

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
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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.

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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 XVII.

NO ACCESS TO GOD BUT BY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8.

THERE is no question that can arise in the mind of man, that is of so high importance as this in my text, and yet, alas! how seldom is it laid to heart! May the Spirit of God impress it upon all your consciences! You are now come before God to worship; ask yourselves, wherewith? On what do you ground your hope, that you offer him acceptable service? You must shortly appear before him in judgment. Are you prepared to meet him? Amos, iv. 12. What plea have you provided? Take heed in time. Be sure that it is such a one as he will admit, lest your hopes should fail, and you perish in his presence as chaff before the devouring flame.

The passage plainly expresses the inquiry of an awakened mind. It is to be feared many of you have often read these words without being suitably affected with their meaning. But if you can indeed make them your own, if you are truly solicitous how you are to come before God both here and hereafter, I hope his good Spirit will enable you to receive satisfaction from the answer given by the prophet.

If you can speak these words from your heart, you will readily acknowledge that they imply the following things:

1. A sense of duty; that you are under an obligation to come and bow before the High God. You are sensible that you ought not, and you find that you cannot, live without paying him homage and worship, but that he has a right to your service, and expects it. Too many show, in this respect, that they are dead while they live, dead to God, insensible and regardless of their many obligations to him, in whom they live, and move, and have their being. They live without prayer; they offer no praises to the God of their lives, but rise up and lie down, go out and come in, without one reflection on his power, goodness, and providence, even like the beasts that perish. But the awakened soul cannot do so. He trembles to think that he once could neglect that God, whom all the hosts of heaven worship, and is convinced, that however fair his character might have been amongst men, he justly deserved to have been struck to hell for so long restraining prayer before God.

2. A sense of the majesty and glory of God. Whoever seriously asks this

question, has an awful view of the Lord as the High God. Many, who do not wholly neglect prayer and worship, yet have no spiritual and humbling apprehensions of the God whom they profess to serve. Their prayers, whether in public or private, are only lip-service, as though they thought him altogether such a one as themselves. Their petitions are not guided by their desires, but they utter with their mouths what they find in the book, though their hearts have no love or relish of the things they ask for. How often is God mocked by those who join in our established worship? Has he not been so this morning by some of you? How little he is revered by many, is plain from the little regard they pay to his commands. They will break his Sabbaths, blaspheme his name, live in drunkenness, whoredom, anger, and malice, and yet pretend to worship him. But those who rightly understand the inquiry in my text, cannot do thus. They consider him as the High God: they know that he humbles himself to behold even the worship of heaven, and are therefore struck with this thought, Wherewith can I, a poor worm, who am but dust and ashes, come before this High God?

3. A sense of guilt. Alas! says the soul that is enlightened to see itself, I am not only mean, but vile. "I have sinned, but what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?" Job vii. 20. Wherewith shall such a polluted, obnoxious creature as I am appear before a holy God? Can my services atone for my sins, or what service can I perform that is not defiled and rendered unworthy of acceptance by the evil of my heart? But could I perform ever so well from this day forward, what would this avail for what is past? If I had offended a man like myself, I might think of making some amends; but my sins are against God. His justice, wisdom, holiness, and truth, have all demands upon me. What then can I bring? Will sacrifices appease him? No; these, though of his own appointment, are not of themselves sufficient. "It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," Heb. x. 4. Though all the beasts of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills were mine, though I should offer all Lebanon, hills of frankincense, rivers, yea, ten thousand rivers of oil, all would not do. Or should I give my son, my only son, the fruit of my body, neither would this atone for the sin of my soul.

Here, then, you may see, that to an awakened sinner sin is the heaviest burden imaginable. He is willing, and would be glad (if it might be), to purchase the pardon of sin with the loss of everything he accounts most valuable. If he had the whole world, he would freely part with it to be free from guilt. But at the same time he finds it a burden that he cannot shake off; he knows that he never can be delivered for anything he can do or propose, and therefore the great subject of inquiry always upon his mind is, Wherewith, or how shall I appear and stand before the High God?

I hope some of you are thus minded; to you I have a comfortable message

from the other part of my text. But as I cannot hope thus of you all, I must previously take notice, that there is hardly any one passage in the Bible more generally misunderstood, and which ignorant and careless men are more prone to wrest to their own destruction, than the verses under our present consideration. Not a few, having their eyes blinded by the god of this world, and their hearts enslaved to the love and practice of sin, are content to understand it as if it was rather a rebuke than an encouragement to them, who, like the jailor (Acts xvi. 30.), are deeply affected with a concern for the salvation of their souls. Their comment is to this purpose, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good:" that is, you need not terrify yourself at this rate; there is nothing so evil in sin, or so awful in God's threatenings as you suppose. He has said, indeed, "the soul that sinneth shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4.); yet here you see an easy way to escape, "Do justly," which is, being interpreted, Do not grossly cheat and injure your neighbour; abstain from robbery, extortion, and heavy oppression: and "love mercy;" that is, Be ready to do what are commonly called good-natured offices, and to give a shilling or a guinea (according to your circumstances) now and then to the poor, and you will be safe enough. How they explain the other clause, "walk humbly," upon this plan, I confess myself unable to conceive, and therefore I believe they are glad to omit it; for I am sure light cannot be more contrary to darkness, than such language as this is opposite to the idea of walking humbly with God.

According to this opinion, "to do justly, and to love mercy," are the whole of religion. They are indeed essential parts of it; and miserable will you be who talk in this strain, if God, at the great day, should judge you by this text to which you now so presumptuously appeal. How wonderful is the pride and arrogance of fallen man, who will dare to urge a plea before God, which must issue in his own confusion! Do you indeed deal justly? It implies something more than not being an arrant knave. Do you at all times, and in all respects, behave to every person as you would they should do unto you? Did you never take the least advantage of the ignorance or necessity of your neighbour? Did you never speak or report anything to his prejudice, without sufficient warrant and sufficient cause? You feel how tender you are of your own character and interests. Have you been equally tender of the interests of others, of all others with whom you have had connections, without being influenced in any instance or degree by partiality or mercenary views? If you cannot appeal to the Searcher of hearts that you have walked in this integrity, your pretence that you have done justly is vile hypocrisy, and you may tremble to think how easily you may be condemned out of your own mouth. Alas! if God, to whom all your thoughts and actions have been incessantly exposed, should enter into judgment with you, how unable would you be to answer him in one of a thousand!

Again, do you love mercy? Do you love it as a miser loves money? Is it the pleasure of your hearts to overcome evil with good? If your brother or neighbour offend you, not seven times but seventy times seven (Matth. xviii. 22.), do you find it delightful to repeat your forgiveness, to bless them that curse you, to pray for them that despitefully use you, and to requite repeated injuries with repeated acts of kindness? If not, what have you to do with mercy, either to pretend that you love mercy yourself, or to indulge a hope of obtaining mercy from God, if you know no better way of seeking it than by your own works. But suppose you were less culpable in these particulars, can you say that you walk humbly with God? Alas! how impossible is this, while you trust in your own righteousness, while you slight and despise his threatenings, while your hearts rise against his gospel! Are you not impatient under the afflictions which he sends, and unthankful for innumerable mercies which he is daily bestowing upon you? And is this to walk humbly with God? Bear with me for a plain word, which I purposely speak plainly that it may not be forgot; I say, that if any man or woman can be saved in this way, that is, upon the account of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, then Satan himself has no cause to despair.

I return now to those who see and acknowledge themselves to be sinners, without righteousness and strength, and are desirous to appear before God with comfort. To you I bring good tidings; the Lord help you to believe and rejoice! He hath showed you that which is good, which is the only and sufficient ground whereon to build your hopes; he has showed or revealed it, for otherwise you could never have found it out. What the law cannot do, in that it is weak and ineffectual through the flesh, God has done by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, Rom. viii. 3. The Lord Jesus Christ is that good to which the prophet refers: Moses and the prophets, and all the scriptures, testify of him, and Micah among the rest. One of the most illustrious testimonies to the person and office of our Emmanuel in the Old Testament, is to be found in the chapter preceding my text. "But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace," Micah v. 2–5. All other sacrifices and saviours are insufficient; but Jesus, by the once offering up of himself hath made a full, perfect, and everlasting atonement, and now he reigns in our nature, possessed of all the fulness of grace, exercising the power of God in the salvation of men. Would you then come before the High God? come in the name of Jesus, and you shall find acceptance. In him God is well pleased (Matth. iii. 17.); and for his

sake he is well pleased with all who honour his beloved Son, and put their trust in him. He has authority and compassion sufficient to save the most deplorable and the most unworthy. If you read the history of his life and death, you will read of a display of love and grace beyond expression; and he is the same still. Before he ascended, he left an assurance for your encouragement, that whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast him out. If you say, I want faith, remember it is his gift, and he has promised to do whatever you ask in his name. Therefore fight against unbelief, resist Satan with the sword of the Spirit. If it is suggested that you are a great sinner, you cannot deny it, nor need you; avow the charge, take shame to yourselves, and give glory to God; but it is equally true, that Jesus is a great Saviour, he is able to save to the uttermost; and though your iniquities are great, yet cast not away your hope, for his mercy is greater than the heavens.

When you come in this way, what does the Lord require of you? Is it to make your own peace? He would as soon require you to make a new heaven and a new earth. Is it to keep your own soul? No more than he requires you to keep the sun in its course. His own arm has wrought salvation, and he will secure it. He requires none of your help here; nay, he disdains the thought: you might as well offer to help him to govern the world. But this he requires of you, “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God;” and the methods of his grace will enable you to do so.

1. “To do justly.” We are by nature attached to worldly goods, and wholly influenced by selfish principles. But faith in Jesus communicates new motives, views, and aims to the soul: it teaches us to have our treasure in heaven; to sit loose to the world; to be satisfied with that station and competence which Divine Providence has allotted us; and to love our neighbours as ourselves, because they are our fellow-sinners, and are capable of being called to a participation with us in the honourable relation and privilege of the children of God. Upon these principles the practice of justice is attainable, but upon no other; for though there are many characters honourable and blameless in the outward concerns of life, and in the judgment of men, there is no person upon earth who does or can love or practise justice in its full extent, till he has received the Spirit of Christ, and lives upon him by faith, for wisdom and strength from day to day.

2. “To love mercy.” None can truly love it but those who have tasted it. When your hearts feel the comforts of God’s pardoning love, you will delight to imitate him. When you can truly rejoice that he has freely forgiven you that immense debt, which is expressed by ten thousand talents (Matth. xviii. 24), you will have no desire to take your fellow-servant by the throat for a few pence. This sense of God’s goodness, and the continual need you find of

his renewed mercy from day to day, will soften your spirit (if you are a believer), disarm and gradually weaken every proud thought that would plead for the exercise of anger and resentment towards those who have offended you. You will be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; you will put on (as the beloved of God) bowels of meekness (Col. iii. 12), long-suffering and compassion, forbearing and forgiving, if you have ought against any; because God, for Christ's sake, has freely forgiven you. If you find this practice difficult, it is owing partly to the remaining depravity of your nature, and partly because you have had but a faint sense of his mercy. Pray for a more powerful manifestation of it, and you will do better; mercy will be your delight.

3. "To walk humbly." "Can two walk together except they are agreed?" Amos iii. 3. When Christ is your peace, you will delight in God; you will set him before you, commune with him, study to please him, and to keep all his commandments. This is to walk with God; and you will walk humbly, remembering how much you owe to free grace, and how far you fall short in your best endeavours. These considerations, impressed by the Holy Spirit, will humble you, will keep you from being high in your own esteem, wise in your own conceit, and from seeking great things for yourself. You will be habitually thankful when the Lord gives, content when he withholds, patient when he afflicts. You will confess yourself unworthy of the smallest mercies you possess, and acknowledge in your heaviest trials, that he has laid far less upon you than your iniquities have deserved.

This is the pattern we are to copy after, and this is the certain tendency and effect of his grace. A measure of this disposition is found in all who are Christians indeed. Yet we may take shame to ourselves that we are still so far defective in every branch of our duty. Let us stir up ourselves to greater diligence, watchfulness, and prayer, that we may obtain more lively, abiding, and transforming views of that which is our true good, that so we may be enabled to glorify our heavenly Father, and to adorn our profession, by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.