

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.

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MATTHEW V. 1–12.

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:	7 Blessed <i>are</i> the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,	8 Blessed <i>are</i> the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
3 Blessed <i>are</i> the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.	9 Blessed <i>are</i> the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
4 Blessed <i>are</i> they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.	10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.
5 Blessed <i>are</i> the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.	11 Blessed are ye, when <i>men</i> shall revile you, and persecute <i>you</i> , and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
6 Blessed <i>are</i> they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.	12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great <i>is</i> your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

THE three chapters which begin with these verses deserve the special attention of all readers of the Bible. They contain what is commonly called the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Every word of the Lord Jesus ought to be most precious to professing Christians. It is the voice of the Chief Shepherd; it is the charge of the great Bishop and Head of the Church; it is the Master speaking; it is the word of Him who “spake as never man spake,” and by whom we shall all be judged at the last day.

Would we know what kind of people Christians ought to be? Would we know the character at which Christians ought to aim? Would we know the outward walk and inward habit of mind which become a follower of Christ? Then let us often study the Sermon on the Mount. Let us often ponder each sentence, and prove ourselves by it. Not least, let us often consider who they are that are called “blessed” at the beginning of the Sermon. Those whom the great High Priest blesses are blessed indeed!

The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who are *poor in spirit*. He means the humble, and lowly-minded, and self-abased. He means those who are deeply convinced of their own sinfulness in God’s sight. These are they who are not “wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight.” They are not “rich and increased with goods;” they do not fancy they “need nothing;” they regard themselves as “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Blessed are all such! Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity. We must begin low, if we would build high. (Is. vi. 21; Rev. iii. 17.)

The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who *mourn*. He means those who sorrow for sin, and grieve daily over their own short-comings. These are they who trouble themselves more about sin than about anything on earth. The remem-

brance of it is grievous to them; the burden of it is intolerable. Blessed are all such! “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” and a contrite heart. (Ps. li. 17.) One day they shall weep no more: “they shall be comforted.”

The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who are *mEEK*. He means those who are of a patient and contented spirit. They are willing to put up with little honour here below. They can bear injuries without resentment. They are not ready to take offence. Like Lazarus in the parable, they are content to wait for their good things. Blessed are all such! They are never losers in the long run. One day they shall “reign on the earth.” (Rev. v. 10.)

The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who *hunger and thirst after righteousness*. He means those who desire above all things to be entirely conformed to the mind of God. They long not so much to be rich, or wealthy, or learned, as to be holy. Blessed are all such! They shall have enough one day. They shall “awake up after God’s likeness and be satisfied.” (Psalm xvii. 15.)

The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who are *merciful*. He means those who are full of compassion towards others. They pity all who are suffering either from sin or sorrow, and are tenderly desirous to make their sufferings less; they are “full of good works,” and endeavours to do good. (Acts ix. 36.) Blessed are all such! Both in this life and in that which is to come they shall reap a rich reward.

The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who are *pure in heart*. He means those who do not aim merely at outward correctness, but at inward holiness. They are not satisfied with a mere external show of religion: they strive to have always a conscience void of offence, and to serve God with the spirit and the inner man. Blessed are all such! The heart is the man. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” (1 Sam. xvi. 7.) He that is most spiritually-minded will have most communion with God.

The Lord Jesus call those “blessed” who are *peacemakers*. He means those who use all their influence to promote peace and charity on earth, in private and in public, at home and abroad. He means those who strive to make all men love one another, by teaching that Gospel which says, “love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. xiii. 10.) Blessed are all such! They are doing the very work which the Son of God began when He came to earth the first time, and which He will finish when He returns the second time.

Lastly, the Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who are *persecuted for righteousness’ sake*. He means those who are laughed at, mocked, despised, and ill-used, because they endeavour to live as true Christians. Blessed are all such! They drink of the same cup which their Master drank. They are now confessing

Him before men, and He will confess them before His Father and the angels at the last day. "Great is their reward."

Such are the eight foundation-stones, which the Lord lays down at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Eight great testing truths are placed before us. May we mark well each one of them, and learn wisdom.

Let us learn how entirely contrary are the principles of Christ to the principles of the world. It is vain to deny it. They are almost diametrically opposed. The very characters which the Lord Jesus praises the world despises; the very pride, and thoughtlessness, and high tempers, and worldliness, and selfishness, and formality, and unlovingness, which abound everywhere, the Lord Jesus condemns.

Let us learn how unhappily different is the teaching of Christ from the practice of many professing Christians. Where shall we find men and women among those who go to churches and chapels, who are striving to live up to the pattern we have read of today? There is too much reason to fear that many baptized persons are utterly ignorant of what the New Testament commands.

Above all, let us learn how holy and spiritually-minded all believers should be. They should never aim at any standard lower than that of the Sermon on the Mount. Christianity is eminently a practical religion: sound doctrine is its root and foundation, but holy living should always be its fruit; and if we would know what holy living is, let us often bethink ourselves who they are that Jesus calls "blessed."

MATTHEW V. 13–20.

13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

THESE verses teach us, in the first place, *the character which true Christians must support and maintain in the world.*

The Lord Jesus tells us that true Christians are to be in the world like “salt.” “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Now salt has a peculiar taste of its own, utterly unlike anything else. When mingled with other substances it preserves them from corruption; it imparts a portion of its taste to everything it is mixed with. It is useful so long as it preserves its savour, but no longer. Are we true Christians? Then let us see here our office and our duties!

The Lord Jesus tells us that true Christians are to be in the world like light. “Ye are the light of the world.” Now it is the property of light to be utterly distinct from darkness. The least spark in a dark room can be seen at once. Of all things created, light is the most useful: it fertilizes; it guides; it cheers. It was the first thing called into being. (Gen. i. 3.) Without it the world would be a gloomy blank. Are we true Christians? Then behold again our position and its responsibility!

Surely, if words mean anything, we are meant to learn from these two figures that there must be something marked, distinct, and peculiar about our character, if we are true Christians. It will never do to idle through life, thinking and living like others, if we mean to be owned by Christ as His people. Have we grace? Then it must be *seen*.—Have we the Spirit? Then there must be *fruit*.—Have we any saving religion? Then there must be a difference of habits, tastes, and turn of mind, between us and those who think only of the world.—It is perfectly clear that true Christianity is something more than being baptized and going to church. “Salt” and “light” evidently imply *peculiarity* both of heart and

life, of faith and practice. We must dare to be singular and unlike the world, if we mean to be saved.

These verses teach us, in the second place, *the relation between Christ's teaching and that of the Old Testament.*

This is a point of great importance, and one about which great errors prevail. Our Lord clears up the point in one striking sentence: He says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." These are remarkable words. They were deeply important when spoken, as satisfying the natural anxiety of the Jews on the point. They will be deeply important as long as the world stands, as a testimony that the religion of the Old and New Testaments is one harmonious whole.

The Lord Jesus came to fulfil the predictions of the prophets, who had long foretold that a Saviour would one day appear.—He came to fulfil the ceremonial law, by becoming the great Sacrifice for sin, to which all the Mosaic offerings had ever pointed. He came to fulfil the moral law, by yielding to it a perfect obedience, which we could never have yielded,—and by paying the penalty for our breach of it with His atoning blood, which we could never have paid. In all these ways He exalted the law of God, and made its importance more evident even than it had been before. In a word, "He magnified the law and made it honourable." (Isaiah xlii. 21.)

There are deep lessons of wisdom to be learned from these words of our Lord about "the law and the prophets." Let us consider them well, and lay them up in our hearts.

For one thing, let us beware of despising the Old Testament, under any pretence whatever. Let us never listen to those who bid us throw it aside as an obsolete, antiquated, useless book. The religion of the Old Testament is the germ of Christianity. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud; the New Testament is the Gospel in full flower.—The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade; the New Testament is the Gospel in full ear.—The saints in the Old Testament saw many things through a glass darkly, but they all looked by faith to the same Saviour, and were led by the same Spirit as ourselves. These are no light matters. Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament.

For another thing, let us beware of despising the law of the Ten Commandments. Let us not suppose for a moment that it is set aside by the Gospel, or that Christians have nothing to do with it. The coming of Christ did not alter the position of the Ten Commandments one hair's breadth. If anything, it exalted and raised their authority. (Rom. iii. 31.) The law of the Ten Commandments is God's eternal measure of right and wrong. By it is the knowledge of sin; by it the Spirit shows men their need of Christ, and drives them to Him: to it Christ

refers His people as their rule and guide for holy living. In its right place it is just as important as “the glorious Gospel.”—It cannot save us: we cannot be justified by it; but never, never let us despise it. It is a symptom of an ignorant ministry, and an unhealthy state of religion, when the law is lightly esteemed. The true Christian “delights in the law of God.” (Rom. vii. 22.)

In the last place, let us beware of supposing that the Gospel has lowered the standard of personal holiness, and that the Christian is not intended to be as strict and particular about his daily life as the Jew. This is an immense mistake, but one that is unhappily very common. So far from this being the case, the sanctification of the New Testament saint ought to exceed that of him who has nothing but the Old Testament for his guide. The more light we have, the more we ought to love God. The more clearly we see our own complete and full forgiveness in Christ, the more heartily ought we to work for His glory. We know what it cost to redeem us far better than the Old Testament saints did. We have read what happened in Gethsemane and on Calvary, and they only saw it dimly and indistinctly as a thing yet to come. May we never forget our obligations! The Christian who is content with a low standard of personal holiness has got much to learn.

MATTHEW V. 21–37.

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the counsel: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

33 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

THESE verses deserve the closest attention of all readers of the Bible. A right understanding of the doctrines they contain lies at the very root of Christianity. The Lord Jesus here explains more fully the meaning of His words, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil." He teaches us that His Gospel magnifies the Law, and exalts its authority. He shows us that the Law, as expounded by Him, was a far more spiritual and heart-searching rule than most of the Jews supposed; and He proves this by selecting three commandments out of the ten as examples of what He means.

He expounds *the sixth commandment*. Many thought that they kept this part of God's law so long as they did not commit actual murder. The Lord Jesus shows that its requirements go much further than this. It condemns all angry and passionate language, and especially when used without a cause. Let us mark this well. We may be perfectly innocent of taking life away, and yet be guilty of breaking the sixth commandment!

He expounds *the seventh commandment*. Many supposed that they kept this part of God's law if they did not actually commit adultery. The Lord Jesus teaches that we may break it in our thoughts, hearts, and imaginations, even when our outward conduct is moral and correct. The God with whom we have to do looks far beyond actions. With Him even a glance of the eye may be a sin!

He expounds *the third commandment*. Many fancied that they kept this part of God's law so long as they did not swear falsely, and performed their oaths. The Lord Jesus forbids all vain and light swearing altogether. All swearing by created things, even when God's name is not brought forward,—all calling upon God to witness, excepting on the most solemn occasions, is a great sin.

Now all this is very instructive. It ought to raise very serious reflections in our minds. It calls us loudly to use great searching of heart. And what does it teach?

It teaches us *the exceeding holiness of God*. He is a most pure and perfect Being, who sees faults and imperfections where man's eyes often see none. He reads our inward motives; He notes our words and thoughts, as well as our actions: "He desires truths in the inward parts." (Psa. li. 6.) It would be well if men would consider this part of God's character more than they do! There would be no room for pride, and self-righteousness, and carelessness, if men only saw God "as He is." (1 John iii. 2.)

It teaches us *the exceeding ignorance of man in spiritual things*. There are thousands and tens of thousands of professing Christians, it may be feared, who know no more of the requirements of God's law than the most ignorant Jews;

they know the letter of the Ten Commandments well enough; they fancy, like the young ruler, “all these have I kept from my youth up ” (Matt, xix. 20): they never dream that it is possible to break the sixth and seventh commandments if they do not break them by outward acts or deeds. And so they live on satisfied with themselves, and quite content with their little bit of religion. Happy indeed are they who really understand God’s law!

It teaches us *our exceeding need of the Lord Jesus Christ’s atoning blood to save us*. What man or woman upon earth can ever stand before such a God as this, and plead “not guilty”? Who is there that has ever grown to years of discretion, and not broken the commandments thousands of times? “There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Rom. iii. 10.) Without a mighty Mediator we should everyone be condemned in the judgment day. Ignorance of the real meaning of the Law is one plain reason why so many do not value the Gospel, and content themselves with a little formal Christianity. They do not see the strictness and holiness of God’s Ten Commandments: if they did, they would never rest till they were safe in Christ.

In the last place, this passage teaches us *the exceeding importance of avoiding all occasions of sin*. If we really desire to be holy, we must “take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongues.” (Psa. xxxix. 1.) We must be ready to make up quarrels and disagreements, lest they gradually lead on to greater evils. “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water.” (Prov. xvii. 14.) We must labour to crucify our flesh and mortify our members, to make any sacrifice and endure any bodily inconvenience rather than sin. We must keep our lips as it were with a bridle, and exercise an hourly strictness over our words. Let men call us precise, if they will, for so doing: let them say, if they please, that we are “too particular.” We need not be moved. We are merely doing as our Lord Jesus Christ bids us, and, if this is the case, we have no cause to be ashamed.

MATTHEW V. 38–48.

38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:	44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.	45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.
40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have <i>thy</i> cloak also.	46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?
41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.	47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more <i>than others</i> ? do not even the publicans so?
42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.	48 Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.
43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.	

WE have here our Lord Jesus Christ's rules for our conduct one towards another. He that would know how he ought to feel and act towards his fellow men, should often study these verses. They deserve to be written in letters of gold: they have extorted praise even from the enemies of Christianity. Let us mark well what they contain.

The Lord Jesus *forbids everything like an unforgiving and revengeful spirit* "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." A readiness to resent injuries, a quickness in taking offence, a quarrelsome and contentious disposition, a keenness in asserting our rights,—all, all are contrary to the mind of Christ. The world may see no harm in these habits of mind; but they do not become the character of the Christian. Our Master says, "Resist not evil."

The Lord Jesus *enjoins on us a spirit of universal love and charity.* "I say unto you, Love your enemies." We ought to put away all malice. We ought to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing. Moreover we are not to love in word only, but in deed; we are to deny ourselves, and take trouble, in order to be kind and courteous. If any man "compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." We are to put up with much and bear much, rather than hurt another, or give offence. In all things we are to be unselfish. Our thought must never be, "How do others behave to me?" but "What would Christ have me to do?"

A standard of conduct like this may seem, at first sight, extravagantly high. But we must never content ourselves with aiming at one lower. We must observe the two weighty arguments by which our Lord backs up this part of His instruction. They deserve serious attention.

For one thing, if we do not aim at the spirit and temper which are here recommended, *we are not yet children of God.* What does our "Father which is in

heaven” do? He is kind to all: He sends rain on good and on evil alike; He causes “His sun” to shine on all without distinction.—A child should be like his father, but where is our likeness to our Father in heaven if we cannot show mercy and kindness to everybody? Where is the evidence that we are new creatures if we lack charity? It is altogether wanting. We must yet be “born again.” (John iii. 7.)

For another thing, if we do not aim at the spirit and temper here recommended *we are manifestly yet of the world*. “What do ye more than others?” is our Lord’s solemn question. Even those who have no religion can “love those who love them:” they can do good and show kindness when affection or interest moves them. But a Christian ought to be influenced by higher principles than these.—Do we flinch from the test? Do we find it impossible to do good to our enemies? If that be the case we may be sure we have yet to be converted. As yet we have not “received the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 12.)

There is much in all this which calls loudly for solemn reflection. There are few passages of Scripture so calculated to raise in our minds humbling thoughts. We have here a lovely picture of the Christian as he ought to be. We cannot look at it without painful feelings. We must all allow that it differs widely from the Christian as he is. Let us carry away from it two general lessons.

In the first place, if the spirit of these ten verses were more continually remembered by true believers *they would recommend Christianity to the world far more than they do*. We must not allow ourselves to suppose that the least words in this passage are trifling and of small moment. They are not so. It is attention to the spirit of this passage which makes our religion beautiful. It is the neglect of the things which it contains by which our religion is deformed. Unfailing courtesy, kindness, tenderness, and consideration for others, are some of the greatest ornaments to the character of a child of God. The world can understand these things, if it cannot understand doctrine. There is no religion in rudeness, roughness, bluntness, and incivility. The perfection of practical Christianity consists in attending to the little duties of holiness as well as to the great.

In the second place, if the spirit of these ten verses had more dominion and power in the world *how much happier the world would be than it is*. Who does not know that quarrellings, strifes, selfishness, and unkindness, cause half the miseries by which mankind is visited? Who can fail to see that nothing would so much tend to increase happiness as the spread of Christian love, such as is here recommended by our Lord? Let us remember this. Those who fancy that true religion has any tendency to make men unhappy, are greatly mistaken. It is the absence of it that does this, and not the presence. True religion has the directly contrary effect. It tends to promote peace, and charity, and kindness, and

goodwill among men. The more men are brought under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the more they will love one another, and the more happy they will be.