

# Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

## 12:22-37

by J.C. Ryle

### Transcript

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, 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 have 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 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 labor stare them in the face and they cannot deny them. What then shall they. 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 endeavor 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 people 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. Offenses arising from ignorance of the true mission of the Son of man will not be punished so heavily as offenses 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 willfully 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 and if they shall fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance. If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment" (Hebrews 6:4, 6; 10:26-27). 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 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 forever. 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 (see Philippians 3:9). 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." (Proverbs 18:21 ). 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 full of grace" (Colossians 4:6 ). 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 door of my lips." Well indeed might St. James say, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (Ps. 39:1; 141:3 James 3:2 ).

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