

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

which it has itself raised. To awaken faith is the work of the apostolic testimony, presenting itself to our conscience in its noble, its holy simplicity. The Divine characteristics with which it is invested are at once apprehended by any one who possesses in its integrity the sense of that which is good, true, Divine. It is thus that faith is born. If afterwards she happens to meet on her way with objections raised by science which threaten to obstruct her course, she is not troubled; she waits, and leaves science to manage her own affairs. Before long this latter pulls her own work to pieces; she puts her arguments to the proof, and soon sweeps away with her own hands the difficulties which she has herself raised. When science has accomplished this task, as we have just now been attempting to make her do, faith, now seeing the way clear before her, resumes her course in peace, with the sense of one more victory gained, and of possessing still more assuredly the treasure in which her happiness consists.

F. GODET.

---

### A CHAPTER OF GOSPEL HISTORY.

4.—THE CHILDREN IN THE MARKET-PLACE.—(*St. Matt.* xi. 16-20.)

“To what shall I liken this generation?” asked the Divine Critic of his age; and in reply to his own question He said, “It is like unto children.” In other circumstances Jesus represented childlikeness as the very *beau idéal* of character for all aspirants to citizenship and honour in the Divine kingdom. On the present occasion He thought of childhood on its less admirable and exemplary side, as the age of

play as opposed to earnest work, and as the age of caprice, whim, peevishness. The men of his own time, including very specially the religious people, the Pharisees, seemed to Him like children in this respect in the first place, that while He and John were both in dead earnest about the things of the Kingdom, each in his own way striving with might and main to advance its interests, they were merely playing at religion, amusing themselves with pious works, and mightily pleased with their own performances. They appeared to Him children in this further respect, that they were capricious and fickle in temper, changeable in their humour, fastidious and hard to please, much given to peevish complaining. Their way of treating John and Himself reminded Him of what one might see any day in the market-places of towns—children playing at marriages and funerals, and quarrelling with each other, because they were never all in the same humour at the same time, one set wanting to play at marriages when another set wanted to play at funerals, and *vice versâ*. John and Himself were very different in their spirit, ways of life, and methods of work, and it might have been expected that if either of these was disliked the other would be a favourite. But no; they were both alike unpopular. When they witnessed John's austerity, and listened to his stern preaching of repentance, the men imbued with the *Zeit-geist* of that generation were in the mood to wish for something more genial and tolerant. On the other hand, when they witnessed the genial way of Jesus, and heard the words of grace and mercy spoken by Him to the sinful, they were in the mood to like something more strict and severe. Both the Great Ones of the time,

full of force and originality, sinned against the maxim of worldly wisdom—nothing in excess, *nequid nimis*, *μηδὲν ἄγαν*—and so incurred the penalty of being blamed by those, at all times the majority, to whom anything not characterized by tameness, half-and-halfness, and mediocrity was an offence.

Such, we doubt not, is in general the import of the remarkable words in which our Lord expressed His opinion of the generation among whom He lived, led thereto by reflection on the treatment which He and John had received at their hands. Jesus regarded the men who accounted themselves the better sort morally and spiritually, as persons who had no capacity to sympathize with earnestness under any of its manifestations, their own religious life being but child's play; and who therefore occupied the position of captious critics towards all that was noblest and best and most hopeful in their time, expressing themselves in very severe and ill-natured terms about those whom they ought to have held in high and reverend esteem, calling John a man possessed, Himself a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. Such is the general drift of the passage. When, however, we proceed to the detailed interpretation of the little parable concerning the children in the market-place, we encounter minute difficulties, and consequent contrarieties of exegetical opinion. Such questions as these have been asked: Who are the complainants and who the complained of? who say, "We have piped, we have mourned"? and who are they who did not dance to the pipe as men do at weddings, nor weep in sympathy with the mourners as men do at funerals? For the settlement of these questions

another point has to be decided. Does Jesus include Himself and John among the children, *mirabili facilitate*, as Bengel says?<sup>1</sup> If we include Jesus and John among the children, then we may make them either the complainants or the complained of. The traditional interpretation favours the former of these alternatives. Those who call to their companions are Jesus and John, and their complaint, a just complaint, against their countrymen is, that they had not responded to their call, had not danced when the Son of man piped, nor wept when the Baptist mourned. In favour of this view is the fact that it assigns to Jesus and John the *initiative*, and puts their generation in the position of simply not sympathizing cordially with their work, in accordance with the historical state of the case. But, on the other hand, to make John and Jesus the complainants robs the parable of literary felicity by presenting them in an aspect which was not characteristic of them, but which was eminently characteristic of the Pharisaic religionists of the time. The two prophets of that age had a good right to complain, but it was not their way to complain; while, on the other hand, fault-finding was an outstanding vice of the Pharisaic character. The presumption therefore is, that the children who were so unfortunate as never to be able to get other children to play with them, were not the two heroes of the kingdom, but their small-souled critics. This view, accordingly, is adopted by many modern commentators, *e.g.*, by Lange and Alford.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus non solum Judaeos, sed etiam se et Johannem, diversis modis comparat cum puerulis mirabili, quod ad Jesum attinet, facilitate.—Gnomon, *in loco*.

But now, supposing this point to be settled, and still going on the assumption that John and Jesus are among the children, the question arises in what order are the latter complained of? Who is it that would not dance, and who that would not weep? Alford thinks that He who would not dance is Jesus, and he that would not lament or weep is John; making the cause of complaint consist in this, that Christ's gladness and John's sadness were not of the *sort* their contemporaries liked. According to his view, the passage paraphrased must run thus: We have piped unto you, and ye have not *danced* as we desired, but have shewn your mirth in some other objectionable way; we have mourned, and ye have not wept, but have shewn your sorrow in some other distasteful manner. This interpretation strikes us as artificial and unhappy. If it were worth while, it would be easy to adduce a variety of reasons against it. Suffice it to mention one, viz., that the stress laid on the kind of sorrow and joy is not in keeping with the variation in the Evangelic accounts of Christ's words.<sup>1</sup> It is more natural to understand the text the other way, and to regard John as the person complained of as refusing to dance, and Jesus as the person complained of as refusing to weep. On this view the negatives have the force of emphatic positives. "Ye danced not," means ye did the very opposite of dancing, went to culpable excess in sadness. "Ye lamented not, or wept not," means ye gave no place to the element of sadness, but, on the contrary, indulged in a degree of cheerfulness and joy

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 32. ἔθρηνησαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ἐκλαύσατε. Matt. xi. 17. ἐθρηνησαμεν καὶ οὐκ ἐκούψασθε.

with which we could not possibly have any sympathy. The moral of the parable is that John and Jesus went to extremes in opposite directions, and so incurred the disapprobation of those who, in their worldly-wise way of thinking, deemed that mode of life proper and commendable which was made up both of gladness and of sadness moderate in quantity and duly blended. When such worldly-wise ones visited the neighbourhood of the Jordan, and heard John preaching with awful earnestness on the necessity of repentance, they felt that he offended against "the law of the mean" by leaving no place in his scheme of life for the gay piping element in human nature, and they said, He hath a devil, he is possessed, he is a monomaniac, with one fixed idea in his head—Repent, repent, repent! When the same men came by chance into close contact with the society of Jesus on any peculiarly significant characteristic occasion, say at Matthew's farewell feast, they felt shocked by the unmeasured flow of joy, and said: Surely these revellers forget the sadness that is in human existence—the sin and misery and death that are all around! Perhaps they even garnished their spiteful remarks with quotations from Scripture, and pointed at the supposed drunkards and gluttons the saying of the wise man, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men."<sup>1</sup>

Thus far we have been discussing the question as to the exact interpretation of the parable on the hypothesis that Jesus and John are to be included among the children. But now we must frankly confess that

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. vii. 2.

in the foregoing remarks we have been going on a method of dealing with this striking figurative saying of our Lord for which we have no taste. The great matter in the interpretation of parables is to get at the essential point, and not to inquire too minutely in regard to details—What does this mean and what does that mean? The truth, we believe, is hit by Olshausen, one of the most sagacious and satisfactory of German commentators, who says that both classes of children—both those who complain and those who are complained of—are representatives of the fickle contemporaries of Jesus, and gives as the sense of the passage: This generation is like a company of peevish children, with whom nothing goes right: one half wishes this, the other that, and so activity with a fixed aim is impossible among them. In the parable the one set of children are just as peevish and as unreasonable as the other, they are fit companions for each other—"fellows"<sup>1</sup> in spirit as well as in years—and they are photographed together, caught in the act of play, to form a picture of the grown children of the time, who are as unreasonable in their treatment of the children of true wisdom, Jesus and John, as the children in the market-place are with one another. In one respect

<sup>1</sup> The received Greek Text has *ἑταίρους*, rendered in English Version as above. But many MSS. give *ἑτέροις*, and critical editors differ as to which of the two readings should have the preference. Lange adopts *ἑτέροις*, and seems to assign to it a moral significance = other children not belonging to the playing party, and not in a mood to play; representing Jesus and John, who were too earnestly-minded to trifle after the prevailing fashion. On the other hand, Alford prefers *ἑταίρους*, and thinks *ἑτέροις* has arisen through mistake of the ear, and is an instance of itacism. But, of course, this view cuts both ways. Tischendorf (Eighth Edition) reads *ἑτέροις*. The corresponding word in Luke is *ἀλλήλοις*, which sympathizes with *ἑταίρους* better than with *ἑτέροις*.



only does the thought of the intended application influence the colouring of the parable. If the purpose had been merely to depict the fickleness and fastidiousness of the Pharisaic Jews, it would have sufficed to draw a picture of children playing at any game and quarrelling over it. But the Speaker desires further to indicate what it was in John's conduct and his own that specially called forth manifestations of the fault-finding spirit characteristic of his generation ; therefore He does not merely draw a picture of children at play, but represents them as playing at marriages and funerals. Beyond indicating these two points, that the men of the time were childish in their temper, and what it was in John and in Jesus that provoked the manifestation of their fickle, peevish, captious humour, the parable does not go. What it was in the Pharisaic character out of which their fault-finding sprang, Jesus left his hearers to find out for themselves, and we are left by the record in the same position. Nor can any one with any measure of insight be much at a loss for an answer. The men who were under the dominion of the *Zeit-geist* of the period were solemn triflers, and therefore were offended by intense moral earnestness in all its manifestations. They were worldly-wise men, believing in the maxim, Moderation in all things, and especially in religion,<sup>1</sup> and they had no sympathy

<sup>1</sup> This feature may be regarded as scarcely compatible with the Pharisaic character, which, as portrayed in the Gospel, went to great lengths of religious extravagance in certain directions, such as ritual, washings, Sabbath keeping, and the like. But it must be remembered that the Sadducees were children of the *Zeit-geist*, as well as the Pharisees, and agreed with them in their dislike of Jesus and John. The two parties or sects were radically the same, animated by one

with the enthusiasm and extravagance of extremes. They were dull-minded, custom-ridden, mechanical formalists, abhorred originality, poetry, passion, and were incapable of making allowance for the faults, real or seeming, which sprang out of these. They were men who looked only on the surface of things, and wanted the insight which can look into the very heart of a man, and see there the true worthy explanation of strange eccentric actions, and hence committed the inconceivably stupid mistakes of pronouncing John the Baptist a madman and Jesus of Nazareth a profligate.

From the harsh and unsympathetic judgment of the worldly-wise ones, Jesus appealed to the tribunal of true wisdom, with great confidence as to the result of the appeal. "And yet," He added, "wisdom was justified of her children."<sup>1</sup> The reflection may be taken, as in the English Version, as a moral axiom,<sup>2</sup> but the form in which it is put in the narratives shews that our Lord meant it, in the first place at least, as a statement of fact with reference to the two historical characters whose reception by their contemporaries has just been considered, viz., Himself and John.<sup>3</sup> The connection of thought is: John came, and was treated thus and thus; Jesus

spirit, manifesting itself under different phases; and hence Jesus warned his disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, treating them as one.

<sup>1</sup> Instead of *τέκνων*,  $\aleph$  B have *ἐργων*, which is therefore adopted by Tischendorf. Alford suggests that *ἐργων* may have been substituted for *τεχνων*, which again may easily have arisen from *τέκνων*, by the change of  $\kappa$  into  $\chi$ . In Luke the undisputed reading is *τῶν τέκνων, πάντων* being added, before in some MSS., after in others.

<sup>2</sup> Wisdom is justified of her children (*always* understood).

<sup>3</sup> *ἐδικαιώθη* (aorist) *ἡ σοφία*. Wisdom *was* justified, in the cases referred to.

came, and was treated in similar fashion. Both were treated badly, though for opposite reasons; yet in the case of both, wisdom was justified of her children. The wisdom of God, the Sender of the two badly-received Prophets, the wisdom of both the Sent, was recognized by a small minority in an evil degenerate age, by those, viz., who were themselves the children of wisdom.

While this is the historical exposition of the remarkable saying—one of many remarkable sayings crowded into the Chapter we are now studying—it is manifest that the words are very suggestive of didactic meanings applicable to all times. It may be worth our pains to state and develop one or two of the general reflections which naturally occur to one's mind.

1. One lesson then is, that if Wisdom was justified in the cases both of John and Jesus, it follows that wisdom is compatible with various ways of life. John came neither eating nor drinking; the Son of man came both eating and drinking; and Wisdom was justified in them both—God's wisdom, in sending them such as they were; their wisdom, in being what God meant them to be.

There are certain respects in which all the wise do agree, or let us say one respect, which includes all others, viz., in hearty devotion to the interest of the Divine kingdom. In this cardinal respect, John and Jesus were at one; each was animated by a holy passion for doing the Divine will, and for getting it done in this earth by all men. That Divine noble passion ruled their life and shaped their conduct; they followed it whithersoever it led them; their

wisdom consisted simply in following its impulses with unhesitating steps. In this respect all the children of true wisdom are like them; but along with this cardinal unity may go great diversity in means and methods for accomplishing the common end. While there is one end for all, there are diversities of endowments and functions, and it is not only permissible but desirable that a man's manner of life and of action should correspond to his gifts, his opportunities, and not the whim, certainly, but the need of the time and place in which he lives. Means must be adapted to ends, and men must be like their work. Christ and his forerunner had very different work to do, and the laws of congruity required that their work and their characters should correspond. John, standing on the threshold of the new era of grace, was still a child of the old time: he was a Hebrew prophet, a large part of whose business it was to shew the people their transgressions. He was, indeed, the last of the prophets and the harbinger of the new era, but that made no difference. His work as the forerunner of Messiah was one involving rough tasks and demanding a stern will. He had to prepare the way of the Lord; levelling heights, filling up hollows, removing stumbling-blocks; in plain terms, humbling pride, rousing dormant consciences, exposing special sins, and so, by a severe moral discipline, preparing men for receiving Christ when He came in the fulness of grace. This being the Baptist's work, it became him to come neither eating nor drinking, an austere ascetic, by the very exaggerations of his self-denial protesting against all forms of sensualism. His very dress was in keeping with his vocation, helping as it

did to give emphasis to his ministry of repentance. His rough garment of camel's hair, gathered up with a leathern girdle, was an expressive symbol which spoke to the eye of the multitude, and told them that this man was a prophet, another Elijah come among them, a living representative of the Moral Law, and as such isolated from them and raised above them, and as it were from Sinai's peak thundering down a stern "Thou shalt not" against the vices of the world below—altogether a most legitimate piece of Ritualism. Grant that his habits were excessive in their austerity, his aspect grotesque, his manners uncouth, his speech uncourtly, his whole way of life eccentric, insomuch that people, not knowing well what to think of him, disposed of the puzzle by the ready suggestion, *He is possessed*, John would nevertheless not have done his peculiar work so well wanting these peculiarities. At the very least they were guarantees of his utter sincerity, proved that he really was possessed, not by a devil indeed, but by the sublime spirit of zeal for righteousness; possessed to such a degree as to make him, owing to human infirmity, almost a monomaniac, or at least to disturb the balance and mar the symmetry of his character, and present him to the world a one-sided, singular, extreme man, unendurable except to those who understood and sympathized with his mission, and therefore were not disappointed or shocked when on going out to the wilderness they saw not a vacillating weak-willed reed, nor an effeminate courtier, but a prophet of the prophets.

On the other hand, the law of congruity required Jesus to come eating and drinking, and dressing like

other people within the limits of the innocent. For Jesus was the "Son of man," and as such it became Him to be in all sinless respects like unto his brethren, that He might get close to them, and find his way into their hearts with his gospel of mercy, and the peace of forgiveness, and the rest of a new heart endowed with rightly ordered affections. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and He did well. Not eating and drinking riotously did He come, as ignorant, prejudiced, or malicious men said: his accommodations to existing customs sprang from love, not from laxity. He, too, came in the spirit of holy self-denial and sobriety; He had not either the desire or the means to live luxuriously. But He did not make an exhibition of his self-denial. He took privation cheerfully, not to say gaily, as a matter of course rather than as a thing to be complained of; went about wearing on his face an aspect of sunny serenity, as one who had good news to tell; and for the rest kept his fasting and his sorrow and his spiritual agonies for solitary times and places. And in all this He did well. His way of life was suited to his vocation. He came to preach the gospel to the poor, and therefore it became Him to live so as to win confidence, avoiding singularity by accommodating Himself in all innocent ways to existing custom, gaining for Himself opportunities of doing spiritual good: now asking a drink from a sinful woman, that He might have an opportunity of telling her of the living water; going at another time, self-invited and without ceremony, to dine with a publican, that He might bring salvation to the house of his host; always eating and drinking without indulgence, but also without scruple, and in his very

eating and drinking seeking his Father's glory in the saving of lost ones. And in Him, thus living, Wisdom was justified. Wisdom was justified through his own lips; for his apologies for so living, to them that examined Him, are among the wisest as well as the most beautiful of his utterances. "Why goest thou to the homes of publicans and sinners?" asked the fault-finders. "Why goeth a physician to the homes of the sick, if not because they need him?" replied He at one time. "Why goeth a shepherd after a stray sheep, if not for the joy of finding it?" replied He at another time. "I eat with those accounted specially sinful, because they are great sinners and know it, and if I save them I gain devoted followers, seeing one who is forgiven much loveth much," He replied on a third occasion. And Wisdom, in the person of Jesus, was justified also by her children, *i.e.*, by those who received the benefit of his grace. The ignorant or ill-minded might mistake or sneer, but the Son of man received the blessings of them that were ready to perish, and their after lives shewed what He had aimed at in frequenting their company; and with the blessing of their lips and the vindication of their lives He was satisfied.

2. A second lesson suggested by the reflection uttered by our Lord, is that Wisdom is not a time-server, seeking to please the world by following its fashion. If Wisdom expected to be and was justified in Jesus and John, then a time-server she could not be, for both came so that their generation was extensively displeased with them. Herein the true, divine, heaven-born Wisdom differs from the wisdom of the world, the very essence of which consists in time-serving,

studying in all things to be in fashion, to please all, to obviate immediate difficulties, to gain immediate temporary advantages; and, in its eagerness to accomplish such petty purposes, stifling conviction, chilling enthusiasm, and cutting itself off from the possibility of a heroic career permanently influential. True wisdom cares more for ultimate than immediate results, has faith in the future, and prescribes to a man as his first duty the expression of conviction, the forth-putting of the Divine force that is in him, regardless of immediate consequences, at least comparatively. There is such a thing as innocent time-serving compatible with true wisdom. The author of "The Holy State" says, "There be four kinds of time-serving; first, out of Christian discretion, which is commendable; second, out of human infirmity, which is pardonable; third and fourth, out of ignorance or affectation, both which are damnable." He illustrates the first thus: "He is a good time-server that is pliant to the times in matters of mere indifference." By way of apology for the second he exclaims pathetically, "Oh, there is more required to make one valiant than to call Cromwell or Jewell coward, as if the fire in Smithfield had been no hotter than what is painted in the 'Book of Martyrs.'" Time-serving through ignorance he describes as a "gaping for company, as others gaped before them;" illustrating it by a comical story of an old woman who had lived in the days of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, and said her prayers daily both in Latin and in English, leaving God, as she said, "to take to Himself which He liked best." By time-serving through affectation, Fuller meant accommodating oneself to the times



from motives of self-interest. How common he found it in that age we may learn from the observation: "We read of an Earl of Oxford fined by King Henry VII. 15,000 marks for having too many retainers. But how many retainers hath Time had in all ages, and servants in all offices. Yea, and chaplains too." <sup>1</sup> Yea, indeed; and the reason is not far to seek. That picture of the children in the market-place goes far of itself to explain it, for it is a photograph of human nature in all ages and places. Caprice, unreasonableness, fastidiousness, aversion to that which is emphatic, are common vices in all societies; and if a man care more for his own comfort than for higher considerations, he is sure to become a man-pleaser rather than a follower of the Baptist and of Christ. And men will praise him when he does this, as they blame those who act otherwise. Nevertheless, this course of action is not wisdom. A man may be called foolish by many, yet not be a fool after all. It depends on who they are who blame. Wisdom is justified not of fools, but of her own children: by all others she is pronounced foolish, and with great plausibility and show of reason. Only with a *show* of reason, however; for time-serving, except the innocent sort that springs out of charity and a peaceable disposition, is demonstrably folly. It disables a man from serving his time by making him a moral imbecile, a reed shaken by every wind. Further, it often fails even of its own end, which is to please men. Many men, many minds; and it is hard to please all, and best not to try. Yet again, following fashion is wearisome, for fashion changes fast. It is, indeed,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Fuller, "The Holy State." Book iii. chap. 19.

as the writer already quoted says, "a very difficult thing to serve the times; they change so frequently, so suddenly, and sometimes so violently from one extreme to another. The times under Diocletian were Pagan, under Constantine, Christian, under Constantius, Arian, under Julian, apostate, under Jovian Christian again; and all within the age of man, the term of seventy years. And would it not have wrenched and sprained his soul with short-turning who in all these should have been of the religion for the time being?"<sup>1</sup>

ALEX. B. BRUCE.

---

THE BOOK OF JOB.

III.—THE FIRST COLLOQUY. (CHAPTERS IV.—XIV.)

(4) JOB TO ZOPHAR. (CHAPTERS XII.—XIV.)

AT last Job has nerved himself to contend with the Almighty! He has challenged God, "in desperate manner daring the event to the teeth," either to accuse him and listen to his defence, or to reply to his impeachment of the Divine justice and compassion. He has prepared his pleas, drawn out his Declaration, or Defence; and he now enters the presence of the Judge of all the earth, trembling and afraid because his integrity to Heaven is all he dare call his own, and yet strong in the assurance that nothing but integrity could possibly avail him. He has but little hope of a happy issue to the trial, since he believes that, for some inscrutable reason, God has determined to hold him for a foe; but he is resolved, eager, to put his fate to the touch, to learn

<sup>1</sup> "The Holy State." Book iii. chap. 19.