

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

ness to God, to what we believe to be truth, and to ourselves. Yet it is pleasing to think that the course of truth will prove also the wisest and best. Of the great advantages that will be secured upon the whole, there cannot be a doubt. By seeking first the kingdom of God it will be won, and much also will be added to us.

One brief remark more, and we have done. Defenders of more recently adopted readings ought not to plead, by way of palliation, that they are few and unimportant. Were they so, we might be asked with some show of reason, Why disturb men's minds about them? But they are both many and important. They may not change doctrines received in the Church, but there is a vast deal besides that of consequence; and the more these readings are studied, the more varied and far-reaching will *be seen to be their influence*. The one consideration to be ever before us is, that they, as a part of Holy Writ, are the cause of God; and that it is our duty to be on God's side, be the consequences to human calculation what they may. W. MILLIGAN.

*THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM AND THE
INVITATION OF THE KING.*

ST. MATTHEW xi. 25-30.

I.—THE FIRST LAW.

THIS passage has been discussed so recently in the pages of THE EXPOSITOR, and in so full and able a manner by Dr. Bruce, that it may seem scarcely necessary to go over the ground again. Yet Scripture has many sides, and it is possible that every earnest stu-

dent looks at it in a different light, catches here and there a glimpse of the varied surface which others have failed to notice, and thus may contribute something further to its elucidation. It is with this conviction that I venture to add one or two suggestions to the interpretation of this most interesting passage.

My remarks will be addressed chiefly to the relation in which the three main clauses of the passage stand one to another, because, so far as I have observed, expositors have not directed sufficient attention to this point. It may, of course, be said that in the parallel passage of St. Luke, the relation does not exist, the Gracious Invitation is wanting, and we are not warranted therefore in assuming any original connection between our Lord's words in Verses 25-27 and the Invitation which follows. As St. Matthew has placed the utterance of the words on a different occasion from that in which they are found in St. Luke, so he may have joined together words which were not originally joined together in the mouth of the Speaker.

And yet, I believe each part of the passage loses by a severance between the two. The contrast, the paradox, is not only striking, it is profoundly true, profoundly instructive. The Invitation would lose immensely in impressiveness if severed from the words going before. The words going before catch a softer tint, a light as of sunset on the austere grandeur of mountain summits, from the Invitation which follows. We have here that blending of majesty and meekness, that wonderful union of the Divine and the human which stamps our Lord's words with a character perfectly unique, and which is the absolutely necessary condition of any true Revelation from God to man.

But to come more closely to the links of thought by which the whole is riveted together. We have in this passage, first, the laws of the kingdom, and then the invitation of the King. This is briefly the relation between the two parts of the passage. So far from being contradictory or discordant, they are bound together by the principle of an inner harmony. The first law declares the condition on which alone the Revelation of God can be received: "I thank thee that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." The revelation is made to humility. The second law expresses the nature and the method of the revelation: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any one the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." The revelation is made only through Christ. Then follows the Invitation, corresponding exactly to these conditions: made, (1) not to the self-sufficiency of man, but to his need, and the confession of that need; made by One who is meek and lowly in heart,—thus explaining and interpreting the first law; and made (2) with a promise of rest to those, and those only, who take upon them Christ's yoke, and learn of Him, thus confirming the second law, that they only attain to the knowledge of God who attain to it through Christ.

1. The first law, then, of the kingdom is this, that God's Revelation of Himself is addressed, not to man's pride, but to his humility; not to the intellect arrogantly asserting itself, but to the childlike heart, the open unprejudiced spirit which is willing to receive what God gives, instead of dictating to Him the terms

on which it shall be given ; not to those who are wise in their own eyes and understanding in their own sight, but to those who are ready to become fools that they may be wise,—to children

crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry.

In speaking of this as the first *law* of Christ's kingdom, I do so emphatically and purposely. For these words, and words like these in the Gospel, have been strangely perverted. They have been treated, not as the expression of a Divine order, but as the expression of a supreme arbitrary Will. They have been interpreted as if that which called forth our Lord's joy and thankfulness was not the moral beauty of a law, but the exercise of an inscrutable power. "*Thou hast hidden.*" Is not that, it is said, a sovereign act, before which we must bow our heads in unquestioning awe? Is it not plain that God has determined "by his counsel secret to us" to shut out certain persons from the knowledge of his truth? He chooses whom He will, He leaves others to their fate, which is the same thing as passing on them the sentence of perdition, "*Quos ergo præterit reprobat.*" So men have piously argued, thinking to exalt God by representing Him as an absolute Master, who "will not give an account of any of his matters."

And yet, how is it possible to believe, in face of the large and loving Invitation which follows, that our Lord could have rejoiced because certain persons had been smitten with a moral blindness which excluded them from his kingdom? The words "*Thou hast hidden,*" must admit of, must require, an explanation consistent with the invitation. The key to that expla-

nation is given in the name by which our Lord addresses the Father. "I thank thee, O Father, *Lord of heaven and earth.*" The Father whom He thus invokes, is Lord of the kingdom of nature as well as of the kingdom of grace, and the principles of his administration must be the same in both. In both He rules by laws which are the expression of his righteousness. The moral order and the physical order are correlated, and the beauty of each is to be discerned by the same method. We rejoice to acknowledge and to trace the order in the realm of nature; we are never tired of insisting upon it; we have almost said of the physical laws of the universe, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Why do we hesitate and stumble when the moral order is in question? It is as certain that man's life, his temper, his spirit, his conduct are under the control of law, as it is that the material bodies of the universe are under the control of law. Whilst, therefore, every action of man is free, every action is tending, by virtue of the great moral laws of his being, to certain results. And hence it is often a matter of indifference, so far as the result is concerned, whether we speak of it as the consequence of the man's own action, or whether we ascribe it to the law of God's appointment, that is, to God Himself. So Scripture tells us that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Both statements are equally true. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Was that an arbitrary punishment, or was it the result of the moral constitution of things? God's will is and must be a righteous will. God lays a command upon Pharaoh, and, instead of subduing, it irritates and provokes him; it

stirs up all that is worst in his nature; he fights against God. The sin brings with it, like all sin, its repeated chastisement; but the chastisement does not produce moral reformation. And, according to the law of all chastisements, failing to reform it hardens. The resistance becomes more determined and desperate: the heart grows harder. That is the result of all thwarting of the will of God. It must be the result, precisely because his will is a righteous will. The hardening, then, of Pharaoh's heart, or of any man's heart, is the result no doubt of a man's own temper, of his obstinate self-will: he hardens his own heart. But that self-will frets and chafes and struggles against the One supremely righteous Will; it is at variance with and in conflict with the moral order of the universe. You may therefore say, looking at it from the other, the Divine, side of the question, that the Will of God occasions the evil, that inasmuch as his Will rules the universe, and the constitution of man is his work, He hardens the heart.

Precisely so it is, as regards the law which our Lord recognizes here, The first condition of God's self-revelation is that it is made to humility. The "wise and the understanding" cannot by their wisdom and their understanding, find out God. If they make the attempt they fail; it is contrary to God's eternal law; they are fighting against God. From such men *God* has hidden these things. Is that an arbitrary law, an unreasonable law? Is it not the law of the acquisition of all knowledge? What has been the history of the greatest discoveries concerning the physical constitution of the universe? So long as men built up theories out of their own brains, framing to themselves systems,

and conjecturing what the universe *ought to be* according to their own conceptions, they failed utterly to comprehend the beauty and harmony of the world, and their theories were false and worthless. When they sat down with patient reverence to study what the world really was,—seeking with humility to ascertain what God had wrought, instead of presumptuously affirming what ought to be the fashion of the universe; learning, instead of assuming to teach; confessing ignorance, instead of asserting knowledge,—then their patience and their humility received their due reward. Magnificent discoveries crowned their labours. God revealed to these “babes” the mystery and the glory of the world, which He had hid from the “wise and prudent.”

The law of the spiritual world, as here announced, is precisely the same. Humility here, too, is the gate of knowledge. This is here still more emphatically true, because pride is at the root of man’s moral perversion: he fell by listening to the tempter’s lie, “Ye shall be as God;” he can only be restored by the acknowledgment of his error; he must have the heart and temper of a child. It is the first condition of knowledge; it is the first law of the kingdom. God reveals Himself to babes, to the unprejudiced, the candid, the simple, the teachable, to those who are ready to place themselves in the seat of learners, and to be fools that they may be wise. And our Lord gratefully recognizes here the wisdom of the law which He beheld written in letters of light over the portals of his kingdom: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter therein.”

And whether we say that the wise and the under-

standing in their arrogance cannot discern God—have “hid these things” from themselves—or whether we say, God has so ordered the world and man’s nature that God reveals Himself only to the humble, and therefore has “hid these things from the wise and understanding,” the statement is equally true, and his hiding is no part of an arbitrary election, but the necessary result of his eternal wisdom and righteousness.

This is the great law of the kingdom. He who would enter therein must enter as a child; he must enter not indeed by abdicating his intellect, but by putting his intellect in its right place. Would we have it otherwise? Would we have it left to the exercise of man’s intellectual powers to find out God, and to determine for himself the nature and the limits of revelation? Shall it be the privilege of the great discoverer, or of the wise philosopher, to tell the world what they are to believe? I say nothing of the imperfection of the human mind, or of the terrible moral perversion of the human heart, which must cloud man’s thoughts of God and drive him, as it has driven him in all ages, to make a god the creature of his own baseness, his own imperfection, his own lusts and passions, his own sin. I say nothing of the arrogance of the human intellect, which has ever held the key of knowledge, only to admit the few *elite* within its charmed circle. But would we have this honour put upon man’s intellect? Would we have this the sign and evidence of its greatness that it shall need no help from above, that it shall be self-sufficing, that religion, like philosophy, or art, or science, shall spring from the brain of man? What, then, will become of the poor, the simple, and the suffering? What will

become of those who lack the intellectual capacity to grasp high truths, or the notions which an arrogant and self-satisfied reason propounds as such? What will become of that vast crowd who plod along the dusty highways of the world, carrying each, with weary feet, his burden of woe and toil? They cannot explore mysteries, they cannot study systems, they cannot construct theologies, they cannot follow your elaborate proofs. They want the message of a Father's love. They want a sunshine which shall stream in upon their hearts and light up their daily lives. They need for their spiritual being, for its trials and temptations, its struggles and griefs, the same beneficent provision which is made for them in nature. The sunshine and the rain are God's gifts to man, by which he lives; they are not in man's power to summon or destroy. And it was because our Lord saw the same wisdom and righteousness displayed in God's self-revelation, because He saw it was made to man's need, and not to man's self-sufficiency, that He rejoiced in spirit when He declared this as the first law of the kingdom, with grateful acknowledgment of the Father's goodness,—“I thank thee,¹ Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and the understanding. Even so, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.”

J. J. STEWART PEROWNE.

¹ This has been frequently rendered (e.g., by Alford), “I confess to thee,” and explained, *I fully recognize the justice of thy doings*. But *ἰξομολογῆσθαι* is in the LXX. the common rendering of the Hiphil of the Hebrew verb *יָדָה*, to give thanks.