

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

15:10-20

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

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 has 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 offense 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 offense, 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 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 this is 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 right heart in the sight of God. (Acts) The right heart is a heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Ghost, 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. (Ps. 51:10 2 Cor 5:17). Finally, let it be a settled resolution with us to keep our hearts with all diligence all the days of our lives. (Prov.4:23) 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. (Proverbs 28:26)

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