

THE  
**WORKS**  
OF  
**THE REV . JOHN NEWTON**

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF  
ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,  
LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

---

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.

---

**COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.**

---

**EDINBURGH**

*Printed at the University Press, for*

**PETER BROWN AND THOMAS NELSON.**

---

1830.

# 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 XVI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMPARED TO A RACE.

—*So run that ye may obtain.* 1 COR. ix. 24.

THE scriptures teach us to derive profitable lessons from common occurrences: and since we cannot avoid seeing and hearing the vanities of those who know not God, unless we would go wholly out of the world, we may learn some instruction from them at a distance. The country of Greece, and especially the neighbourhood of Corinth, was famous for trials of skill in a variety of exercises, such as racing, wrestling, fighting, and the like. And because the children of the world are very wise in their generation, and spare no pains to accomplish the point they have in view, the apostle would stir up believers to diligence from their example; and therefore, in several places, compares the Christian life to one or other of the contests which were managed in the public games, and here particularly to a race. In those ancient races much solemnity was observed. The ground or course was exactly marked out; those who were to run went through a strict regimen and exercise beforehand; a vast concourse of people were assembled as spectators; authorised judges were appointed to award the prize, which was a crown of laurel or oak leaves, to the winner: and before they began, a herald publicly proclaimed the rules to be observed by the competitors; which unless strictly complied with, all their pains and endeavours issued only in disappointment and shame. To each of these particulars the apostle alludes in different parts of his writings.

Let us, then, briefly consider wherein the allusion holds, and take notice of some things in which there is a remarkable difference.

I. That the Christian life is compared to a race, may intimate to us,

1. That it is a laborious and strenuous service, and incompatible with an indolent and careless frame of spirit. Not that we can do anything of ourselves; in this sense, “it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth,” Rom. ix. 16. But when a believer is animated by a view of Jesus, and the prize of the high calling, to run the race set before him, he finds that it demands his utmost strength, courage, and patience. A spectator may divert himself with the prospect, or the company; he may make observations upon what passes around him, and ride as softly as he pleases; but then he has no pretensions to the prize. But those who are actually candidates for it, may be easily distinguished without being pointed out: they have no leisure for amusement; their eyes are fixed, and their thoughts wholly engaged, upon what they have in hand; and they exert all their powers, and strain every nerve, to reach the goal. How inconsistent is the conduct of many profes-

sors! They enter the lists, they inform themselves of the rules, they even presume to expect the prize, though they idle away their whole lives, without once attempting to run in good earnest. Not so those who are taught and called of God: a sense of the worth of their souls, of the love of Christ, of the glory that shall be revealed, of their own weakness, and of the many obstacles that withstand their progress, stirs them up to watchfulness, diligence, and prayer, and excites a holy jealousy, "lest a promise being made of entering into his rest, any of them should come short of it," Heb. iv. 1.

2. That we should press forward, and not rest in what we have received. If a man sets out in a race with the greatest speed, and seems to outstrip all his antagonists; yet if he does not persevere to the end, he will be sure to lose. The apostle alludes to a race in another place, where he says, "Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I stretch forward," Phil. iii. 13, 14. The Greek word beautifully expresses the earnestness and energy of those who run, and are determined to be first: they make no account of the ground already passed over, but exert themselves to the utmost, labour with their hands and feet, and strain every joint to the utmost, as though the whole success depended on each single step. We see too many instances of persons who begin warmly, and seem to run well for a season; but they are hindered in their progress, slacken their pace first, and then stop short. Take notice of the exhortation in my text: "So run that you may obtain;" for it will be a dreadful disappointment if you should be set aside disapproved, when others receive the prize.

II. The heralds or criers in the Christian race are the ministers of the gospel, and their proper name of office is expressed by the same word. They have it in charge to invite all to run, and to declare the prescribed rules; and these must be carefully attended to; for "if," or, as it might be rendered, "although, a man strive" (2 Tim. ii. 5), although he wrestle, and fight, and run, weary himself, and excel others; yet, after all, he loses the prize, "he is not crowned, unless he strive lawfully," unless he strictly conforms to the prescribed regulations: he will be judged unqualified, though in other respects skilful and diligent, unless he runs in the limits marked out, fights with the usual weapons, and observes in all points the discipline of the place. We are bound in duty, at the same time that we proclaim the race, and point out the prize to your view, to tell you, that without faith and holiness (Mark xvi. 16; Heb. xii. 14) there can be no acceptance. And we cannot but be grieved to see how little these cautions are regarded by multitudes. Some are labouring, as it were in the fire, to establish a righteousness by their own works, and refuse to believe in Christ for salvation. Others who profess indeed to believe in him, call themselves his people, and affect to speak highly of his gospel, yet eventually deny him by their works and

conversation. But unless you can alter the sure determinations of the word of God, there must be an alteration in yourselves, or else when you think you have attained, and shall confidently demand the prize, you will hear him say, "I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity," Luke xiii. 27.

There is a circumstance in this resemblance which I would not pass over, because it is peculiar to the Christian race. The ministers or heralds are not only to invite others, but are likewise to run themselves. To this the apostle alludes, when he says, "Lest, when I have preached to others, I should be myself a castaway" (1 Cor. ix. 27), or be disapproved of the Judge for breaking those regulations himself which he had been authorised to propound to all. We have need to preach to ourselves no less than to you, and to entreat your prayers for us, that we may stand perfect and complete in the whole will of God. And the caution may be proportionally extended to every one that is entrusted with any measure of gifts for the edification of the people of God. Keep close to his word; pray for his Spirit; be diligent and temperate in all things; and maintain a watchful jealousy over your own hearts;—these are the means by which the Lord keeps his people from falling. But trust not to any outward talent, calling, or usefulness; for it is possible for a man to be instrumental to the good of others in families and societies, and yet to come short of the kingdom himself at last.

III. I have observed that a great concourse of spectators attended at the ancient games. The Christian, in his race and warfare, has likewise innumerable eyes upon him, a great cloud of witnesses, Heb. xii. 1. We are exhibited (says the apostle) as a spectacle to the world, to the whole universe, both to angels and to men, 1 Cor. iv. 9. Though he may be placed in an obscure situation, yet his neighbours at least will observe him, to see how his profession and practice agree. Invisible beings attend him in every step; the good angels (Luke xv. 10) rejoice over the returning sinner, and it is probable, by God's appointment, support and refresh him in ways which are beyond our apprehension. The powers of darkness watch him with subtlety and envy, and go to the utmost bounds of their commission, in their endeavours either to divert him from his course, or to make it uncomfortable to him. How should this thought both animate and humble every sincere soul! Be not discouraged, because to appearance you are almost left to serve God alone. If the veil of flesh and blood could be drawn aside, you would see you are not alone; all the host of heaven are on your side; the glorious company that are before the throne of God, day without night, rejoicing, are engaged in your cause, and drink of the same fountain from which you are supplied. The spirits of just men made perfect, who are now all eye, all ear, all love, were once, as you are, partakers of the same infir-

mities, sorrows, and cares; and you were long shall be as they are, clothed with light, and freed from every burden. And Jesus, the Lord of angels, the King of saints, beholds your toil and conflict with complacence, and says, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," Rev. iii. 11. He is always near to succour, strengthen, and to save. Rejoice, therefore, that you run not as unnoticed, but rejoice with trembling. Be ashamed to think how disproportionate your efforts are to the company that behold you, and to the prize that awaits you. Remember likewise other eyes are upon you; Satan envies your privileges, and scorns your profession: he is every minute waiting permission to sift you as wheat (Luke, xxii. 31); he is incessantly spreading snares for your feet, and preparing his arrows against you; therefore be not high-minded, but fear, and give all diligence so to run that you may obtain.

IV. The judge who presides at the end of the race is Jesus, the Judge of all He holds forth the prize full in view to the eye of faith, and shall shortly crown the conqueror with his own hand. How sweetly does the apostle spiritualize upon this circumstance! "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth; there is laid up for me a crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge" (who does not decide by appearances, nor can be influenced by partiality, as is too frequent among men), "shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing," 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. Be of good cheer, believer; your case may be misrepresented or misunderstood by men, but the Lord, the righteous and unerring Judge, will vindicate, approve, and reward you in the great day, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.

Thus much concerning the resemblance of the Christian life to a race, to which the apostle alludes. I shall briefly take notice of some particulars in which the resemblance fails; and a very interesting and important difference may be observed,

1. In the reward. The "bodily exercise" employed in the games (for to these the apostle refers), "profited little" (1 Tim. iv. 8.): a crown of oak or laurel, or some such bauble, was their highest aim, and this the most of the competitors came short of: for though all ran, one only received the prize. Of little more value, and equal uncertainty, is the prize that has engaged the time and thoughts of many. "But godliness" (the whole course and conflict in which the believer is engaged) "is profitable for all things," or in every view, having promises to support the life that now is, and to crown that which is to come. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son," Rev. xxi. 7. "I will give him to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," Rev. ii. 7. "I will

make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; yea, I will grant him to sit down with me in my throne," Rev. iii. 12, 21. The Lord will give grace here, and will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly (Psal. lxxxiv. 11.); and hereafter he will crown grace with glory, and place his servants out of the reach of every trouble and enemy, in the kingdom which his love has prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord," 2 Cor. vii. 1.

2. In races, though many run, one only can receive the prize. But thanks be to God, it is not so in the Christian race. All who run, as the Lord has appointed, shall be sure to win. No opposition can prevail against them, nor will the number of candidates be any diminution to the happiness of each individual. The inheritance of the saints in light, like the light of the sun, is not diminished by being shared amongst many; each one possesses the whole, in the same perfection as he could do, if there was none to enjoy it but himself.

3. In the races the apostle alludes to, none were compelled to run. The proclamation was general; but those who did not choose to engage, suffered no disadvantage. But it is not so in the race to which you are invited by the gospel. The Lord is greatly offended with those who slight the message, and refuse to enter the lists. If you only give his ministers a hearing, and return to your farms and merchandise, (Matth. xxii. 5.) forget the worth of your precious souls, and suffer your thoughts to be engrossed with the cares and pleasures of this life, to the neglect of this one thing needful, the Lord will account it a contempt offered to himself, and will ere long call you before his tribunal to answer for it.

4. Those who ran, and did not win the prize, only lost their labour, or at the worst were exposed to shame; but they were liable to no positive punishment. But you who are professors of the gospel, if you come short at last, will be lost for ever. "So run that you may obtain." Be not content with having set out; the promise is made to perseverance. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matth. x. 22.); but if any draw back, or stop short, the Lord will have no pleasure in them, Heb. x. 38. They will not only lose the prize, but will receive a heavy and aggravated doom. It would have been better for them not to have known the ways of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. If you were forced to run for your lives, you would be very thoughtful about the event. But if you are not found amongst those who come in for the prize of eternal life, you will be cast into outer darkness, and sink under the curse of God for ever.



Fain, therefore, would I persuade you to address yourselves with earnestness to run the race set before you. Flee from approaching wrath. The wrath of God is already revealed against all unrighteousness, and soon it will be poured forth upon the head of every transgressor. Though God is patient and forbearing, he is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his glittering sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he hath ordained his arrows against those who shall finally disobey his great command, to receive the gospel of his grace. It is impossible to elude his eye, or to withstand his power. You are upon the brink of danger, if you are not already entered in this race; you stand upon a precipice, and hell from beneath has opened its mouth to receive you. But a respite is still afforded; the Lord waits to be gracious; and as yet there is room. The gate of mercy is not yet shut: "turn therefore to the stronghold, as prisoners of hope no longer refuse his gracious invitation, or trifle with your precious souls; seek to Jesus that you may live; apply to him for faith and repentance; and, in his strength and name prepare to run this important race. Meditate upon the glorious prize, which is provided for all who endure to the end; it is freely proposed to all who run. Pardon, grace, and eternal life, are promised and bestowed, without money and without price. If, after so many repeated calls, you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and determine that you will not come unto Jesus, that you may have life, you must assuredly perish, without mercy, and without excuse.

But if you are desirous to run, remember the admonition in my text, "So run that you may obtain." Your steps must be regulated by the word of God, or you will wander wide from the good old way; you must derive your sufficiency and strength from Christ by faith and prayer, or you will faint, and be unable to endure to the end. We read of some (Gal. v. 7.) that run well for a season, but were afterwards hindered, and turned aside. Be upon your guard; for there are many that will strive to divert you from your course. Satan, the world, and your own evil hearts, will combine, and form various attempts to slacken your pace, and to withdraw your attention from the one thing needful. Dread the thoughts of stopping short, or turning back; and the more you meet with opposition, be so much the more earnest to redouble your diligence, and especially to cry mightily to him who is able to keep you from falling, to preserve you unblameable in love while here, and at last to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

Believers, why are not we as wise in our generation as the children of the world? We see how those who are fond of a common horse-race are thinking and talking of it, and preparing for it every day. Does not their dil-

igence shame us, who are so cold, faint, and dilatory, in the most important, and honourable concerns! Let us gird up the loins of our mind: some of you have not far to run now; you have taken many a weary step since you were first called; but the end is at hand; the period of your complete salvation is now much nearer than when you first believed, Rom. xiii. 11. Think of Jesus, the forerunner and the judge: he has already entered within the veil for us, his eye is upon us, he is near to assist, and waiting to receive us. May his Spirit and his example animate us to press forward to the prize of our high calling, to tread down every difficulty, and to be faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of life!