us observe, in the second place, *God's patience and longsuffering towards the Jewish nation*. What is their whole history as recorded in the Old Testament, but a long record of repeated provocations and repeated pardons? Over and over again we read of prophets being sent to them, and warnings being delivered, but too often entirely in vain. One servant after another came to the vineyard of Israel, and asked for fruit.—One servant after another was “sent away empty” by the Jewish husbandmen, and no fruit borne by the nation to the glory of God. “They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets.” (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.) Yet hundreds of years passed away before “the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” Never was there a people so patiently dealt with as Israel.

And we too, who dwell in Great Britain, have we no longsuffering of God to be thankful for? Beyond doubt, we have abundant cause to say, that our Lord is patient. He does not deal with us according to our sins, or reward us according to our iniquities. We have often provoked Him to take our candlestick away, and to deal with us as He has dealt with Tyre, and Babylon, and Rome. Yet His longsuffering and lovingkindness continue still. Let us beware that we do not presume on His goodness too far. Let us hear in His mercies a loud call to us to bear fruit, and let us strive to abound in that righteousness which alone exalteth a nation. (Prov. xiv. 34.) Let every family in the land feel its responsibility to God, and then the whole nation will be seen showing forth His praise.

Let us observe, in the third place, *the hardness and wickedness of human nature, as exemplified in the history of the Jewish people*.

It is difficult to imagine a more striking proof of this truth, than the summary of Israel's dealings with God's messengers, which our Lord sketches in this parable. Prophet after prophet was sent to them in vain. Miracle after miracle was wrought among them, without any lasting effect. The Son of God Himself, the well-beloved, at last came down to them, and was not believed. God Himself was manifest in the flesh, dwelling among them, and “they took Him and killed Him.”

There is no truth so little realized and believed as the “desperate wickedness” of the human heart. Let the parable before us this day be always reckoned among the standing proofs of it. Let us see in it what men and women can do, in the full blaze of religious privileges,—in the midst of prophecies and miracles,—in the presence of the Son of God Himself. “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Rom. viii. 7.) Men never saw God face to face but once, when Jesus became a man, and

lived upon earth. They saw Him holy, harmless, undefiled, going about doing good. Yet they would not have Him, rebelled against Him, and at last killed Him. Let us dismiss from our minds the idea that there is any innate goodness, or natural rectitude, in our hearts. Let us put away the common notion that seeing and knowing what is good is enough to make a man a Christian. The great experiment has been made in the instance of the Jewish nation. We too, like Israel, might have among us miracles, prophets, and the company of Christ Himself in the flesh, and yet, like Israel, have them in vain. Nothing but the Spirit of God can change the heart. "We must be born again." (John iii. 7.)

Let us observe, in the last place, *that men's consciences may be pricked, and yet they may continue impenitent.* The Jews, to whom our Lord addressed the solemn historical parable which we have been reading, saw clearly that it applied to themselves. They felt that they and their forefathers were the husbandmen to whom the vineyard was let, and who ought to have rendered fruit to God. They felt that they and their forefathers were the wicked labourers, who had refused to give the Master of the vineyard His dues, and had "shamefully handled" His servants, "beating some, and killing some." Above all, they felt that they themselves were planning the last crowning act of wickedness, which the parable described. They were about to kill the well-beloved Son, and "cast Him out of the vineyard." All this they knew perfectly well. "They knew that He had spoken the parable against them." Yet though they knew it, they would not repent. Though convicted by their own consciences, they were hardened in sin.

Let us learn from this awful fact, that knowledge and conviction alone save no man's soul. It is quite possible to know that we are wrong, and be unable to deny it, and yet to cleave to our sins obstinately, and perish miserably in hell. The thing that we all need, is a change of heart and will. For this let us pray earnestly. Till we have this, let us never rest. Without this, we shall never be real Christians, and reach heaven. Without it we may live all our lives, like the Jews, knowing inwardly that we are wrong, and yet, like the Jews, persevere in our own way, and die in our sins.

MARK XII. 13–17.

13 And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in *his* words.

14 And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?

15 Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto

them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see *it*.

16 And they brought *it*. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Cæsar's.

17 And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

LET us observe in the beginning of this passage, *how men of different religious opinions can unite in opposing Christ*. We read of “Pharisees and Herodians” coming together to “catch our Lord in His words,” and perplex Him with a hard question. The Pharisee was a superstitious formalist, who cared for nothing but the outward ceremonies of religion. The Herodian was a mere man of the world, who despised all religion, and cared more for pleasing men than God. Yet when there came among them a mighty teacher who assailed the ruling passions of both alike, and spared neither formalist nor worldling, we see them making common cause, and uniting in a common effort to stop His mouth.

It has always been so from the beginning of the world. We may see the same thing going on at the present day. Worldly men and formalists have little real sympathy with one another. They dislike one another's principles, and despise one another's ways. But there is one thing which they both dislike even more, and that is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. And hence, whenever there is a chance of opposing the Gospel, we shall always see the worldly man and the formalist combine and act together. We must expect no mercy from them: they will show none. We must never reckon on their divisions: they will always patch up an alliance to resist Christ.

Let us observe, for another thing, in this passage, *the exceeding subtlety of the question propounded to our Lord*. His enemies asked him, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, the Roman emperor, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?” Here was a question, which it seemed at first sight impossible to answer without peril. If our Lord had replied “give,” the Pharisees would have accused him before the priests, as one who regarded the Jewish nation as under subjection to Rome.—If our Lord had replied, “Do not give,” the Herodians would have accused him before Pilate, as a seditious person who taught rebellion against the Roman government. The trap was indeed well planned. Surely we may see in it the cunning hand of one greater than man. That old serpent the devil was there.

We shall do well to remember, that of all questions which have perplexed Christians, none have ever proved so intricate and puzzling, as the class of questions, which the Pharisees and Herodians here propounded.¹

What are the dues of Cæsar, and what are the dues of God,—where the rights of the church end, and where the rights of the state begin,—what are lawful civil claims and what are lawful spiritual claims,—all these are hard knots and deep problems which Christians have often found it difficult to untie, and almost impossible to solve. Let us pray to be delivered from them. Never does the cause of Christ suffer so much as when the devil succeeds in bringing churches into collisions and law-suits with the civil power. In such collisions precious time is wasted, energies are misapplied,—ministers are drawn off from their proper work,—the souls of people suffer, and a church's victory often proves only one degree better than a defeat.—“Give peace in our time, O Lord,” is a prayer of wide meaning, and one that should often be on a Christian's lips.

Let us observe, in the last place, *the marvellous wisdom which our Lord showed in His answer to His enemies.*

Their flattering words did not deceive Him. He “knew their hypocrisy.” His all-seeing eye detected the “potsherds covered with silver dross” which stood before Him. (Prov. xxvi. 23.) He was not imposed upon, as too many of His people are, by glowing language and fine speeches.

He made the daily practice of His own enemies supply Him with an answer to their cunning question. He tells them to “bring Him a penny,” a common coin which they themselves were in the habit of using. He asks them “whose image and superscription” are stamped upon that penny? They are obliged to reply, “Cæsar's.” They were themselves using a Roman coin, issued and circulated by the Roman government. By their own confession they were in some way under the power of the Romans, or this Roman money would not have been current among them. At once our Lord silences them by the memorable words, “Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.” He bids them pay tribute to the Roman government in temporal things, for by using its money they allowed themselves bound to do so. Yet he bids them give obedience to God in spiritual things, and not to suppose that duty to an earthly sovereign and a heavenly sovereign are incapable of

¹ “Nothing is more likely to ensnare ministers, than bringing them to meddle with controversies about civil rights, and to settle landmarks between the prince and the subjects, which it is fit should be done, while it is not at all fit that they should have the doing of it.”— *Matthew Henry.*

being reconciled one with the other. In short, He bids the proud Pharisee not to refuse his dues to Cæsar, and the worldly Herodian not to refuse his dues to God.

Let us learn from this masterly decision the great principle, that true Christianity was never meant to interfere with a man's obedience to the civil power. So far from this being the case it ought to make him a quiet, loyal, and faithful subject. He ought to regard the powers that be as "ordained of God," and to submit to their rules and regulations, so long as the law is enforced, though he may not thoroughly approve of them. If the law of the land and the law of God come in collision, no doubt his course is clear, he must obey God rather than man. Like the three children, though he serves a heathen king, he must not bow down to an idol. Like Daniel, though he submits to a tyrannical government, he must not give over praying in order to please the ruling powers.²

Let us often pray for a larger measure of that spirit of wisdom, which dwelt so abundantly in our blessed Lord. Many are the evils which have arisen in the Church of Christ, from a morbid and distorted view of the relative positions of the civil government and of God. Many are the rents and divisions which have been occasioned by lack of sound judgment as to their comparative claims. Happy is he who remembers our Lord's decision in this passage, understands it rightly, and makes a practical application of it to his own times.

² Sibelius quotes a passage from Augustine on the Psalms which is worth reading, as an illustration of the subject now before us. "Julian was an unbelieving emperor. He was an apostate, a wicked man, and an idolater. And yet Christian men served as soldiers under this unbelieving emperor. When the cause of Christ was concerned, they acknowledged no commander but Him that was in heaven. When the emperor wished them to worship idols or burn incense to them, they preferred honouring God before him. But when he said, draw out in order of battle, march against that nation, they obeyed him. They drew a distinction between their eternal master, and their temporal master; and yet were submissive to their temporal master for their eternal master's sake."

MARK XII. 18–27.

18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying,

19 Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave *his* wife *behind him*, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

20 Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed.

21 And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise.

22 And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also.

23 In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?

25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?

27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

THESE verses relate a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Sadducees. The religion of these men, we know, was little better than infidelity. They said there was “no resurrection.” They too, like the Pharisees, thought to entangle and perplex our Lord with hard questions. The Church of Christ must not expect to fare better than its Master. Formalism on one side and infidelity on another, are two enemies for whose attacks we must always be prepared.

We learn from this passage, *how much unfairness may often be detected in the arguments of infidels.*

The question propounded by the Sadducees is a striking illustration of this. They tell him of a woman who married seven brothers in succession, had no children, and outlived her seven husbands. They ask “whose wife” of all the seven the woman would be “in the resurrection?” It may well be surmised that the case was a supposed and not a real one. On the face of it, there is the strongest appearance of improbability. The chances against such a case occurring in reality, any actuary would tell us, are almost infinite. But that was nothing to the Sadducees. All they cared for was to raise a difficulty, and if possible to put our Lord to silence. The doctrine of the resurrection they had not the face manfully to deny. The possible consequences of the doctrine were the ground which they chose to take up.

There are three things which we shall do well to remember, if unhappily we have at any time to argue with infidels.—For one thing, let us remember that an infidel will always try to press us with the difficulties and abstruse things of religion, and especially with those which are connected with the world to come. We must avoid this mode of argument as

far as possible. It is leaving the open field to fight in a jungle. We must endeavour, as far as we can, to make our discussion turn on the great plain facts and evidences of Christianity.—For another thing, let us remember, we must be on our guard against unfairness and dishonesty in argument. It may seem hard and uncharitable to say this. But experience proves that it is needful. Thousands of professed infidels have confessed in their latter days, that they had never studied the Bible which they pretended to deny, and though well read in the works of unbelievers and sceptics, had never calmly examined the foundations of Christianity.—Above all, let us remember that every infidel has a conscience. To this we may always appeal confidently. The very men who talk most loudly and disdainfully against religion, are often feeling conscious, even while they talk, that they are wrong. The very arguments which they have sneered at and ridiculed, will often prove at last not to have been thrown away.

We learn, in the second place, from this passage, *how much of religious error may be traced to ignorance of the Bible*. Our Lord's first words in reply to the Sadducees declare this plainly. He says, "Do ye not err, because ye know not the Scriptures?"

The truth of the principle here laid down, is proved by facts in almost every age of church history. The reformation in Josiah's day was closely connected with the discovery of the book of the law. The false doctrines of the Jews in our Lord's time were the result of neglecting the Scriptures. The dark ages of Christendom were times when the Bible was kept back from the people. The Protestant Reformation was mainly effected by translating and circulating the Bible. The Churches which are most flourishing at this day, are churches which honour the Bible. The nations which enjoy most moral light, are nations in which the Bible is most known. The parishes in our land where there is most true religion, are those in which the Bible is most studied. The godliest families are Bible-reading families. The holiest men and women are Bible-reading people. These are simple facts which cannot be denied.

Let these things sink deeply into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Let us not be ignorant of the Bible, lest we fall into some deadly error. Let us rather read it diligently, and make it our rule of faith and practice. Let us labour to spread the Bible over the world. The more the book is known, the better the world will be. Not least, let us teach our children to value the Bible. The very best portion we can give them, is a knowledge of the Scriptures.

We learn, in the last place, from this passage, *how different will be the state of things after the resurrection, from the state in which we live now*. Our Lord tells us, that "when they shall rise from the dead, they

neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.”

It would be foolish to deny that there are many difficulties connected with the doctrine of the life to come. It must needs be so. The world beyond the grave is a world unseen by mortal eye, and therefore unknown. The conditions of existence there, are necessarily hidden from us, and if more were told, we should probably not understand it. Let it suffice us to know that the bodies of the saints shall be raised, and, though glorified, shall be like their bodies on earth;—so like, that those who knew them once shall know them again. But though raised with a real body, the risen saint will be completely freed from everything which is now an evidence of weakness and infirmity. There shall be nothing like Mahomet’s gross and sensual Paradise in the Christian’s future existence. Hunger and thirst being no more,—there shall be no need of food. Weariness and fatigue being no more,—there shall be no need of sleep. Death being no more,—there shall be no need of births to supply the place of those who are removed. Enjoying the full presence of God and his Christ,—men and women shall no more need the marriage union, in order to help one another. Able to serve God without weariness, and attend on Him without distraction,—doing His will perfectly, and seeing His face continually,—clothed in a glorious body,—they shall be “as the angels which are in heaven.”

There is comfort in all this for the true Christian. In the body that he now has he often “groans being burdened,” from a daily sense of weakness and imperfection. (2 Cor. v. 4.) He is now tried by many cares about this world,—what to eat, and what to drink, and what to put on,—how to manage his affairs, where to live, and what company to choose. In the world to come, all shall be changed. Nothing shall be lacking to make his happiness complete.

One thing only we must carefully bear in mind. Let us take heed that we rise again in “the resurrection of life,” and not in “the resurrection of condemnation.” (John v. 29.) To the believer in the Lord Jesus, the resurrection will be the greatest of blessings. To the worldly, the godless and the profane, the resurrection will be a misery and a curse. Let us never rest till we are one with Christ and Christ in us, and then we may look forward with joy to a life to come.³

³ The text by which our Lord silenced the Sadducees, and proved the resurrection to be a scriptural doctrine,—has been a cause of surprise to many Bible readers. Some have wondered that our Lord should have chosen this text, when others far more plain might have been adduced. Some have been unable to see the force and cogency of the text as any proof at all of the resurrection of the body.

As to the particular fitness of the text, as a proof, compared to others we are perhaps very poor judges. It may well be suspected that there is a fulness of meaning in some

texts of scripture, which in our hasty and superficial reading we have not yet fathomed. At any rate it is clear that to a Jewish hearer of the Lord the argument was so forcible as to be unanswerable. This quotation and the famous one in John x. 34, go far to show that the Jewish mind saw a depth of meaning in scriptural expressions, which many of us in modern times have not at all seen yet. It is a matter in which we have much to learn.

As to the text, "I am the God of Abraham, &c.," being a convincing proof of the resurrection of the body, there is a passage in Bishop Pearson, which is worth reading. He says of this text as quoted by our Lord, "With the force of this argument the multitude was astonished, and the Sadducees silenced. For under the name of God was understood a great benefactor, a God of promise, and to be '*their* God' was to bless them and reward them; as in them to be 'his servants,' and 'his people' was to believe in him and obey him. Now Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had not received the promise which they expected, and therefore God after their death desiring still to be called "their God," he thereby acknowledgeth that he had a blessing and a reward for them still, and consequently that he will raise them to another life, in which they may receive it. So that the argument of our Saviour is the same which the Jews have drawn from another place of Moses. (Exod. vi. 3, 4.) 'I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not made known to them. Nevertheless I have established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan.' It is not said 'to give their sons,' but 'to give *them* the land,' and therefore because while they lived here they enjoyed it not, they must rise again that they may receive the promise."

MARK XII. 28–34.

28 And one of the Scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.

31 And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

32 And the Scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love *his* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*.

THESE verses contain a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and “one of the Scribes.” For the third time in one day we see our Lord tried by a hard question. Having put to silence the Pharisees and Sadducees, He is asked to decide a point on which much difference of opinion prevailed among the Jews: “Which is the first commandment of all.” We have reason to bless God that so many hard questions were propounded to our Lord. Without them the marvellous words of wisdom which His three answers contain, might never have been spoken at all. Here, as in many other cases, we see how God can bring good out of evil. He can make the most malicious assaults of His enemies work round to the good of His church, and redound to His own praise. He can make the enmity of Pharisees and Sadducees and Scribes minister instruction to His people. Little did the three questioners in this chapter think what benefit their crafty questions would confer on all Christendom. “Out of the eater came forth meat.” (Judges xiv. 14.)

Let us observe in these verses, *how high is our Lord Jesus Christ’s standard of duty to God and man.*

The question that the Scribe propounded was a very wide one: “Which is the first commandment of all?” The answer he received was probably very unlike what he expected. At any rate, if he thought that our Lord would commend to him the observance of some outward form or ceremony, he was mistaken. He hears these solemn words: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

How striking is our Lord’s description of the *feeling* with which we ought to regard both God and our neighbour! We are not merely to obey

the one, or to abstain from injuring the other. In both cases we are to give far more than this. We are to give love, the strongest of all affections, and the most comprehensive. A rule like this includes everything. It makes all petty details unnecessary. Nothing will be intentionally lacking where there is love.

How striking again is our Lord's description of the *measure* in which we should love God and our neighbour! We are to love God better than ourselves, with all the powers of our inward man. We cannot love Him too well. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to deal with him in all respects as we would like him to deal with us. The marvellous wisdom of this distinction is clear and plain. We may easily err in our affections towards others, either by thinking too little or too much of them. We therefore need the rule to love them as ourselves, neither more nor less. We cannot err in our affections towards God in the matter of excess. He is worthy of all we can give Him. We are therefore to love Him with all our heart.

Let us keep these two grand rules continually before our minds, and use them daily in our journey through life. Let us see in them a summary of all that we ought to aim at in our practice, both as regards God and man. By them let us try every difficulty of conscience that may happen to beset us, as to right and wrong. Happy is that man who strives to frame his life according to these rules.

Let us learn from this brief exposition of the true standard of duty, how great is the need in which we all naturally stand of the atonement and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Where are the men or women who can say with truth, that they have perfectly loved God and perfectly loved man? Where is the person on earth who must not plead "guilty," when tried by such a law as this? No wonder that the Scripture says, "there is none righteous, no! not one." "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Rom. iii. 10, 20.) It is only gross ignorance of the requirements of God's law which makes people undervalue the Gospel. The man who has the clearest view of the moral law, will always be the man who has the highest sense of the value of Christ's atoning blood.

Let us observe, for another thing, in these verses, *how far a man may go in religion, and yet not be a true disciple of Christ.*

The Scribe, in the passage now before us, was evidently a man of more knowledge than most of his equals. He saw things which many Scribes and Pharisees never saw at all. His own words are a strong proof of this. "There is one God: and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." These words are re-

markable in themselves, and doubly remarkable when we remember who the speaker was, and the generation amongst whom he lived. No wonder that we read next, that our Lord said, “thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

But we must not shut our eyes to the fact, that we are nowhere told that this man became one of our Lord’s disciples. On this point there is a mournful silence. The parallel passage in St. Matthew throws not a gleam of light on his case. The other parts of the New Testament tell us nothing about him. We are left to draw the painful conclusion that, like the rich young man, he could not make up his mind to give up all and follow Christ; or that, like the chief rulers, elsewhere mentioned, he “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John xii. 43.) In short, though “not far from the kingdom of God,” he probably never entered into it, and died outside.

Cases like that of this Scribe, are unhappily far from being uncommon. There are thousands on every side, who, like him, see much and know much of religious truth, and yet live and die undecided. There are few things which are so much overlooked as the length to which people may go in religious attainments, and yet never be converted, and never saved. May we all mark well this man’s case, and take care!

Let us beware of resting our hopes of salvation on mere intellectual knowledge. We live in days when there is great danger of doing so. Education makes children acquainted with many things in religion, of which their parents were once utterly ignorant. But education alone will never make a Christian in the sight of God. We must not only know the leading doctrines of the Gospel with our heads, but receive them into our hearts, and be guided by them in our lives. May we never rest till we are inside the kingdom of God, till we have truly repented, really believed, and have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. If we rest satisfied with being “not far from the kingdom,” we shall find at last that we are shut out for evermore.

MARK XII. 35–44.

35 And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the Scribes that Christ is the Son of David?

36 For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

37 David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he *then* his son? And the common people heard him gladly.

38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the Scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and *love* salutations in the marketplaces,

39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts:

40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

43 And he called *unto him* his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

44 For all *they* did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, *even* all her living.

WE have seen in the former part of this chapter, how the enemies of our Lord endeavoured to “catch Him in His words.” We have seen how the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Scribes successively propounded to Him hard questions,—questions, we can hardly fail to observe, more likely to minister strife than edification. The passage before us begins with a question of a very different character. Our Lord Himself propounds it. He asks His enemies about Christ and the meaning of Holy Scripture. Such questions are always truly profitable. Well would it be for the church if theological discussions were less about trifles, and more about weighty matters, and things necessary to salvation.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, *how much there is about Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures*. Our Lord desires to expose the ignorance of the Jewish teachers about the true nature of the Messiah. He does it by referring to a passage in the book of Psalms, and showing that the Scribes did not rightly understand it. And in so doing He shows us that one subject, about which David was inspired by the Holy Ghost to write, was Christ.

We know from our Lord's own words in another place, that the Old Testament Scriptures “testify of Christ.” (John v. 39.) They were intended to teach men about Christ, by types, and figures, and prophecy, till He Himself should appear on earth. We should always keep this in mind, in reading the Old Testament, but never so much as in reading the Psalms. Christ is undoubtedly to be found in every part of the Law and the Prophets, but nowhere is He so much to be found, as in the book of Psalms. His experience and sufferings at His first coming into the world,—His future glory, and His final triumph at His second coming,—are the chief subjects of many a passage in that wonderful part of God's

word. It is a true saying, that we should look for Christ quite as much as David, in reading the Psalms.

Let us beware of undervaluing, or despising the Old Testament. In its place and proportion, the Old Testament is just as valuable as the New. There are probably many rich passages in that part of the Bible, which have never yet been fully explored. There are deep things about Jesus in it, which many walk over like hidden gold mines, and know not the treasures beneath their feet. Let us reverence *all* the Bible. All is given by inspiration, and all is profitable. One part throws light upon another, and no part can ever be neglected without loss and damage to our souls. A boastful contempt for the Old Testament Scriptures has often proved the first step towards infidelity.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, *how odious is the sin of hypocrisy in the sight of Christ*. This is a lesson which is taught us by our Lord's warning against the Scribes. He exposes some of their notorious practices,—their ostentatious manner of dressing,—their love of the honour and praise of man rather than God,—their love of money, disguised under a pretended concern for widows, their long-protracted public devotions, intended to make men think them eminently godly. And He winds up all by the solemn declaration, “these shall receive greater damnation.”

Of all the sins into which men can fall, none seem so exceedingly sinful as false profession and hypocrisy. At all events, none have drawn from our Lord's mouth such strong language, and such heavy denunciations. It is bad enough to be led away captive by open sin, and to serve divers lusts and pleasures. But it is even worse to pretend to have a religion, while in reality we serve the world. Let us beware of falling into this abominable sin. Whatever we do in religion, let us never wear a cloak. Let us be real, honest, thorough, and sincere in our Christianity. We cannot deceive an all-seeing God. We may take in poor short-sighted man by a little talk and profession, and a few cant phrases, and an affectation of devoutness. But God is not mocked. He is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. His all-seeing eye pierces through the paint, and varnish, and tinsel, which cover the unsound heart. The day of judgment will soon be here. The “joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.” (Job xx. 5.) His end will be shame and everlasting contempt.

One thing, however, must never be forgotten in connection with the subject of hypocrisy. Let us not flatter ourselves, because some make a false profession of religion, that others need not make any profession at all. This is a common delusion, and one against which we must carefully guard. It does not follow, because some bring Christianity into contempt by professing what they do not really believe and feel, that we should

run into the other extreme, and bring it into contempt by a cowardly silence and by keeping our religion out of sight. Let us rather be doubly careful to adorn our doctrine by our lives. Let us prove our sincerity by the consistency of our conversation. Let us show the world that there is true coin, as well as counterfeit coin, and that the visible church contains Christians who can witness a good confession, as well as Pharisees and Scribes. Let us confess our Master modestly and humbly, but firmly and decidedly, and show the world that although some men may be hypocrites, there are others who are honest and true.

Let us learn, in the last place, from these verses, *how pleasing to Christ is self-denying liberality in giving*. This is a lesson which is taught us in a striking manner, by our Lord's commendation of a certain poor widow. We are told that He "beheld how the people cast in" their voluntary contributions for God's service into the public collecting box or "treasury." He saw "many that were rich casting in much." At last he saw this poor widow cast in all that she had for her daily maintenance. And then we hear Him pronounce the solemn words, "This poor woman hath cast more in than they all,"—more in the sight of Him who looks not merely at the amount given, but at the ability of the giver,—not merely at the quantity contributed, but at the motive and heart of the contributor.

There are few of our Lord's sayings so much overlooked as this. There are thousands who remember all His doctrinal discourses, and yet contrive to forget this little incident in His earthly ministry. The proof of this is to be seen in the meagre and sparing contributions which are yearly made by Christ's church to do good in the world. The proof is to be seen in the miserably small incomes of all the missionary societies, in proportion to the wealth of the churches. The proof is to be seen in the long annual lists of self-complacent guinea subscribers, of whom many could easily give hundreds of pounds. The stinginess of professing Christians in all matters which concern God and religion, is one of the crying sins of the day, and one of the worst signs of the times. The givers to Christ's cause are but a small section of the visible church. Not one baptized person in twenty, probably, knows anything of being "rich towards God." (Luke xii. 21.) The vast majority spend pounds on themselves, and give not even pence to Christ.

Let us mourn over this state of things, and pray God to amend it. Let us pray Him to open men's eyes, and awake men's hearts, and stir up a spirit of liberality. Above all, let us each do our own duty, and give liberally and gladly to every Christian object, while we can. There will be no giving when we are dead. Let us give as those who remember that the eyes of Christ are upon us. He still sees exactly what each gives, and

knows exactly how much is left behind. Above all, let us give as the disciples of a crucified Saviour, who gave Himself, for us, body and soul, on the cross. Freely we have received. Let us freely give.⁴

It may be well to remark in this connection, that nothing can be more absurd than to say, as some do, that they contribute “their mite” to an object, when they probably contribute some trifling sum which they do not miss, and which bears not the most remote proportion to the widow’s scale of liberality.—A man contributes “his mite” when he contributes half his daily income, and not till then.

⁴ It is probable, according to Arias Montanus and Brenius, that the words “all her living,” mean “all her daily income,” and not all her property.