

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
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CONTAINING
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED
MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE PARISH-CHURCH OF OLNEY.
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE PARISH OF OLNEY.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I HAVE principally two motives for publishing these Discourses. The one is, to exhibit a specimen of the doctrine that is taught and most surely believed amongst us, to satisfy those who desire information, and to stop, if possible, the mouth of Slander. I cheerfully submit them to examination, in full confidence that they contain nothing of moment which is not agreeable to the general strain of the word of God, and to the principles of the church whereof I am a minister, as specified in the Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies. And that what I now print is to the same purport with the usual course of my preaching, I doubt not but all who stately hear me, will do me the justice to acknowledge.

My other motive is, a desire of promoting your edification. It is my comfort that many of you live by the truths of the gospel, and highly prize them. You will not, therefore, be unwilling to view the substance of what you once heard with acceptance. But it is to be feared, that the far greater part of the congregation have need to have the things pertaining to their peace pressed upon them again and again, for a different reason; not because they know them, and therefore love to have them brought to their remembrance, but because they have hitherto heard them without effect. For the sake of both, therefore, I am willing to leave an abiding testimony amongst you. I hereby take each of your consciences to witness, that I am clear of your blood; and that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.

In the choice of the subjects I have selected for publication, I have not been solicitous to comprise a succinct scheme of gospel-doctrine, but have given the preference to such topics, which the peculiar circumstances of the times, and of my hearers, make me desirous might be had in continual remembrance.

The exposition of the third commandment, which was first delivered in your hearing, I afterwards preached (nearer the form in which it now appears) at London; and as it led me to touch on some particulars of a very public and interesting concern, I have given it a place in this volume. And I shall think myself happy indeed, if it may please God to give weight to the

testimony of so obscure a person, with respect to a grievance under which the nation groans.

As long discourses are in many respects inconvenient, I have chosen to publish no more than a brief summary of what you heard more at large from the pulpit. And as I aim to speak plain truths to a plain people, I have purposely avoided any studied ornaments in point of expression, being desirous to accommodate myself to the apprehensions of the most ignorant.

May it please the God of all grace to accompany my feeble endeavours to promote the knowledge of his truth with the powerful influence of his Holy Spirit! And I earnestly entreat all who know how to draw near to a throne of grace by Jesus Christ, to strive mightily in prayer for me, that I may stand fast in the faith, and increase in the knowledge of Jesus the Saviour, and that, for his sake, I may labour, without fear of fainting, in the service to which he has been pleased to call me. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

I am your affectionate friend, and servant in the gospel of Christ,

JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, January 20, 1767.

SERMON XII.

OF THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls. MATTH. xi. 29.

THOSE who are enabled to come unto Christ, not only experience a change of state, but of character, disposition, and practice. They are not only freed from condemnation, but they are made partakers of a divine nature. They are delivered from the slavery and yoke of Satan, and made willing in the day of the Lord's power, to accept and embrace his yoke, which is commended to us in the following verse, as easy and pleasant. Our Lord speaks of his service as a yoke or burden, because it is so esteemed by all who know him not. They account him a hard master, and think his service wearisome; but those who have made the experiment, find it otherwise: though, it must be confessed, it exposes to some difficulties, calls for the daily exercise of self-denial, and will not admit either of competition or composition with the world, nor can be pleasing to the unrenewed part of our nature. But the knowledge of his love, the hope of glory, and those seasonable refreshments with which he is pleased to favour those who come unto him, sweeten every bitter thing, and make them willing to bear his yoke, and to prefer it to all that the world accounts freedom.

Let us inquire,

1. What is meant by the yoke of Christ?

2. The proper means by which we are enabled to take it upon us; that is, the believing consideration of him, as our effectual teacher and perfect pattern.

3. The happy effect of bearing his yoke: We shall find rest to our souls.

I. The yoke of Christ, taken at large, includes all the dependence, obedience, and submission which we owe him, as our rightful Lord and gracious Redeemer. He has a double right to us; "he made us," Psal. c. 3. We are the creatures of his power: he gave us our being, with all our capacities and enjoyments. And farther, "he bought us" (Acts, xx. 28.); he pitied us in our low and fallen state, and gave his own life, his precious blood, to ransom us from that ruin and misery which was the just desert of our sins. There is good reason, therefore, that we should be his, and live and cleave to him in love alone; that we should no longer live to ourselves, but to him who died for us, and rose again. In particular, we may consider,

1. The yoke of his profession. This is very pleasing to a gracious soul, so far as faith is in exercise. Far from being ashamed of the gospel of Christ,

he is ready and willing to tell all who will hear, what God has done for his soul. Many young converts, in the first warmth of their affection, have more need of a bridle than of a spur in this concern. For want of prudence to time things rightly, and perhaps for want of more tenderness mixed with their zeal, they are apt to increase their own troubles, and sometimes, by pushing things too far, to obstruct the success of their well-meant endeavours to convince others. But though this is a fault, it is a fault on the right side, which time, experience, and observation, will correct. And though we are hasty enough to condemn the irregular overflowings of a heart deeply impressed with a sense of eternal things, I doubt not but the Lord, who owns and approves the main principle from whence they spring, beholds them with a far more favourable eye than he does the cold, cautious, temporizing conduct of some others, who value themselves upon their prudence. We should judge thus, if we had servants of our own. If we had one who was heartily and affectionately devoted to our interests, always ready to run by night or by day, refusing no danger or difficulty, from a desire to please us, though sometimes, through ignorance or inattention, he should make a mistake, we should prefer him to another of greater knowledge and abilities, who was always slow and backward, and discovered at least as much care to save himself from inconveniences as to promote our service. However, this warm zeal usually suffers abatement; we are flesh as well as spirit; and there are some circumstances attending a profession of the gospel, on the account of which it may be with propriety termed a yoke to us, who have so many remaining evils within us, and so many outward temptations to call them forth. It will certainly stir up opposition from the world, and may probably break in upon our dearest connections, and threaten our most necessary temporal interests, 2 Tim. iii. 12; Matth. x. 36.

2. The yoke of his precepts. These the gracious soul approves and delights in; but still we are renewed but in part. And when the commands of Christ stand in direct opposition to the will of man, or call upon us to sacrifice a right hand or a right eye, though the Lord will surely make those who depend upon him victorious at the last, yet it will cost them a struggle; so that, when they are sensible how much they owe to his power working in them, and enabling them to overcome, they will, at the same time, have a lively conviction of their own weakness. Abraham believed in God, and delighted to obey; yet when he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, this was no easy trial of his sincerity and obedience; and all who are partakers of his faith are exposed to meet, sooner or later, with some call of duty little less contrary to the dictates of flesh and blood.

3. The yoke of his dispensations. This none can bear as they ought, but those who come to him. It is natural to us to repine, to fret, and toss like a wild bull in a net (Isa. li. 20.), when we are under afflictions. Believers likewise find their flesh weak, when their spirits are willing; yet they see sufficient reasons to submission, and they know where to apply for grace. Affliction is a touchstone that discovers what spirit a man is of. The hypocrite may keep up a fair semblance of true piety, while all things go smooth and to his wish; but in sharp troubles the mask will drop off. Satan proceeded upon this maxim in his contest with Job; and the maxim is a truth, though Satan was mistaken in the application.

II. The appointed means by which sinners are enabled to bear this threefold yoke, is suggested in the words, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." However amiable and desirable the disposition I have described may appear, you will never acquire it by any strength, wisdom, or diligence of your own. Our Lord, to prevent you wearying yourselves with unsuccessful efforts and needless disappointments, has assured you beforehand, "Without me ye can do nothing" John xv. 5. But here he graciously offers you the assistance you need. As if he had said, I know you are unable of yourselves, but I will help you. Be not afraid of the prospect, but consider what I can do. To my power all things are easy; I can make the crooked straight, and the rough smooth; I can sweetly engage your affections, subdue your wills; influence your practice, and deliver you from your sinful fears. Consider likewise what I have done; thousands, who by nature were as unskilful and impatient as yourselves, have been made willing in the day of my power.

Therefore, *Learn of me.*—Be not afraid to come to me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. Great and mighty as I am, you may freely apply to me in every doubt and difficulty. Awakened souls, through a sense of guilt, and the power of unbelief, are backward and unwilling to come to Christ. They think, surely he will take no notice of such a one as I am. But observe how kind and condescending is his invitation; how graciously suited to engage our confidence! It was said of a Roman emperor, that those who durst speak to him were ignorant of his greatness, but those who durst not were still more ignorant of his goodness. This was a false and impious compliment when applied to a sinful mortal; but it is justly applicable to Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. His glorious majesty may well fill our hearts with awe, and humble us unto the dust before him: but his immense compassions, tenderness, and love, are revealed, to overbalance our fears, to give us confidence to draw nigh to him, and an encouraging hope that he will draw nigh to us.

Again, *Learn of me.*—I know the cause why these things appear so hard. It is owing to the pride and impatience of your hearts. To remedy this, take me for your example; I require nothing of you but what I have performed before you, and on your account: in the path I mark out for you, you may perceive my own footsteps all the way. This is a powerful argument, a sweet recommendation of the yoke of Christ, to those who love him, that he bore it himself. He is not like the Pharisees, whom he censured (Matt. xxiii. 4.) on this very account, who bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.

1. Are you terrified with the difficulties attending your profession, disheartened by hard usage, or too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Learn of Jesus, imitate and admire his constancy: "Consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," Heb. xii. 3. Make a comparison (so the word¹ imports) between yourself and him, between the contradiction which he endured, and that which you are called to struggle with, then surely you will be ashamed to complain. Admire and imitate his meekness: when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; he wept for his enemies, and prayed for his murderers. Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

2. Do you find it hard to walk steadfastly in his precepts, especially in some particular instances, when the maxims of worldly prudence, and the pleadings of flesh and blood, are strongly against you? Learn of Jesus. He pleased not himself (Rom. xv. 3.), he considered not what was safe and easy, but what was the will of his heavenly Father. Entreat him to strengthen you with strength in your soul, that as you bear the name of his disciples, you may resemble him in every part of your conduct, and shine as lights in a dark and selfish world, to the glory of his grace.

3. Are you tempted to repine at the dispensations of divine providence? Take Jesus for your pattern. Did he say, when the unspeakable sufferings he was to endure for sinners were just coming upon him, "The cup which my Father has put into my hands shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11.) and shall we presume to have a will of our own? especially when we further reflect, that as his sufferings were wholly on our account, so all our sufferings are by his appointment, and all designed by him to promote our best, that is, our spiritual and eternal welfare?

It is thus by looking to Jesus that the believer is enlightened and strengthened, and grows in grace and sanctification, according to that

¹ *Αναλογισασθι.*

passage of St. Paul, "We all with open face," or unveiled face, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. The word of God is a glass in which the goodness and beauty of the Lord Jesus are manifested to the eye of faith by the light of the Holy Spirit. In this wonderful glass the whole object is not seen at once, but every view we take strengthens the sight to discover something not perceived before. And the prospect is not only affecting, but transforming; by beholding we are gradually formed into the resemblance of him whom we see, admire, and love. All those whom Jesus thus teaches to bear his yoke, find his promise fulfilled; they obtain,

III. Rest to their souls. Those who are truly awakened want nothing to make them happy, but to be assured that they have an interest in the Redeemer's love. Now, this satisfaction is peculiar to those who take his yoke upon them, and are daily learning of him, and copying after him. For,

1. This affords the best and most unshaken evidence that he has begun a good work of grace in our hearts: I say the best, because the most unshaken. Many are greatly perplexed to know if they are truly converted; and are kept the longer in suspense, because they overlook the ordinary scriptural method of confirmation. They expect to know it by some extraordinary sensation suddenly impressed upon their minds. But besides that there have been many instances in which this expected evidence has been counterfeited, and a groundless confidence has been placed in a delusion or vain imagination (to the hurt of many, if not to their overthrow), even when they are from the gracious Spirit of God, they are for the most part transient; and when a different frame takes place, the believer is often tempted to question the reality of what went before.

I think therefore the testimony of an enlightened conscience, judging by the word of God, and deciding in our favour, that by his grace we have been enabled to take up the yoke of Christ, is in some respects a more satisfactory evidence, that we are his, and that he is ours, than if an angel was sent from heaven to tell us, that our names are written in the book of life.

2. The promise of the peculiar manifestation of his love (John. xiv. 21.), is made and restricted to those who walk in the path of obedience. If the discoveries the Lord is pleased sometimes to make of himself to the soul, are not the proper and direct evidences of a state of grace, they are however exceedingly desirable. Whoever has tasted the sweets of that water of life, cannot but long for repeated draughts. When he lifts up the light of his countenance upon the soul, then is love, joy, and peace within, however dark and distressing things may be without. But this desirable presence can

only be expected, while we bear his yoke, and walk in his steps. If we turn aside into forbidden paths, if we decline or dishonour the profession of his truth, we grieve the Holy Spirit, on whose communications our comforts are suspended; we give the enemies of our souls encouragement to assault us, and are in danger of falling from one wickedness to another, without the power of withstanding either the greatest or the smallest temptation, till the Lord is pleased to turn again to our assistance. In such a situation there can be no rest. "But he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely, and findeth rest," Prov. x. 9.

And true rest is no otherwise to be obtained. Those of you who refuse the yoke of Christ, will know in yourselves that you are far from rest. Your experience agrees with this declaration in the prophet: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," Isa. lvii. 21. In what respect will you dare to pretend that you have the advantage of those who bear the yoke of Christ?

We allow, the profession of the gospel is subject to inconveniences, but surely not to so many as you meet with who are ashamed, or afraid, or averse to maintain it. If those who are of your household are not your foes on this account, yet we can see how it fares with those who live without the fear of God. How many, and how sharp are your trials from disobedient children, unfaithful servants, false friendships, ungoverned passions, and unsatisfied desires! Nor do you save anything in point of character, not even with those by whom you are most desirous to be esteemed. They cannot indeed reproach you with being a believer, but may they not, do they not reproach and despise you for being a drunkard, or a liar, or a miser, or an extortioner? And is this more honourable than to suffer shame for the cause of Christ?

Do the precepts of Christ seem hard? Certainly not so hard as that miserable bondage you are under to Satan, the god of this world, who works in you, and rules over you at his will. He will not allow you to listen to the united remonstrances of conscience, health, interest, and reputation. But you are hurried on in his drudgery, constrained, like a mill-horse, to toil in the same tedious round of folly and sin, though you are aware of the consequences and wages beforehand. How absurd is it for you to boast of your freedom, while you are compelled to rush into present misery, and to dare your eternal ruin, with your eyes open!

And how greatly are you to be pitied under the many unavoidable afflictions of life, to which you are equally liable with the servants of Christ! When your idols are torn from you, when sickness seizes you, or death stares you in the face, then how do you fret and pine! how many are your fears and alarms! Then you are your own tormentors. The review of the past affords you only shame and regret. If you look forward to the

future, you are filled with foreboding fears and distressing apprehensions; you are weary of living and afraid to die.

Why then will you continue thus, when Jesus says, “Come unto me, that you may have rest?” O may he incline your hearts this day to hear his voice! Have you been hardened in your evil ways by a suspicion that your case is desperate, that it is now too late, and that he whom you have so often rejected will refuse you mercy? Beware of such a thought: “There is forgiveness with him,” Ps. cxxx. 4. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” He is gracious to pardon and mighty to save; only acknowledge your offences, and throw down the arms of your rebellion. He is mighty to save, and no less willing than able. As yet there is hope, but who can tell how long his patience may bear with you? Take notice of that awful denunciation, “He that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy,” Prov. xxix. 1. If you seek him today with all your hearts, you shall find him. But who can answer for tomorrow? Tomorrow, or tonight, your souls may be required of you; or, if your lives are spared, you may be given up to judicial and incurable hardness of heart. If his Spirit should cease from striving with you, you are lost for ever.