

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B.A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,  
VICAR OF STRADBROKE, SUFFOLK;  
*Author of "Home Truths," etc.*

ST. MATTHEW.

LONDON:  
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,  
CAVENDISH SQUARE.  
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

[this edition published after 1961AD and before 1880AD.]

first published 1856AD

MATTHEW XV. 1–9.

1 Then came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,	6 And honour not his father or his mother, <i>he shall be free</i> . Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.
2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.	7 <i>Ye hypocrites</i> , well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying,
3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?	8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with <i>their</i> lips; but their heart is far from me.
4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.	9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching <i>for</i> doctrines the commandments of men.
5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to <i>his</i> father or <i>his</i> mother, <i>It is</i> a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me:	

WE have in these verses a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and certain Scribes and Pharisees. The subject of it may seem, at first sight, of little interest in modern days; but it is not so in reality: the principles of the Pharisees are principles that never die. There are truths laid down here, which are of deep importance.

We learn, for one thing, *that hypocrites generally attach great importance to mere outward things in religion.*

The complaint of the Scribes and Pharisees in this place, is a striking case in point. They brought an accusation to our Lord against His disciples: but what was its nature? It was not that they were covetous or self-righteous; it was not that they were untruthful or uncharitable; it was not that they had broken any part of the law of God: but they “transgressed the traditions of the elders.—They did not wash their hands when they ate bread;” they did not observe a rule of merely human authority, which some old Jew had invented! This was the head and front of their offence!

Do we see nothing of the spirit of the Pharisees in the present day? Unhappily we see only too much. There are thousands of professing Christians, who seem to care nothing about the religion of their neighbours, provided that it agrees in outward matters with their own. Does their neighbour worship according to their particular form? Can he repeat their shibboleth, and talk a little about their favourite doctrines? If he can, they are satisfied, though there is no evidence that he is converted; if he cannot, they are always finding fault, and cannot speak peaceably of him, though he may be serving Christ better than themselves. Let us beware of this spirit. It is the very essence of hypocrisy. Let our principle be, “The kingdom of God is not

meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. xiv. 17.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, *the great danger of attempting to add anything to the Word of God*. Whenever a man takes upon him to make additions to the Scriptures, he is likely to end with valuing his own additions above Scripture itself.

We see this point brought out most strikingly in our Lord’s answer to the charge of the Pharisees against His disciples. He says, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?” He strikes boldly at the whole system of *adding* anything, as needful to salvation, to God’s perfect Word. He exposes the mischievous tendency of the system by an example. He shows how the vaunted traditions of the Pharisees were actually destroying the authority of the fifth commandment. In short, He establishes the great truth, which ought never to be forgotten,—that there is an inherent tendency in all traditions to “make the Word of God of none effect.” The authors of these traditions may have meant no such thing; their intentions may have been pure: but that there is a tendency in all religious institutions of mere human authority to usurp the authority of God’s Word, and this is evidently the teaching of Christ. It is a solemn remark of Bucer’s, that “a man is rarely to be found who pays an excessive attention to human inventions in religion who does not put more trust in them than in the grace of God.”

And have we not seen melancholy proof of this truth in the history of the Church of Christ? Unhappily we have seen only too much. As Baxter says, “Men think God’s laws too many and too strict, and yet make more of their own, and are precise for keeping them.” Have we never read how some have exalted canons, rubrics, and ecclesiastical laws above the Word of God, and have punished disobedience to them with far greater severity than open sins, like drunkenness and swearing? Have we never heard of the extravagant importance which the Church of Rome attaches to monastic vows, and vows of celibacy, and keeping feasts and fasts, insomuch that she seems to place them far above family duties, and the ten commandments?—Have we never heard of men who make more ado about eating flesh in Lent, than about gross impurity of life, or murder?—Have we never observed in our own land, how many seem to make adherence to Episcopacy the weightiest matter in Christianity, and to regard “Churchmanship, ” as they call it, as far outweighing repentance, faith, holiness, and the graces of the Spirit? These are questions which can only receive one sorrowful answer. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives, after eighteen hundred years: the disposition to “make

the Word of God of none effect by traditions,” is to be found among Christians, as well as among Jews: the tendency practically to exalt man’s inventions above God’s Word, is still fearfully prevalent. May we watch against it and be on our guard! May we remember that no tradition or man-made institution in religion can ever excuse the neglect of relative duties, or justify disobedience to any plain commandment of God’s Word.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that *religious worship which God desires, is the worship of the heart*. We find our Lord establishing this by a quotation from Isaiah: “This people draweth near to Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.”

The heart is the principal thing in the relation of husband and wife, of friend and friend, of parent and child. The heart must be the principal point to which we attend in all the relations between God and our souls. What is the first thing we need, in order to be Christians? A new heart.—What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to Him? A broken and a contrite heart.—What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart.—What is genuine obedience? To obey from the heart.—What is saving faith? To believe with the heart.—Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts by faith.—What is the chief request that Wisdom makes to every one? “My son, give me thine heart.”

Let us leave the passage with honest self-inquiry as to the state of our own hearts. Let us settle it in our minds, that all formal worship of God, whether in public or private, is utterly in vain, so long as our “hearts are far from Him.” The bended knee, the bowed head, the loud Amen, the daily chapter, the regular attendance at the Lord’s table, are all useless and unprofitable, so long as our affections are nailed to sin, or pleasure, or money, or the world. The question of our Lord must yet be answered satisfactorily, before we can be saved. He says to everyone, “Lovest thou Me?” (John xxii. 17.)

MATTHEW XV. 10–20.

10 And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand.

11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

20 These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

THERE are two striking sayings of the Lord Jesus in this passage. One respects false doctrine: the other respects the human heart. Both of them deserve the closest attention.

Respecting false doctrine, our Lord declares *that it is a duty to oppose it; that its final destruction is sure; and that its teachers ought to be forsaken.* He says, “Every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone.”

It is clear, from examination of the passage, that the disciples were surprised at our Lord’s strong language about the Pharisees and their traditions. They had probably been accustomed from their youth to regard the Pharisees as the wisest and best of men. They were startled to hear their Master denouncing them as hypocrites, and charging them with transgressing the commandment of God. “Knowest thou,” they said, “that the Pharisees were offended?” To this question we are indebted for our Lord’s explanatory declaration,—a declaration which perhaps has never received the notice it deserves.

The plain meaning of our Lord’s words is, that false doctrine, like that of the Pharisees, was a plant to which no mercy should be shown. It was a “plant which His heavenly Father had not planted,” and a plant which it was a duty to “root up,” whatever offence it might cause. To spare it was no charity, because it was injurious to the souls of men.—It mattered nothing that those who planted it were high in office, or learned: if it contradicted the Word of God, it ought to be opposed, refuted, and rejected. His disciples must therefore understand that it was right to resist all teaching that was unscriptural, and to “let alone” and forsake all instructors who persisted in

it.—Sooner or later they would find that all false doctrine will be completely overthrown and put to shame, and that nothing shall stand but that which is built on the Word of God.

There are lessons of deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord, which serve to throw light on the duty of many a professing Christian. Let us mark them well, and see what they are. It was practical obedience to this saying which produced the blessed Protestant Reformation. Its lessons deserve close attention.

Do we not see here the duty of boldness in resisting false teaching? Beyond doubt we do. No fear of giving offence, no dread of ecclesiastical censure, should make us hold our peace, when God's truth is in peril. If we are true followers of our Lord, we ought to be outspoken, unflinching witnesses against error. "Truth," says Musculus, "must not be suppressed because men are wicked and blind."

Do we not see again the duty of forsaking false teachers, if they will not give up their delusions? Beyond doubt we do. No false delicacy, no mock humility should make us shrink from leaving the ministrations of any minister who contradicts God's Word. It is at our peril if we submit to unscriptural teaching. Our blood will be on our own heads. To use the words of Whitby, "It never can be right to follow the blind into the ditch."

Do we not see, in the last place, the duty of patience, when we see false teaching abound? Beyond doubt we do. We may take comfort in the thought that it will not stand long. God Himself will defend the cause of His own truth; sooner or later every heresy "shall be rooted up." We are not to fight with carnal weapons, but wait, and preach, and protest, and pray. Sooner or later, as Wycliffe said, "the truth shall prevail."

Respecting the heart of man, our Lord declares in these verses *that it is the true source of all sin and defilement*. The Pharisees taught that holiness depended on meats and drinks; on bodily washings and purifications. They held that all who observed their traditions on these matters were pure and clean in God's sight; and that all who neglected them were impure and unclean.—Our Lord overthrew this miserable doctrine, by showing His disciples that the real fountain of all defilement was not without a man, but within. "Out of the heart," He says, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man."—He that would serve God aright, needs something far more important than bodily washings. He must seek to have a "clean heart."

What an awful picture we have here of human nature, and drawn too by One who "knew what was in man!" What a fearful catalogue is this of the

contents of our own bosoms! What a melancholy list of seeds of evil our Lord has exposed, lying deep down within every one of us, and ready at any time to start into active life! What can the proud and self-righteous say, when they read such a passage as this? This is no sketch of the heart of a robber or murderer. It is the true and faithful account of the hearts of all mankind. May God grant that we may ponder it well, and learn wisdom!

Let it be a settled resolution with us that in all our religion the state of our hearts shall be the main thing. Let it not content us to go to church, and observe the forms of religion. Let us look far deeper than this, and desire to have a “heart right in the sight of God.” (Acts viii. 21.) The right heart is a heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, and purified by faith. Never let us rest till we find within the witness of the Spirit, that God has created in us a clean heart, and made all things new. (Psalm li. 10; 2 Cor. v. 17.)

Finally, let it be a settled resolution with us to “keep our hearts with all diligence,” all the days of our lives. (Prov. iv. 23.) Even after renewal they are weak: even after putting on the new man they are deceitful. Let us never forget that our chief danger is from within. The world and the devil combined, cannot do us so much harm as our own hearts will, if we do not watch and pray. Happy is he who daily remembers the words of Solomon: “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” (Prov. xxviii 26.)

MATTHEW XV. 21–28.

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

ANOTHER of our Lord's miracles is recorded in these verses: the circumstances which attend it are peculiarly full of interest; let us take them up in order, and see what they are. Every word in these narratives is rich in instruction.

We see, in the first place, *that true faith may sometimes be found where it might have been least expected.*

A Canaanitish woman cries to our Lord for help, on behalf of her daughter." Have mercy on me," she says, "O Lord, thou son of David." Such a prayer would have showed great faith had she lived in Bethany or Jerusalem; but when we find that she came from the "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," such a prayer may well fill us with surprise. It ought to teach us, that it is grace, not place, which makes people believers. We may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent, unbelieving, and fond of the world. We may dwell in the midst of superstition and dark idolatry, like the little maid in Naaman's house, and yet be faithful witnesses for God and His Christ. Let us not despair of any one's soul, merely because his lot is cast in an unfavourable position. It is possible to dwell in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and yet sit down in the kingdom of God.

We see, in the second place, *that affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul.*

The Canaanitish mother, no doubt, had been sorely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with a devil, and been unable to relieve her; but yet that trouble brought her to Christ, and taught her to pray. Without it she might have lived and died in careless ignorance, and never seen Jesus at all: surely it was good for her that she was afflicted. (Psalm cxix. 71.)

Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a mes-

sage from God, and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think,—to wean us from the world,—to send us to the Bible,—to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads us to God. Prosperity is a great mercy; but adversity is a greater one, if it brings us to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness, and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted, like the Canaanitish mother, and like her flee to Christ, than live at ease, like the rich “fool,” and die at last without Christ and without hope. (Luke xii. 20.)

We see, in the third place, *that Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ Himself.*

The woman about whom we are reading, found small favour with our Lord's disciples. Perhaps they regarded an inhabitant of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon as unworthy of their Master's help. At any rate they said, “Send her away.”

There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage inquirers after Christ, instead of helping them forward. They are too ready to doubt the reality of a beginner's grace, because it is small, and to treat him as Saul was treated when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion. “They believed not that he was a disciple.” (Acts ix. 26.) Let us beware of giving way to this spirit. Let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like Him, let us be gentle, and kind, and encouraging in all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved. Above all, let us tell men continually that they must not judge of Christ by Christians. Let us assure them that there is far more in that gracious Master than there is in the best of His servants. Peter, and James, and John, may say to the afflicted soul, “Send her away;” but such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep us long waiting, as He did this woman, but He will never send us empty away.

We see, in the last place, *what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer, both for ourselves and others.*

It is hard to conceive a more striking illustration of this truth, than we have in this passage. The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed: Jesus “answered her not a word.” Yet she prayed on.—The saying which by and by fell from our Lord's lips sounded discouraging: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yet she prayed on, “Lord help me.”—The second saying of our Lord was even less encouraging than the first: “It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs.” Yet “hope deferred” did not “make her heart sick.” (Prov. xiii. 12.) Even then she was not silenced: even then she finds a plea for some

“crumbs” of mercy to be granted to her. And her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward: “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” That promise never yet was broken: “Seek, and ye shall find.” (Matt. vii. 7.)

Let us remember this history, *when we pray for ourselves*. We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation. It comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on, and not faint.—For strength to do duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us “continue in prayer.” Let us be sure that no time is so well spent in every day as that which we spend upon our knees. Jesus hears us, and in His own good time will give an answer.

Let us remember this history *when we intercede for others*. Have we children, whose conversion we desire? Have we relations and friends, about whose salvation we are anxious? Let us follow the example of this Canaanitish woman, and lay the state of their souls before Christ. Let us name their names before Him night and day, and never rest till we have an answer. We may have to wait many a long year. We may seem to pray in vain, and intercede without profit; but let us never give up, while life lasts. Let us believe that Jesus is not changed, and that He who heard the Canaanitish mother, and granted her request, will also hear us, and one day give us an answer of peace.

MATTHEW XV. 29–39.

29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them *those that were* lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

31 Inasmuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

32 Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in

the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets full.

38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, besides women and children.

39 And he sent away the multitude and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

THE beginning of this passage contains three points which deserve our special attention. For the present let us dwell exclusively on them.

In the first place, let us remark, *how much more pains people take about the relief of their bodily diseases than about their souls*. We read, that “great multitudes came to Jesus, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others.” Many of them, no doubt, had journeyed many miles, and gone through great fatigues. Nothing is so difficult and troublesome as to move sick people. But the hope of being healed was in sight: such hope is everything to a sick man.

We know little of human nature if we wonder at the conduct of these people. We need not wonder at all. They felt that health was the greatest of earthly blessings. They felt that pain was the hardest of all trials to bear. There is no arguing against sense. A man feels his strength failing; he sees his body wasting and his face becoming pale; he is sensible that his appetite is leaving him: he knows, in short, that he is ill, and needs a physician. Show him a physician within reach, who is said never to fail in working cures, and he will go to him without delay.

Let us however not forget that our souls are far more diseased than our bodies, and let us learn a lesson from the conduct of these people. Our souls are afflicted with a malady far more deep-seated, far more complicated, far

more hard to cure than any ailment that flesh is heir to. They are in fact plague-stricken by sin. They must be healed, and healed effectually, or perish everlastingly. Do we really know this? Do we feel it? Are we alive to our spiritual disease? Alas, there is but one answer to these questions! The bulk of mankind do not feel it at all. Their eyes are blinded. They are utterly insensible to their danger. For bodily health they crowd the waiting-rooms of doctors; for bodily health they take long journeys to find purer air; but for their souls' health they take no thought at all. Happy indeed is that man or woman who has found out his soul's disease! Such an one will never rest till he has found Jesus. Troubles will seem nothing to him. Life, life, eternal life is at stake. He will "count all things loss that he may win Christ," and be healed. (Phil. iii. 8.)

In the second place, let us mark *the marvellous ease and power with which our Lord healed all who were brought to Him*. We read that "the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified the God of Israel."

Behold in these words a lively emblem of our Lord Jesus Christ's power to heal sin-diseased souls! There is no ailment of heart that He cannot cure. There is no form of spiritual complaint that He cannot overcome. The fever of lust, the palsy of the love of the world, the slow consumption of indolence and sloth, the heart-disease of unbelief,—all, all give way when He sends forth His Spirit on any one of the children of men. He can put a new song in a sinner's mouth, and make him speak with love of that Gospel which he once ridiculed and blasphemed. He can open the eyes of a man's understanding and make him see the kingdom of God. He can open the ears of a man, and make him willing to hear His voice, and to follow Him wheresoever He goeth. He can give power to a man who once walked in the broad way that leadeth unto destruction, to walk in the way of life. He can make hands that were once instruments of sin, serve Him and do His will. The time of miracles is not yet passed. Every conversion is a miracle. Have we ever seen a real instance of conversion? Let us know that we saw in it the hand of Christ. We should have seen nothing really greater if we had seen our Lord making the dumb to speak and the lame to walk, when He was on earth.

Would we know what to do, if we desire to be saved? Do we feel soul-sick and want a cure? We must just go to Christ by faith, and apply to Him for relief. He is not changed: eighteen hundred years have made no difference in Him. High at the right hand of God, He is still the great Physician. He still "receiveth sinners." (Luke xv. 2.) He is still mighty to heal.

In the third place, let us remark *the abundant compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We read that “He called His disciples and said, I have compassion on the multitude.” A great crowd of men and women is always a solemn sight. It should stir our hearts to feel that each is a dying sinner, and each has a soul to be saved. None ever seems to have felt so much when He saw a crowd, as Christ.

It is a curious and striking fact, that of all the feelings experienced by our Lord when upon earth, there is none so often mentioned as “compassion.” His joy, His sorrow, His thankfulness, His anger, His wonder, His zeal, all are occasionally recorded. But none of these feelings are so frequently mentioned as “compassion.” The Holy Spirit seems to point out to us that this was the distinguishing feature of His character, and the predominant feeling of His mind, when He was among men. Nine times over,—to say nothing of expressions in parables,—nine times over the Spirit has caused that word “compassion” to be written in the Gospels.

There is something very touching and instructive in this circumstance. Nothing is written by chance in the Word of God. There is a special reason for the selection of every single expression. That word “compassion,” no doubt, was specially chosen for our profit.

It ought to encourage all who are hesitating about beginning to walk in God’s ways. Let them remember that their Saviour is full of “compassion.” He will receive them graciously; He will forgive them freely; He will remember their former iniquities no more; He will supply all their need abundantly. Let them not be afraid. Christ’s mercy is a deep well, of which no one ever found the bottom.

It ought to comfort the saints and servants of the Lord when they feel weary. Let them call to mind that Jesus is “full of compassion.” He knows what a world it is in which they live; He knows the body of a man and all its frailties; He knows the devices of their enemy, the devil. And the Lord pities His people. Let them not be cast down. They may feel that weakness, failure, and imperfection are stamped on all they do, but let them not forget that word which says, “His compassions fail not.” (Lament. iii. 22.)