

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
13:16-20

16. Verily, verily, I say to you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. 18. I do not speak of you all. I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me. 19. Now I tell you before it comes, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*. 20. Verily, verily, I say to you, He who receives whomever I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me.

16.--[*Verily, verily, I say to you, etc.*] This well-known mode of expression is doubtless used here to show the importance of the lessons which our Lord is imposing on the disciples at this point. It is as though He said, "Do not think lightly of what I am teaching you now. It is no trifling matter. Love and humility are weighty things in my service. I solemnly charge you to remember that, as I have often told you, the servant is not greater than his master but must strictly follow his example. The messenger sent on an errand is not greater than him that sends him and must carefully do as he is bid. If I, your Master and Head, have done these actions of love and humility, never be ashamed of doing the same or similar ones. If you are really my disciples and messengers, you must prove it by shrinking from nothing which you have seen Me do."

The Greek word which we render here "He who is sent," is the same that is elsewhere rendered "the Apostle." Our translators seem to have translated the word as they have to show more forcibly the connection between "the sender" and "the sent," which, to a reader ignorant of Greek, would not have appeared if the word "apostle" had been used.

17.--[*If ye know...if ye do them.*] The object of this verse seems to be the confirmation of the preceding one. "Be not content with knowing these things with your heads. See that you actually practice them. If you really know and understand my meaning, you will find it your happiness to put it in practice." The latent idea seems to be, "Wretched and miserable Christians are ye, if you know these things and then stop short and do not practice them."

Let us note the solemn principle which lies beneath the verse. Knowledge without practice is the character of the devil. None knows more truth, and none does more evil than he. Let us not forget that!

18.--[*I do not speak of you all.*] It is not quite clear what our Lord meant by these words. Some think, as Bishop Hall, that the connection is with the verse before, and that our Lord meant, "When I speak of happiness, knowledge, and practice, I do not speak as if there was no false Apostle among you."

Others think that the sense should be carried forward. "I am not speaking

as if you were all equally faithful and equally sent by Me."

[*I know whom I have chosen.*] This sentence again admits of being taken in two senses. Some think, as Calvin, Poole, Rollock, and Hutcheson, that it refers to the eternal election and choice of those disciples who were true believers. "I know whom I have really called and chosen to be mine by my Spirit."

Others think, as Zwingle, Musculus, Hall, Whitby, Hengstenberg, and Burgon, that it only refers to the official choice and calling of the twelve when our Lord selected them to be His disciples, and has no reference to the inward call of grace. It would then mean, "I know the real inward character of all those whom I have called to be my professing disciples." It certainly favors this view that our Lord uses precisely the same expression in John 6:70: "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil?"

Anyone who cares to see the question well discussed will find it ably examined by Gomarus.

[*But that the Scripture may be fulfilled.*] Our Lord's meaning seems to be filled up in the following way: "I speak not of you all, as if I thought you all faithful. I know that ye are not all clean and trustworthy, and I know that in this way you will see the words of Scripture fulfilled."

Here, as in many places where the expression occurs, "This was done that the Scripture might be fulfilled," we must not for a moment suppose that "things were done in order that Scripture might be fulfilled," but that "when things were done the Scripture was fulfilled." "I know the characters of all my disciples," our Lord seems to say, "and I know that very soon something will happen by which the Scripture will be fulfilled."

[*He who eats bread, etc.*] The 41st Psalm is here shown to apply to one greater than David and one worse than Ahithophel. The ninth verse here quoted says, "My own familiar friend, who did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." The expression implies the act of one who like a stubborn and vicious horse suddenly turns round against his master and kicks at him. "This," our Lord says, "is about to be fulfilled in the conduct of Judas Iscariot to Me."

It cannot of course be said that this quotation is positive proof that Judas ate the Lord's Supper. But it certainly rather increases the probability of it. The words "eats bread with Me," used in such close juxtaposition to the institution of the Lord's Supper, are very remarkable.

The grand lesson, that we must be prepared for much disappointment in friends and companions in this life, is very plain in this passage. The less we expect from man the better.

19.--[*Now I tell you before, etc.*] There can be little doubt that this verse applies to the warning of Judas' approaching apostasy which our Lord had just given. "I tell you of the coming fall of one of your number before it takes place, in order that when it takes place you may not be

confounded, but may see fresh reason for believing that I am the promised Messiah."

The expression, "I am He," in the Greek is literally, "I am." Is there any reference to the famous "I AM has sent me" in Exodus? It comes in close connection with "sending" in the next verse.

20.--[*Verily, verily I say, etc.*] Our Lord's purpose in this verse seems to be to encourage and cheer His faithful disciples. "Be not dismayed" he seems to say, "though one of your number is unfaithful and falls away. Persevere and fear not. Remember the high dignity of your office. I solemnly declare to you that he who receives you or anyone else whom I send forth to preach the Gospel receives Me, because ye are my representatives. Nor is this all. He who receives Me receives not Me only, but God the Father who sent Me. Ye have no cause therefore to be ashamed of your calling however unworthily some may behave.

Let us note that it is no light matter to reject and despise a faithful minister of Christ. A weak and ignorant servant may carry a message for a royal master; and for his master's sake, he ought not to be lightly esteemed. Contempt for Christ's ministers, when they are really faithful, is a bad symptom in a church or nation.

The connection of this verse with the preceding passage is certainly not easy to see and has puzzled all commentators. Some, as Alford, have thought that our Lord intended to show the wickedness of Judas in giving up such an honorable office as that of the Apostleship. This seems farfetched. Some refer it back to the command to imitate our Lord's humility by washing one another's feet, and think it is meant to remind them that even they are Christ's ambassadors. I prefer the view already given, that the words are meant to cheer and comfort the disciples. Though not all were faithful, the true-hearted ones were Christ's commissioned ambassadors.

Stier says: "The whole circle of the Apostles seemed to be disgraced and broken up by the treachery of Judas, and therefore our Lord confirms the faithful in their election, and that very fitly by repeating an earlier promise."