

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And many Explanatory Notes.

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ST. MARK.

IPSWICH:

WILLIAM HUNT, STEAM PRESS, TAVERN STREET.

LONDON:

WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, & HUNT, 24, PATERNOSTER ROW;

23, HOLLES STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

MDCCCLIX.

MARK VII. 1-13.

1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the Scribes, which came from Jerusalem.

2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen hands, they found fault.

3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

4 And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables.

5 Then the Pharisees and Scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me.

7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions.

10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is* Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free.*

12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;

13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

THIS passage contains a humbling picture of what human nature is capable of doing in religion. It is one of those Scriptures which ought to be frequently and diligently studied by all who desire the prosperity of the Church of Christ.

The first thing, which demands our attention in these verses, is *the low and degraded condition of Jewish religion, when our Lord was upon earth*. What can be more deplorable than the statement now before us? We find the principal teachers of the Jewish nation finding fault, "because our Lord's disciples ate bread with unwashen hands!" We are told that they attached great importance to the "washing of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and tables!" In short, the man who paid most rigid attention to mere external observances of human invention was reckoned the holiest man!

The nation, be it remembered, in which this state of things existed, was the most highly favoured in the world. To it was given the law on Mount Sinai, the service of God, the priest-hood, the covenants, and the promises. Moses, and Samuel, and David, and the prophets, lived and died among its people. No nation upon earth ever had so many spiritual privileges. No nation ever misused its privileges so fearfully, and so thoroughly forsook its own mercies. Never did fine gold become so dim! From the religion of the books of Deuteronomy and Psalms, to the religion of washing hands, and pots, and cups, how great was the fall! No wonder that in the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, He found the

people like sheep without a shepherd. External observances alone feed no consciences and sanctify no hearts.

Let the history of the Jewish church be a warning to us never to trifle with false doctrine. If we once tolerate it we never know how far it may go, or into what degraded state of religion we may at last fall. Once leave the King's highway of truth, and we may end with washing pots and cups, like Pharisees and Scribes. There is nothing too mean, trifling, or irrational for a man, if he once turns his back on God's word. There are branches of the Church of Christ at this day in which the Scriptures are never read, and the Gospel never preached,—branches in which the only religion now remaining consists in using a few unmeaning forms and keeping certain man-made fasts and feasts,—branches which began well, like the Jewish church, and like the Jewish church, have now fallen into utter barrenness and decay. We can never be too jealous about false doctrine. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Let us earnestly contend for the whole faith once delivered to the saints.¹

The second thing, that demands our attention, is *the uselessness of mere lip-service in the worship of God*. Our Lord enforces this lesson by a quotation from the Old Testament: "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

The heart is the part of man which God chiefly notices in religion. The bowed head, and the bended knee,—the grave face and the rigid posture,—the regular response, and the formal amen,—all these together do not make up a spiritual worshipper. The eyes of God look further and deeper. He requires the worship of the heart. "My son," He says to every one of us, "Give me thy heart."

Let us remember this in the public congregation. It must not content us to take our bodies to Church, if we leave our hearts at home. The eye of man may detect no flaw in our service. Our minister may look at us with approbation. Our neighbours may think us patterns of what a Chris-

¹ Absurd and ridiculous as the customs and traditions of the Pharisees appear at first sight, it is a humbling fact that the Pharisees have never wanted imitators and successors. Zeal about washing pots and cups, and tables, may seem almost ludicrous, and worthy of none but children; but we need not look far to find an exact parallel near home. What can we say to the gravity and seriousness with which men argue on behalf of chasubles, albs, tunics, piscinas, sedilia, credence-tables, rood-screens, and the like, in the present day?—What can we say to the exaggerated attention paid by many to ceremonies, ornaments, gestures, and postures, in the worship of God, about which it is enough to say that Scripture is totally silent?—What is it all but Pharisaism over again? What is it but a melancholy repetition of disproportioned zeal about men's traditional usages? What single argument can be used in defence of these things that the Pharisees might not have used with equal force? Eighteen hundred years have passed away, and yet the generation that made so much ado about washing pots, cups, and tables, is still amongst us. The succession of the Pharisees has never ceased.

tian ought to be. Our voice may be heard foremost in the praise and prayer. But it is all worse than nothing in God's sight, if our hearts are far away. It is only wood, hay, and stubble before Him who discerns thoughts, and reads the secrets of the inward man.

Let us remember this in our private devotions. It must not satisfy us to say good words, if our heart and our lips do not go together. What does it profit us to be fluent and lengthy, if our imaginations are roving far away, while we are upon our knees?—It profits us nothing at all. God sees what we are about, and rejects our offering. Heart-prayers are the prayers He loves to hear. Heart-prayers are the only prayers that He will answer. Our petitions may be weak, and stammering, and mean in our eyes. They may be presented with no fine words, or well-chosen language, and might seem almost unintelligible, if they were written down. But if they come from a right heart, God understands them. Such prayers are His delight.

The last thing that demands our attention in these verses, is *the tendency of man's inventions in religion to supplant God's word*. Three times we find this charge brought forward by our Lord against the Pharisees. "Laying aside the commandments of God, ye hold the traditions of men."—"Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions."—"Making the Word of God of none effect through your traditions."—The first step of the Pharisees, was to add their traditions to the Scriptures, as useful supplements. The second was to place them on a level with the Word of God, and give them equal authority. The last was to honour them above the Scripture, and to degrade Scripture from its lawful position. This was the state of things which our Lord found when He was upon earth. Practically, the traditions of man were everything, and the Word of God was nothing at all. Obedience to the traditions constituted true religion. Obedience to the Scriptures was lost sight of altogether.

It is a mournful fact, that Christians have far too often walked in the steps of Pharisees in this matter. The very same process has taken place over and over again. The very same consequences have resulted. Religious observances of man's invention, have been pressed on the acceptance of Christians,—observances to all appearance useful, and at all events well-meant, but observances nowhere commanded in the word of God. These very observances have by and bye been enjoined with more vigour than God's own commandments, and defended with more zeal than the authority of God's own word. We need not look far for examples. The history of our own church will supply them.²

² The persecution of the Puritans in the time of the Stewarts, on account of canons and rubrics was, in too many cases, neither more nor less than zeal for traditions. An

Let us beware of attempting to add anything to the word of God, as necessary to salvation. It provokes God to give us over to judicial blindness. It is as good as saying that His Bible is not perfect, and that we know better than He does what is necessary for man's salvation. It is just as easy to destroy the authority of God's word by addition as by subtraction, by burying it under man's inventions as by denying its truth. The whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, must be our rule of faith,—nothing added and nothing taken away.

Finally, let us draw a broad line of distinction between those things in religion which have been devised by man, and those which are plainly commanded in God's word. What God commands is necessary to salvation. What man commands is not. What man devises may be useful and expedient for the times; but salvation does not hinge on obedience to it. What God requires is essential to life eternal. He that wilfully disobeys it ruins his own soul.³

enormous amount of zeal was expended in enforcing conformity to the Church of England, while drunkenness, swearing, and open sin were comparatively let alone. Obedience to man-made ecclesiastical rules was required, on pain of fine or imprisonment, while open disobedience to God's ten commandments was overlooked. Experience supplies painful proof, that traditions once called into being are first called *useful*. Then they become *necessary*. At last they are too often made *idols*, and all must bow down to them, or be punished.

³ The subtle way in which the Pharisees evaded the requirements of the fifth commandment, to which our Lord refers in this passage, calls for a few words of explanation.

We must remember that the Pharisees did not openly deny the obligation of the fifth commandment. In all probability they professed to attach as much importance to it as any men. And yet they contrived to make it void! How did they effect this?

They taught that a man might dedicate to God's service, as sacred, any part of his property which might be applied to the relief of his parents, and so discharge himself from any further expense about them. He had only to say that all his money was "corban,"—that is, given over to holy purposes,—and no further claim could be made upon him for his father's or mother's support. Under pretence of giving God a prior claim, he set himself free from the burden of maintaining them for ever. He did not flatly deny his duty to minister of his worldly substance to his parents' necessities. But he evaded it by setting up a human tradition, and asserting a higher call of duty, even duty to God.

The likeness between the traditions and sophistries of the Pharisees, making void God's word under a pretended zeal for God's glory, and those of the Jesuits, and other advocates of the Roman Catholic Church, is painfully striking. The following passage from an old commentator is worth reading:

"The Scriptures teach that there is no difference to be put between meats, in regard of holiness, but that every creature of God is good. This the Papists make void by teaching that it is matter of religion and conscience to abstain from flesh meats at certain seasons.—The Scripture teacheth that we should pray to God alone. This they make void by their manifold prayers to saints departed.—The Scripture teacheth Christ alone to be our mediator, both of redemption and intercession. This they make void by making saints intercessors.—The Scripture teacheth Christ to be the only head of the church. This they abrogate by their doctrine of the Pope's supremacy.—The Scripture teacheth that every soul should be subject to the higher power. This they abrogate by exempting the Pope and popish clergy from subjection to the civil power of princes and magistrates.—Lastly, to instance in the same kind as our Saviour here against the Phar-

isees, whereas the word of God commands children to honour their parents, the Papists teach that if the child have vowed a monastical life, he is exempted from duty to *parents*.”—*Petter on St. Mark*.

MARK VII. 14–23.

14 And when he had called all the people <i>unto him</i> , he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one <i>of you</i> , and understand:	without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;
15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.	19 Because it entereth not into his heart but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?
16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.	20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.
17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.	21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders,
18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from	22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
	23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

WE see in the beginning of this passage, *how slow of understanding men are in spiritual things*. “Hearken,” says our Lord to the people, “hearken unto me every one of you and understand.”—“Are ye so without understanding?” He says to His disciples,—“Do ye not perceive?”

The corruption of human nature is an universal disease. It affects not only a man’s heart, will, and conscience, but his mind, memory, and understanding. The very same person, who is quick and clever in worldly things, will often utterly fail to comprehend the simplest truths of Christianity. He will often be unable to take in the plainest reasonings of the Gospel. He will see no meaning in the clearest statements of evangelical doctrine. They will sound to him either foolish or mysterious. He will listen to them like one listening to a foreign language, catching a word here and there, but not seeing the drift of the whole. “The world by wisdom knows not God.” (1 Cor. i. 21.) It hears, but does not understand.

We must pray daily for the teaching of the Holy Ghost, if we would make progress in the knowledge of divine things. Without Him, the mightiest intellect and the strongest reasoning powers will carry us but a little way. In reading the Bible and hearing sermons, everything depends on the spirit in which we read and hear. A humble, teachable, child-like frame of mind is the grand secret of success. Happy is he who often says with David, “Teach me thy statutes.” (Psalm cxix. 64.) Such an one will understand as well as hear.

We see, in the second place, from this passage, *that the heart is the chief source of defilement and impurity in God’s sight*. Moral purity does not depend on washing or not washing,—touching things or not touching them,—eating things or not eating them, as the Scribes and Pharisees taught. “There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, these are they that defile the man.”

There is a deep truth in these words which is frequently overlooked. Our original sinfulness and natural inclination to evil are seldom sufficiently considered. The wickedness of men is often attributed to bad examples, bad company, peculiar temptations, or the snares of the devil. It seems forgotten that every man carries within him a fountain of wickedness. We need no bad company to teach us, and no devil to tempt us, in order to run into sin. We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.

We ought to remember this in the training and education of children. In all our management we must never forget, that the seeds of all mischief and wickedness are in their hearts. It is not enough to keep boys and girls at home, and shut out every outward temptation. They carry within them a heart ready for any sin, and until that heart is changed they are not safe, whatever we do. When children do wrong, it is a common practice to lay all the blame on bad companions. But it is mere ignorance, blindness, and foolishness to do so. Bad companions are a great evil no doubt, and an evil to be avoided as much as possible. But no bad companion teaches a boy or girl half as much sin as their own hearts will suggest to them, unless they are renewed by the Spirit. The beginning of all wickedness is within. If parents were half as diligent in praying for their children's conversion, as they are in keeping them from bad company, their children would turn out far better than they do.⁴

We see, in the last place, from this passage, *what a black catalogue of evils the human heart contains*. "Out of the heart of men," says our Lord, "proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within."

Let us distinctly understand, when we read these words, that our Lord is speaking of the human heart generally. He is not speaking only of the notorious profligate, or the prisoner in the jail. He is speaking of all mankind. All of us, whether high or low, rich or poor, masters or servants, old or young, learned or unlearned,—all of us have by nature such a heart as Jesus here describes. The seeds of all the evils here mentioned lie hid within us all. They may lie dormant all our lives. They may be

⁴ The common arguments against "public school" education, appear to me based on forgetfulness of our Lord's teaching about the heart. Unquestionably there are many evils in "public schools," however carefully conducted. It must needs be so. We must expect it. But it is no less true that there are great dangers in private education, and dangers in their kind quite as formidable as any which beset a boy at public school. Of course no universal rule can be laid down. Regard must be had to individual character and temperament. But to suppose, as some seem to do, that boys educated at public schools must turn out ill, and boys educated at home must turn out well, is surely not wise. It is forgetting our Lord's doctrine, that the heart is the principal source of evil. Without a change of heart a boy may be kept at home, and yet learn all manner of sin.

kept down by the fear of consequences,—the restraint of public opinion,—the dread of discovery, —the desire to be thought respectable,—and, above all, by the almighty grace of God. But every man has within him the root of every sin.

How humble we ought to be, when we read these verses? “We are all as an unclean thing “in God’s sight. (Isai. lxiv. 6.) He sees in each one of us countless evils, which the world never sees at all, for He reads our hearts. Surely of all sins to which we are liable, self-righteousness is the most unreasonable and unbecoming.

How thankful we ought to be for the Gospel, when we read these verses! That Gospel contains a complete provision for all the wants of our poor defiled natures. The blood of Christ can “cleanse us from all sin.” The Holy Ghost can change even our sinful hearts, and keep them clean, when changed. The man that does not glory in the Gospel, can surely know little of the plague that is within him.

How watchful we ought to be, when we remember these verses! What a careful guard we ought to keep over our imaginations, our tongues, and our daily behaviour! At the head of the black list of our heart’s contents, stand “evil thoughts.” Let us never forget that. Thoughts are the parents of words and deeds. Let us pray daily for grace to keep our *thoughts* in order, and let us cry earnestly and fervently, “lead us not into temptation.”

MARK VII. 24–30.

24 And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.

25 For a *certain* woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet:

26 The woman was a Greek, a Syro-phenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

27 But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to

take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.

28 And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.

29 And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.

30 And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.

WE know nothing of the woman, who is here mentioned, beyond the facts that we here read. Her name, her former history, the way in which she was led to seek our Lord, though a Gentile, and dwelling in the borders of Tyre and Sidon,—all these things are hidden from us. But the few facts that are related about this woman are full of precious instruction. Let us observe them, and learn wisdom.

In the first place, *this passage is meant to encourage us to pray for others*. The woman who came to our Lord, in the history now before us, must doubtless have been in deep affliction. She saw a beloved child possessed by an unclean spirit. She saw her in a condition in which no teaching could reach the mind, and no medicine could heal the body,—a condition only one degree better than death itself. She hears of Jesus, and beseeches Him to “cast forth the devil out of her daughter.” She prays for one who could not pray for herself, and never rests till her prayer is granted. By prayer she obtains the cure which no human means could obtain. Through the prayer of the mother, the daughter is healed. On her own behalf that daughter did not speak a word; but her mother spoke for her to the Lord, and did not speak in vain. Hopeless and desperate as her case appeared, she had a praying mother, and where there is a praying mother there is always hope.

The truth here taught is one of deep importance. The case here recorded is one that does not stand alone. Few duties are so strongly recommended by Scriptural example, as the duty of intercessory prayer. There is a long catalogue of instances in Scripture, which show the benefits that may be conferred on others by praying for them. The nobleman's son at Capernaum,—the centurion's servant, the daughter of Jairus, are all striking examples. Wonderful as it may seem, God is pleased to do great things for souls, when friends and relations are moved to pray for them. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James v. 16.)

Fathers and mothers are especially bound to remember the case of this woman. They cannot give their children new hearts. They can give them Christian education, and show them the way of life; but they cannot give them a will to choose Christ's service, and a mind to love God. Yet there is one thing they can always do;—they can pray for them. They can pray for the conversion of profligate sons, who will have their own way, and run greedily into sin. They can pray for the conversion of worldly daughters, who set their affections on things below, and love pleasure more than God. Such prayers are heard on high. Such prayers will often bring down blessings. Never, never let us forget that the children for whom many prayers have been offered, seldom finally perish. Let us pray more for our sons and daughters. Even when they will not let us speak to them about religion, they cannot prevent us speaking for them to God.

In the second place, *this passage is meant to teach us to persevere in praying for others.* The woman whose history we are now reading, appeared at first to obtain nothing by her application to our Lord. On the contrary, our Lord's reply was discouraging. Yet she did not give up in despair. She prayed on, and did not faint. She pressed her suit with ingenious arguments. She would take no refusal. She pleaded for a few "crumbs" of mercy, rather than none at all. And through this holy importunity she succeeded. She heard at last these joyful words: "For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter."

Perseverance in prayer is a point of great moment. Our hearts are apt to become cool and indifferent, and to think that it is no use to draw near to God. Our hands soon hang down, and our knees wax faint. Satan is ever labouring to draw us off from our prayers, and filling our minds with reasons why we may give them up.—These things are true with respect to all prayers, but they are especially true with respect to intercessory prayer. It is always far more meagre than it ought to be. It is often attempted for a little season, and then left off. We see no immediate answer to our prayers. We see the persons for whose souls we pray, going on still in sin. We draw the conclusion that it is useless to pray for them, and allow our intercession to come to an end.

In order to arm our minds with arguments for perseverance in intercessory prayer, let us often study the case of this woman. Let us remember how she prayed on and did not faint, in the face of great discouragement. Let us mark how at last she went home rejoicing, and let us resolve, by God's grace, to follow her example.

Do we know what it is to pray for ourselves? This, after all, is the first question for self-inquiry. The man who never speaks to God about his own soul, can know nothing of praying for others. He is as yet Godless,

Christless, and hopeless, and has to learn the very rudiments of religion. Let him awake, and call upon God.

But do we pray for ourselves? Then let us take heed that we pray for others also. Let us beware of selfish prayers, prayers which are wholly taken up with our own affairs, and in which there is no place for other souls beside our own. Let us name all whom we love before God continually. Let us pray for all,—the worst, the hardest, and the most unbelieving. Let us continue praying for them year after year, in spite of their continued unbelief. God's time of mercy may be a distant one. Our eyes may not see an answer to our intercessions. The answer may not come for ten, fifteen, or twenty years. It may not come till we have exchanged prayer for praise, and are far away from this world. But while we live, let us pray for others. It is the greatest kindness we can do to anyone, to speak for him to our Lord Jesus Christ. The day of judgment will show that one of the greatest links in drawing some souls to God, has been the intercessory prayer of friends.

MARK VII. 31–37.

31 And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.

32 And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.

33 And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;

34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.

35 And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

36 And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published *it*;

37 And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

THE first thing that demands our notice in these verses, is *the mighty miracle which is here recorded*. We read that they brought unto our Lord “one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech,” and besought him that He would “put His hand upon Him.” At once the petition is granted, and the cure is wrought. Speech and hearing are instantaneously given to the man by a word and a touch. “Straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”

We see but half the instruction of this passage, if we only regard it as an example of our Lord’s divine power. It is such an example, beyond doubt, but it is something more than that. We must look further, deeper, and lower than the surface, and we shall find in the passage precious spiritual truths.

Here we are meant to see our Lord’s power to heal the spiritually deaf. He can give the chief of sinners a hearing ear. He can make him delight in listening to the very Gospel which he once ridiculed and despised.

Here also we are meant to see our Lord’s power to heal the spiritually dumb. He can teach the hardest of transgressors to call upon God. He can put a new song in the mouth of him whose talk was once only of this world. He can make the vilest of men speak of spiritual things, and testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

When Jesus pours forth His Spirit, nothing is impossible. We must never despair of others. We must never regard our own hearts as too bad to be changed. He that healed the deaf and dumb still lives. The cases which moral philosophy pronounces hopeless, are not incurable if they are brought to Christ.

The second thing which demands our notice in these verses, is *the peculiar manner in which our Lord thought good to work the miracle here recorded*. We are told that when the deaf and dumb person was brought to Jesus, “He took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into

his ears, and he spit and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed,”—and then, and not till then, came the words of commanding power, “Ephphatha, that is, be opened.”

There is undoubtedly much that is mysterious in these actions. We know not why they were used. It would have been as easy to our Lord to speak the word, and command health to return at once, as to do what He here did. His reasons for the course He adopted are not recorded. We only know that the result was the same as on other occasions;—the man was cured.

But there is one simple lesson to be learned from our Lord’s conduct on this occasion. That lesson is, that Christ was not tied to the use of any one means in doing His works among men. Sometimes He thought fit to work in one way, sometimes in another. His enemies were never able to say, that unless He employed certain invariable agency He could not work at all.

We see the same thing going on still in the Church of Christ. We see continual proof that the Lord is not tied to the use of any one means exclusively in conveying grace to the soul. Sometimes He is pleased to work by the word preached publicly, sometimes by the word read privately. Sometimes He awakens people by sickness and affliction, sometimes by the rebukes or counsel of friends. Sometimes He employs means of grace to turn people out of the way of sin. Sometimes He arrests their attention by some providence, without any means of grace at all. He will not have any means of grace made an idol and exalted, to the disparagement of other means. He will not have any means despised as useless, and neglected as of no value. All are good and valuable. All are in their turn employed for the same great end, the conversion of souls. All are in the hands of Him who “giveth not account of His matters,” and knows best which to use, in each separate case that He heals.

The last thing which demands our notice in these verses, is *the remarkable testimony which was borne by those who saw the miracle here recorded*. They said of our Lord, “He hath done all things well!”

It is more than probable that those who said these words were little sensible of their full meaning, when applied to Christ. Like Caiaphas, they “spoke not of themselves.” (John xi. 51.) But the truth to which they gave utterance is full of deep and unspeakable comfort, and ought to be daily remembered by all true Christians.

Let us remember it as we look back over the days past of our lives, from the hour of our conversion. “Our Lord hath done all things well.” In first bringing us out of darkness into marvellous light,—in humbling us and teaching us our weakness, guilt, and folly,—in stripping us of our idols, and choosing all our portions,—in placing us where we are, and

giving us what we have,—how well everything has been done! How great the mercy that we have not had our own way!

Let us remember it as we look forward to the days yet to come. We know not what they may be, bright or dark, many or few. But we know that we are in the hands of Him who “doeth all things well.” He will not err in any of his dealings with us. He will take away and give,—He will afflict and bereave,—He will move and He will settle, with perfect wisdom, at the right time, in the right way. The great Shepherd of the sheep makes no mistakes. He leads every lamb of His flock by the right way to the city of habitation.

We shall never see the full beauty of these words till the resurrection morning. We shall then look back over our lives, and know the meaning of everything that happened from first to last. We shall remember all the way by which we were led, and confess that all was “well done.” The why and the wherefore, the causes and the reasons of everything which now perplexes, will be clear and plain as the sun at noon-day. We shall wonder at our own past blindness, and marvel that we could ever have doubted our Lord’s love. “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known.”⁵ (1 Cor. xiii. 13.)

⁵ The reason why our Lord made use of the previous actions recorded in this miracle,—spitting, looking up to heaven., and sighing,—is a question that has often perplexed commentators. Some observations of Luther, quoted by Stier, are worth reading:

“This sigh was not drawn from Christ on account of the single tongue and ear of this poor man; but it is a common sigh over all tongues and ears, yea over all hearts, bodies, and souls, and over all men from Adam to his last descendant.”

“Our beloved Lord saw well what an amount of suffering and sorrow would be occasioned by tongues and ears. For the greatest mischief which has been inflicted on Christianity, has not arisen from tyrants, (with persecution, murder, and pride against the word,) but from that little bit of flesh which abides between the jaws. This it is that inflicts the greatest injury upon the kingdom of God.”