

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS  
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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ST. MATTHEW.

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## MATTHEW XII. 1–13.

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

6 But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple.

7 But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

10 And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out?

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

The one great subject which stands out prominently in this passage of Scripture, is the Sabbath day. It is a subject on which strange opinions prevailed among the Jews in our Lord's time. The Pharisees had added to the teaching of Scripture about it, and overlaid the true character of the day with the traditions of men.—It is a subject on which divers opinions have often been held in the Churches of Christ, and wide differences exist among men at the present time. Let us see what we may learn about it from our Lord's teaching in these verses.

Let us learn, in the first place, from this passage, that *our Lord Jesus Christ does not do away with the observance of a weekly Sabbath day*. He neither does so here nor elsewhere in the four Gospels. We often find His opinion expressed about Jewish errors on the subject of the Sabbath; but we do not find a word to teach us that His disciples were not to keep a Sabbath at all.

It is of much importance to observe this. The mistakes that have arisen from a superficial consideration of our Lord's sayings on the Sabbath question, are neither few nor small; thousands have rushed to the hasty conclusion that Christians have nothing to do with the fourth commandment, and that it is no more binding on us than the Mosaic law about sacrifices. There is nothing in the New Testament to justify any such conclusion.

The plain truth is that our Lord did not abolish the law of the weekly Sabbath. He only freed it from incorrect interpretations, and purified it from man-made additions. He did not tear out of the decalogue the fourth commandment. He only stripped off the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had incrustated the day, and by which they had made it, not a blessing, but a burden. He left the fourth commandment where He found it, —a part of the eternal law of God, of which no jot or tittle was ever to pass away. May we never forget this!

Let us learn, in the second place, from this passage, that *our Lord Jesus Christ allows all works of real necessity and mercy to be done on the Sabbath day.*

This is a principle which is abundantly established in the passage of Scripture we are now considering. We find our Lord justifying His disciples for plucking the ears of corn on a Sabbath: it was an act permitted in Scripture. (Deut. xxiii. 25.) They “were an hungered,” and in need of food, therefore they were not to blame.—We find Him maintaining the lawfulness of healing a sick man on the Sabbath day. The man was suffering from disease and pain. In such a case it was no breach of God’s commandment to afford relief. We ought never to rest from doing good.

The arguments by which our Lord supports the lawfulness of any work of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath, are striking and unanswerable. He reminds the Pharisees, who charge Him and His disciples with breaking the law, how David and his men, for want of other food, had eaten the holy shew-bread out of the tabernacle.—He reminds them how the priests in the temple are obliged to do work on the Sabbath, by slaying animals and offering sacrifices.—He reminds them how even a sheep would be helped out of a pit on the Sabbath, rather than allowed to suffer and die, by any one of themselves.—Above all, He lays down the great principle that no ordinance of God is to be pressed so far as to make us neglect the plain duties of charity. “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” The first table of the law is not to be so interpreted as to make us break the second. The fourth commandment is not to be so explained as to make us unkind and unmerciful to our neighbour. There is deep wisdom in all this. We are reminded of the saying, “Never man spake like this man.”

In leaving the subject, let us beware that we are never tempted to take low views of the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath. Let us take care that we do not make our gracious Lord’s teaching an excuse for Sabbath profanation. Let us not abuse the liberty which He has so clearly marked out for us,

and pretend that we do things on the Sabbath from “necessity and mercy,” which in reality we do for our own selfish gratification.

There is great reason for warning people on this point. The mistakes of the Pharisee about the Sabbath were in one direction; the mistakes of the Christian are in another. The Pharisee pretended to add to the holiness of the day; the Christian is too often disposed to take away from that holiness, and to keep the day in an idle, profane, irreverent manner. May we all watch our own conduct on this subject! Saving Christianity is closely bound up with Sabbath observance. May we never forget that our great aim should be to “keep the Sabbath *holy!*” Works of necessity may be done: “It is lawful to do well,” and show mercy; but to give the Sabbath to idleness, pleasure-seeking, or the world, is utterly unlawful. It is contrary to the example of Christ, and a sin against a plain commandment of God.

MATTHEW XII. 14–21.

14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

15 But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

16 And charged them that they should not make him known:

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen: my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

The first thing which demands our notice in this passage, is *the desperate wickedness of the human heart*, which it exemplifies. Silenced and defeated by our Lord's arguments, the Pharisees plunged deeper and deeper into sin. They "went out and held a council against Him how they might destroy Him."

What evil had our Lord done, that He should be so treated? None, none at all. No charge could be brought against His life. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. His days were spent in doing good.—No charge could be brought against His teaching. He had proved it to be agreeable to Scripture and reason, and no reply had been made to His proofs. But it mattered little how perfectly He lived or taught: He was hated.

This is human nature appearing in its true colours! The unconverted heart hates God, and will show its hatred whenever it dares, and has a favourable opportunity. It will persecute God's witnesses. It will dislike all who have anything of God's mind, and are renewed after His image. Why were so many of the prophets killed? Why were the names of the apostles cast out as evil by the Jews? Why were the early martyrs slain? Why were John Huss, and Jerome of Prague, and Ridley, and Latimer burned at the stake? Not for any sins that they had sinned,—not for any wickedness they had committed. They all suffered because they were godly men. And human nature, unconverted, hates godly men, because it hates God.

It must never surprise true Christians if they meet with the same treatment that the Lord Jesus met with. "Marvel not if the world hates you." (1 John iii. 13.) It is not the utmost consistency, or the closest walk with God, that will exempt them from the enmity of the natural man. They need not torture their consciences by fancying that if they were only more faultless and consistent, everybody would surely love them: it is all a mistake. They should remember, that there was never but one perfect man on earth, and that He was not loved, but hated. It is not the infirmities of a believer that

the world dislikes, but his godliness. It is not the remains of the old nature that call forth the world's enmity, but the exhibition of the new. Let us remember these things, and be patient. The world hated Christ, and the world will hate Christians.

The second thing which demands our notice in this passage, is *the encouraging description of our Lord Jesus Christ's character*, which St. Matthew draws from the prophet Isaiah. "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench."

What are we to understand by the bruised reed, and smoking flax? The language of the prophet no doubt is figurative. What is it that these two expressions mean? The simplest explanation seems to be, that the Holy Ghost is here describing persons whose grace is at present weak, whose repentance is feeble, and whose faith is small. Towards such persons the Lord Jesus Christ will be very tender and compassionate. Weak as the bruised reed is, it shall not be broken; small as the spark of fire may be within the smoking flax, it shall not be quenched. It is a standing truth in the kingdom of grace, that weak grace, weak faith, and weak repentance, are all precious in our Lord's sight. Mighty as He is, "He despiseth not any." (Job xxxvi. 5.)

The doctrine here laid down is full of comfort and consolation. There are thousands in every Church of Christ to whom it ought to speak peace and hope. There are some in every congregation that hear the Gospel, who are ready to despair of their own salvation, because their strength seems so small. They are full of fears and despondency, because their knowledge, and faith, and hope, and love, appear so dwarfish and diminutive. Let them drink comfort out of this text; let them know that weak faith gives a man as real and true an interest in Christ as strong faith, though it may not give him the same joy. There is life in an infant as truly as in a grown-up man; there is fire in a spark as truly as in a burning flame. The least degree of grace is an everlasting possession. It comes down from heaven. It is precious in our Lord's eyes. It shall never be overthrown.

Does Satan make light of the beginnings of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? No, indeed, he does not! He has great wrath, because he sees his time is short.—Do the angels of God think lightly of the first signs of penitence and feeling after God in Christ? No, indeed, "there is joy" among them, when they behold the sight! Does the Lord Jesus regard no faith and repentance with interest, unless they are strong and mighty? No, indeed! As soon as that "bruised reed," Saul of Tarsus, begins to cry to Him, He sends Ananias to him, saying, "Behold he prayeth." (Acts ix. 11.) We err greatly if we do not encourage the very first movements of a

soul towards Christ. Let the ignorant world scoff and mock, if it will. We may be sure that “bruised reeds” and “smoking flax” are very precious in our Lord’s eyes.

May we all lay these things to heart, and use them in time of need, both for ourselves and others! It should be a standing maxim in our religion,—that a spark is better than utter darkness; and little faith better than no faith at all. “Who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zech. iv. 10.) It is not despised by Christ. It ought not to be despised by Christians.

MATTHEW XII. 22–37.

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

24 But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy Ghost* shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit.

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

This passage of Scripture contains “things hard to be understood.” The sin against the Holy Ghost in particular has never been fully explained by the most learned divines. It is not difficult to show from Scripture what the sin is not. It is difficult to show clearly what it is. We must not be surprised. The Bible would not be the book of God, if it had not deep places here and there, which man has no line to fathom. Let us rather thank God that there are lessons of wisdom to be gathered, even out of these verses, which the unlearned may easily understand.

Let us gather from them, in the first place, that there is *nothing too blasphemous for hardened and prejudiced men to say against religion*. Our Lord casts out a devil; and at once the Pharisees declare that He does it “by the prince of the devils.”

This was an absurd charge. Our Lord shows that it was unreasonable to suppose that the devil would help to pull down his own kingdom, and “Satan cast out Satan.” But there is nothing too absurd and unreasonable for

men to say, when they are thoroughly set against religion. The Pharisees are not the only people who have lost sight of logic, good sense, and temper, when they have attacked the Gospel of Christ.

Strange as this charge may sound, it is one that has often been made against the servants of God. Their enemies have been obliged to confess that they are doing a work, and producing an effect on the world. The results of Christian labour stare them in the face: they cannot deny them. What then shall they say? They say the very thing that the Pharisees said of our Lord, "It is the devil." The early heretics used language of this kind about Athanasius: the Roman Catholics spread reports of this sort about Martin Luther. Such things will be said as long as the world stands.

We must never be surprised to hear of dreadful charges being made against the best of men, without cause. "If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?"—It is an old device. When the Christian's arguments cannot be answered, and the Christian's works cannot be denied, the last resource of the wicked is to try to blacken the Christian's character. If this be our lot, let us bear it patiently: having Christ and a good conscience, we may be content; false charges will not keep us out of heaven. Our character will be cleared at the last day.

In the second place, let us gather from these verses *the impossibility of neutrality in religion*. "He that is not with Christ is against Him, and he that gathereth not with Him, scattereth abroad."

There are many persons in every age of the Church, who need to have this lesson pressed upon them. They endeavour to steer a middle course in religion. They are not so bad as many sinners, but still they are not saints. They feel the truth of Christ's Gospel, when it is brought before them, but they are afraid to confess what they feel. Because they have these feelings, they flatter themselves they are not so bad as others, and yet they shrink from the standard of faith and practice which the Lord Jesus sets up. They are not boldly fighting on Christ's side, and yet they are not openly against Him. Our Lord warns all such that they are in a dangerous position. There are only two parties in religious matters: there are only two camps: there are only two sides. Are we with Christ, and working in His cause?

If not, we are against Him. Are we doing good in the world? If not, we are doing harm.

The principle here laid down is one which it concerns us all to remember. Let us settle it in our minds that we shall never have peace and do good to others unless we are thorough-going and decided in our Christianity. The

way of Gamaliel never yet brought happiness and usefulness to anyone, and never will.

In the third place, let us gather from these verses *the exceeding sinfulness of sins against knowledge*.

This is a practical conclusion which appears to flow naturally from our Lord's words about the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Difficult as these words undoubtedly are, they seem fairly to prove that there are degrees in sin. Offences arising from ignorance of the true mission of the Son of man, will not be punished so heavily as offences committed against the noontide light of the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. The brighter the light, the greater the guilt of him who rejects it. The clearer a man's knowledge of the nature of the Gospel, the greater his sin, if he wilfully refuses to repent and believe.

The doctrine here taught is one that does not stand alone in Scripture. St. Paul says to the Hebrews, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance;" "If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment." (Heb. vi. 4-6; x. 26, 27.) It is a doctrine of which we find mournful proofs in every quarter. The unconverted children of godly parents, the unconverted servants of godly families, and the unconverted members of evangelical congregations, are the hardest people on earth to impress. They seem past feeling. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay.—It is a doctrine, moreover, which receives awful confirmation from the histories of some whose last ends were eminently hopeless. Pharaoh, and Saul, and Ahab, and Judas Iscariot, and Julian, and Francis Spira, are fearful illustrations of our Lord's meaning. In each of these cases there was a combination of clear knowledge and deliberate rejection of Christ. In each there was light in the head, but hatred of truth in the heart. And the end of each seems to have been "blackness of darkness for ever."

May God give us a will to use our knowledge, whether it be little or great! May we beware of neglecting our opportunities, and leaving our privileges unimproved! Have we light? Then let us live fully up to our light. Do we know the truth? Then let us walk in the truth. This is the best safeguard against the unpardonable sin.

In the last place, let us gather from these verses *the immense importance of carefulness about our daily words*. Our Lord tells us, that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment."

And He adds, “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

There are few of our Lord’s sayings which are so heart-searching as this. There is nothing, perhaps, to which most men pay less attention than their words. They go through their daily work, speaking and talking without thought or reflection, and seem to fancy that if they *do* what is right, it matters but little what they *say*.

But is it so? Are our words so utterly trifling and unimportant? We dare not say so, with such a passage of Scripture as this before our eyes. Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts, as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” The lips only utter what the mind conceives. Our words will form one subject of inquiry at the day of judgment. We shall have to give account of our sayings, as well as of our doings. Truly these are very solemn considerations. If there were no other text in the Bible, this passage ought to convince us, that we are all “guilty before God, ” and need a righteousness better than our own, even the righteousness of Christ. (Phil. iii. 9.)

Let us be humble as we read this passage, in the recollection of time past. How many idle, foolish, vain, light, frivolous, sinful, and unprofitable things we have all said! How many words we have used which, like thistle-down, have flown far and wide, and sown mischief in the hearts of others that will never die! How often when we have met our friends, “our conversation,” to use an old saint’s expression, “has only made work for repentance.” There is deep truth in the remark of Burkitt, “A profane scoff or atheistical jest may stick in the minds of those who hear it, after the tongue that spake it is dead. A word spoken is physically transient, but morally permanent. ” “Death and life,” says Solomon, “are in the power of the tongue.” (Prov. xviii. 21.)

Let us be watchful as we read this passage about words, when we look forward to our days yet to come; let us resolve, by God’s grace, to be more careful over our tongues, and more particular about our use of them. Let us pray daily that our “Speech may be always with grace. ” (Coloss. iv. 6.) Let us say every morning with holy David, “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue;” let us cry with him to the Strong One for strength, and say, “Set a watch before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips.” Well indeed might St. James say, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.” (Psal. xxxix. 1; cxli. 3; James iii. 2.)

MATTHEW XII. 38–50.

38 Then certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly: so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas: and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

42 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon: and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

43 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

44 Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth *it* empty, swept, and garnished.

45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, *his* mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?

49 And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

The beginning of this passage is one of those places which strikingly illustrate the truth of Old Testament History. Our Lord speaks of the Queen of the South, as a real true person, who had lived and died. He refers to the story of Jonah, and his miraculous preservation in the whale's belly, as undeniable matters of fact. Let us remember this if we hear men professing to believe the writers of the New Testament, and yet sneering at the things recorded in the Old Testament, as if they were fables: such men forget that in so doing they pour contempt upon Christ Himself. The authority of the Old Testament and the authority of the New stand or fall together. The same Spirit inspired men to write of Solomon and Jonah, who inspired the Evangelists to write of Christ. These are not unimportant points in this day. Let them be well fixed in our minds.

The first practical lesson which demands our attention in these verses, is *the amazing power of unbelief.*

We should mark how the Scribes and Pharisees call upon our Lord to show them more miracles. "Master, we would see a sign from thee." They pretended that they only wanted more evidence in order to be convinced and become disciples. They shut their eyes to the many wonderful works which

Jesus had already done. It was not enough for them that He had healed the sick, and cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, and cast out devils. They were not yet persuaded. They yet demanded more proof. They would not see what our Lord plainly pointed at in His reply,—that they had no real *will* to believe. There was evidence enough to convince them, but they had no wish to be convinced.

There are many in the Church of Christ who are exactly in the state of these Scribes and Pharisees. They flatter themselves that they only require a little more proof to become decided Christians. They fancy that if their reason and intellect could only be met with some additional arguments, they would at once give up all for Christ's sake, take up the cross, and follow Him. But in the mean time they wait. Alas, for their blindness! They will not see that there is abundance of evidence on every side of them. The truth is that they do not want to be convinced.

May we all be on our guard against the spirit of unbelief: it is a growing evil in these latter days. Want of simple childlike faith is an increasing feature of the times, in every rank of society. The true explanation of a hundred strange things that startle us in the conduct of leading men in Churches and States, is downright want of faith. Men who do not believe all that God says in the Bible, must necessarily take a vacillating and undecided line on moral and religious questions. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." (Isaiah vii. 9.)

The second practical lesson which meets us in these verses is *the immense danger of a partial and imperfect religious reformation.*

We should mark what an awful picture our Lord draws of the man to whom the unclean spirit returns, after having once left him. How fearful are those words: "I will return into my house from whence I came out!" How vivid that description: "He findeth it empty, swept, and garnished!" How tremendous the conclusion: "He taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself,—and the last state of that man is worse than the first!" It is a picture most painfully full of meaning. Let us scan it closely, and learn wisdom.

It is certain that we have in this picture *the history of the Jewish church and nation* at the time of our Lord's coming. Called as they were at first out of Egypt to be God's peculiar people, they never seem to have wholly lost the tendency to worship idols. Redeemed as they afterwards were from the captivity of Babylon, they never seem to have rendered to God a due return for His goodness. Aroused as they had been by John the Baptist's preaching, their repentance appears to have been only skin-deep. At the time when our

Lord spoke they had become, as a nation, hardy and more perverse than ever; the grossness of idol-worship had given place to the deadness of mere formality. "Seven other spirits worse than the first" had taken possession of them. Their last state was rapidly becoming worse than the first. Yet forty years, and their iniquity came to the full. They madly plunged into a war with Rome. Judæa became a very Babel of confusion. Jerusalem was taken. The temple was destroyed. The Jews were scattered over the face of the earth.

Again, it is highly probable that we have in this picture *the history of the whole body of Christian Churches*. Delivered as they were from heathen darkness by the preaching of the Gospel, they have never really lived up to their light; revived as many of them were at the time of the Protestant Deformation, they have none of them made a right use of their privileges, or "gone on to perfection." They have all more or less stopped short and settled on their lees. They have all been too ready to be satisfied with mere external amendments. And now there are painful symptoms in many quarters that the "evil spirit has returned to his house," and is preparing an outbreak of infidelity and false doctrine, such as the Churches have never yet seen. Between unbelief in some quarters, and formal superstition in others, everything seems ripe for some fearful manifestation of anti-christ. It may well be feared that "the last state" of the professing Christian Churches will prove "worse than the first."

Saddest and worst of all, we have in this picture *the history of many an individual's soul*. There are men who seemed at one time of their lives to be under the influence of strong religious feelings. They reformed their ways, they laid aside many things that were bad, they took up many things that were good, but they stopped there, and went no further, and by and by gave up religion altogether. The evil spirit returned to their hearts, and found them "empty, swept, and garnished." They are now worse than they ever were before. Their consciences seem seared. Their sense of religious things appears entirely destroyed. They are like men given over to a reprobate mind. One would say it was "impossible to renew them to repentance." None prove so hopelessly wicked as those who, after experiencing strong religious convictions, have gone back again to sin and the world.

If we love life, let us pray that these lessons may be deeply impressed on our minds. Let us never be content with a partial reformation of life, without thorough conversion to God, and mortification of the whole body of sin. It is a good thing to strive to cast sin out of our hearts; but let us take care that we also receive the grace of God in its place. Let us make sure that we not

only get rid of the old tenant, the devil, but have also got dwelling in us the Holy Ghost.

The last practical lesson which meets us in these verses is *the tender affection with which the Lord Jesus regards His true disciples*.

We should mark how He speaks of every one who does the will of His Father in heaven. He says, “the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.” What gracious words these are! Who can conceive the depth of our dear Lord’s love towards His relatives according to the flesh? It was a pure, unselfish love. It must have been a mighty love, a love that passes man’s understanding. Yet here we see that all His believing people are counted as His relatives. He loves them, feels for them, cares for them, as members of His family, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.

There is a solemn warning here to all who mock and persecute true Christians on account of their religion. They consider not what they are doing. They are persecuting the near relatives of the King of kings. They will find at the last day that they have mocked those whom the Judge of all regards as “His brother, and sister, and mother.”

There is rich encouragement here for all believers. They are far more precious in their Lord’s eyes than they are in their own. Their faith may be feeble, their repentance weak, their strength small: they may be poor and needy in this world, but there is a glorious “whosoever” in the last verse of this chapter which ought to cheer them. “Whosoever” believes is a near relative of Christ. The Elder Brother will provide for him in time and eternity, and never let him be cast away. There is not one “little sister” in the family of the redeemed, whom Jesus does not remember. (Cant. viii. 8.) Joseph provided richly for all his relatives, and the Lord Jesus will provide for His.