

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 II.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL HID FROM MANY.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. MATTH. xi. 25.

WHEN our Lord appeared upon earth, though he came on the most gracious and important business, displayed the perfection of holiness in his conduct, and performed innumerable acts of kindness and love, he met with little regard. He found many enemies, but few hearty friends. Especially those who were most eminent for riches, learning, power, or reputed goodness, disdained him; and most of those who followed him were either people in low circumstances, or whose character had been offensive. Publicans and sinners, fishermen, unlearned and obscure persons, were almost the only friends he had. The Lord Jesus, who was infinitely above the selfish views which are too apt to influence our little minds, was well satisfied with this event. He did not desire honour from men. "The souls of the poor were precious in his sight," Psal. lxxii. 13, 14. He spoke kindly to those whom men abhorred; and if he mourned over the obstinacy of the chiefs of the people, it was for their own sakes. Yet (as I observed formerly) when he considered the appointment and will of God in this dispensation, he was not only content, but he rejoiced. He expressed his approbation in these words: "I thank thee, O Father," &c. There is something observable in this passage which will be of continual use and application, so long as the gospel shall be preached. For as it was then, so is it still; the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes. Five particulars offer from the words for our consideration:

1. What may be intended by *these things*?
2. Where and in what sense they are *hid*?
3. From whom? *The wise and prudent*.
4. How the knowledge of them is to be obtained? By revelation: *Thou hast revealed*.
5. Who are thus favoured? *Babes*.
 - I. By the things which it pleases God should be hid from the wise, and revealed to babes, we may understand,
 1. In general, the things pertaining to salvation. That most men are ignorant of them, and careless about them, is too plain. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the tree is known by its fruits. Men speak as though their tongues were their own; they act as though they were to

give no account; they live as though they were to live here for ever. The way of truth is hid from their eyes, and the fear of God has no place in their hearts.

2. More particularly, those doctrines which are in an especial sense peculiar to the gospel, seem here to be intended. If the principles of what some call natural religion, though agreeable to the light of natural conscience, are little regarded, the more spiritual truths of the Bible are not only neglected but scorned and opposed. The same spirit which showed itself under our Lord's personal ministry still subsists. The chief doctrines he taught, and for which he met with the fiercest opposition, were precisely the same with those which have awakened the scorn and rage of the world ever since, and which multitudes who bear the name of Christians in this day oppose with all their strength. Such as,

1st, The divinity of Christ.—When he spoke of himself as existing before Abraham, and said that God was his *own* Father,¹ the Jews took up stones to stone him. And this mystery is still hid from the natural man. No one can say, acknowledge, and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord or Jehovah; that he who once hung upon the cross, bleeding to death, is God the maker of all things, the rightful object of the supreme love, trust, and homage of men and angels, but by the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. xii. 3.

2dly, Distinguishing grace.—When Jesus first preached at Nazareth, the eyes of all were fixed upon him (Luke iv. 16, 20); but when, making application to themselves, he touched upon this point, from the examples of Naaman the Syrian, and the widow of Sarepta, who were released when many lepers and widows in Israel were passed by; they were filled with indignation, and would have thrown him headlong down the rock. And it is to this hour an offensive doctrine to all who do not know the value and the need of it.

3dly, The new birth.—When this was proposed to a master in Israel, he cried out, "How can these things be?" John iii. 9. And by many who are wise and prudent in their own sight, it is at this day accounted nonsense. A small acquaintance with the general strain of what is published either from the pulpit or the press, may prove that modern divinity has, for the most part, found a smoother path to tread than that by which Nicodemus was

¹ John v. 18. Πατέρα ιδιον ελεγεν. "He said that God was his *own* Father," in a sense peculiar to himself, and exclusive of all others. The Jews well understood the meaning of this assertion, that thereby *he made himself equal with God*; and therefore, as they did not believe in him, they charged him with blasphemy. It would indeed have been blasphemy in a mere man, or in the highest archangel, to have spoken of himself in these terms. But the force of the expression is lost in our version of the New Testament, through the omission of the word ιδιον, *his own*, which seems one of the most important mistakes to be found in that translation.

conducted to the knowledge of himself and his Saviour. Such a doubtful inquirer might now be entertained with many ingenious essays on the beauty of virtue, the efficacy of benevolence, the excellency of the human mind, and other favourite topics. He would find teachers enow [enough] to encourage and improve the idea he has of his own importance, but he would hardly meet with any who would speak to him in our Lord's language, and refer him to the brazen serpent, and a new birth, in order to learn the means and the nature of the gospel-salvation.

4thly, The nature of the life of faith.—When our Lord spoke of this, under the metaphor of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, many who till then had professed themselves his disciples, “turned back, and walked no more with him,” John, vi. 66. And none can bear it now who are not taught of God, to see such an excellency and sufficiency in Jesus, and such emptiness in themselves, as constrains them to cry out with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” John, vi. 68. These things are hid from the wise and prudent. But,

II. Where, and in what sense, are these things hid?

1. Where are they hid?

1st, They are hid in Christ. “In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” Col. ii. 3. He is the great repository of truth. “It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell,” Col. i. 19. And he is the messenger by whom the will of God is made known to man, Luke, ix. 35; John, i. 18. From hence observe,

(1.) You can attain to no saving truth, but in and by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If they are hid in him, it can be but lost labour to seek them elsewhere.

(2.) Whatever seeming knowledge you have, if it does not endear him to you, it is nothing worth. It is science falsely so called, and can do you no good; for in the knowledge of him, and of him alone, is eternal life, John xvii. 3.

2dly, They are hid in the word of God.

(1.) They are contained there. “The whole scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is able to make us wise unto salvation” (2 Tim. iii. 16.): to furnish us with a sufficiency of knowledge and motives for every good work. The word of God is perfect.

(2.) Yet though contained there, they are not plain to every eye. Though they are revealed in the letter, they are still hid from the wise and prudent. Something more is necessary than barely to read, in order to understand them; otherwise all who can read, and have the Bible, would be equally enlightened with equal application. But experience shows it far otherwise. This leads me farther to inquire.

2. In what sense they are hid?

1st, They are not hid as if it were on purpose that those who sincerely seek them should be disappointed in their search. Far be it from us to think so hardly of the Lord. We have express promises to the contrary, that all who earnestly seek shall find. Fear not, you that sincerely desire an experimental and practical knowledge of the truths of God, and are willing to be taught in his appointed way: though many things appear difficult to you at present, the Lord will gradually increase your light, and crown your endeavours with success.

2dly, But from some persons they are hid, even from the wise and prudent, whom we are to speak of hereafter. Suffer me to offer a familiar illustration of the Lord's wisdom and justice in this procedure. Let me suppose a person to have a curious cabinet, which is opened at his pleasure, and not exposed to common view: he invites all to come and see it, and offers to show it to any one who asks him. It is hid, because he keeps the key; but none can complain, because he is ready to open it whenever he is desired. Some, perhaps, disdain the offer, and say, Why is it locked at all? Some think it not worth seeing, or amuse themselves with guessing at the contents. But those who are simply desirous for themselves, leave others disputing, go according to appointment, and are gratified. These have reason to be thankful for the favour; and the others have no just cause to find fault. Thus the riches of divine grace may be compared to a richly-furnished cabinet, to which Christ is the door. The word of God likewise is a cabinet generally locked up; but the key of prayer will open it. The Lord invites all; but he keeps the dispensation in his own hand. They cannot see these things except he shows them; but then he refuses none that sincerely ask him. The wise men of the world can go no farther than the outside of this cabinet; they may amuse themselves and surprise others with their ingenious guesses at what is within: but a babe that has seen it opened, can give us more satisfaction, without studying or guessing at all. If men will presume to aim at the knowledge of God, without the knowledge of Christ, who is the way and the door; if they have such a high opinion of their own wisdom and penetration, as to suppose they can understand the scriptures without the assistance of his Spirit; or if their worldly wisdom teaches them, that these things are not worth their inquiry; what wonder is it that they should continue to be hid from their eyes? They will one day be stript of all their false pleas, and condemned out of their own mouths.

3dly, The expression, "Thou hast hid," may perhaps farther imply, that those who seek occasion to cavil shall meet with something to confirm their prejudices. When people examine the doctrines or profession of the gospel, not with a candid desire to learn, imitate, and practise, but in order to find

some plausible ground for misrepresentation, they frequently have their wish. The wisdom of God has appointed, that difficulties, offences, objections, and stumbling-blocks, should attend, to exercise and manifest the spirits of these wise ones. How largely do they expatiate on the divisions and difference of sentiments which too much prevail among those who are united in the same leading truths. If they can discover an instance of error, folly, or wickedness, of a single person who professes to adhere to the gospel-doctrine, how do they rejoice as if they had found great spoil, charge the faults of a few indiscriminately upon the whole, and labour to show, that every mistake and inadvertence is a necessary consequence of the principles which those maintain who commit it. We do not plead for mistakes and errors of any sort, for weakness in judgment, or inconsistency in practice. But as these things are more or less inseparable from the present state of human nature, they necessarily increase and strengthen the prepossessions of scorners against the truth, and are so far a means of hiding it from their eyes. Yet here again the fault is wholly in themselves; for they seek and desire such occasions of stumbling, and would be disappointed and grieved, if they could not meet with them. But those who are babes in their own eyes, humble, sincere, and teachable, are brought safe through, by a simple dependant spirit, and are made wiser every day by their observation of what passes around them.

Many inferences and advices might be deduced from what has been said. I shall content myself with three.

1. Examine yourselves what understanding and experience you have of the things I mentioned under the first head. So much as you know of these, so far you are Christians, and no farther. "A form of godliness without the power" (2 Tim. iii. 5.), is one of the worst characters of the worst times; yet how common in the present day? How many who choose to be called Christians, reject the testimony which God has given of his Son, deny the efficacy of his grace, speak of the new birth with disdain, as unintelligible and unnecessary, and account all that can be said of the life of faith (though founded upon express scripture, and attested by many witnesses) no better than enthusiastic jargon! But if you are thus minded, however sober your deportment, or professedly benevolent your disposition, though you may be applauded as a pattern of generosity, a philosopher, or a saint, by your acquaintance and neighbours, if the scriptures are true, you can be but as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal in the sight of God. You would have despised Thomas in your heart, if you had been witness to his joyful exclamation when he worshipped Jesus, and cried, "My Lord, and my God!" John, xx. 28. You would have despised Paul as a dark enthusiast, had you heard him say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the

Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,” Gal. ii. 20. Yea, you must have despised Jesus himself, if you had been present at his conference with Nicodemus. Our Lord Jesus is now in heaven, Thomas and Paul have been long dead; you cannot reach them; nor do they stand in your way; therefore, perhaps you are content to speak well of them in general terms. But those who come nearest to their language and spirit are the objects of your scorn and hatred. How then can you pretend to love him, or presume that he loves you? Jesus is worshipped in heaven; how then can you expect to come there? or what pleasure could you find there in your present turn of mind? O, kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish; for in a little time his wrath will burn like fire.

But to every one who understands, embraces, and lives under the influence of these truths, I may safely apply our Lord’s words, “Blessed art thou” (Matth. xvi. 17.), however despised by men, or chastened of the Lord; for “flesh and blood hath not revealed these things to thee;” thou hast assuredly received them from God by his Spirit. He alone is able to cause the light to shine into our dark hearts, “to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. Do not entertain hard and perplexing thoughts about the counsels of God, either respecting others or yourselves.

1st, With regard to others. It is a frequent difficulty, either thrown in the way of inquirers after truth by the subtlety of Satan, or perhaps arising from the natural pride of the human heart, that would be thought able to account for everything. I say, when they begin to apprehend the gospel-way of salvation, this perplexing question arises, If things are so, what will become of multitudes? What! are all the Heathens, Mahometans, Papists, and even all the Protestants, except the few who adopt these singular sentiments, to be lost? I shall not attempt to conquer this objection by dint of reasoning, but would rather persuade you to direct your reasonings another way. When the same question, for substance, was proposed to our Lord, his answer to those who asked him was, “Strive (each one for yourselves) to enter in at the strait gate,” Luke xiii. 23, 24. Take care of yourselves, and leave the cases of others to the Lord. Remember he is God, and therefore just and good.

2dly, With regard to yourselves. Secret things belong to God; your business is with what is revealed. Some put the word of salvation from them perversely, and think, if the Lord designs me for eternal life, he will call me in his own time; till then I will go on in my sins. Those who can reason thus, and take encouragement to persist in wickedness, from the consideration of the power and efficacy of God’s grace, do thereby avow themselves to be Satan’s willing servants. But he terrifies many on whom he cannot

thus prevail, with representing to them, that, let them do what they will, it is all in vain; unless the Lord has chosen them, notwithstanding any good beginnings they may hope he has wrought in them, they will come to nothing at last. It is your business to give all diligence to make your calling sure. If, by a humble waiting upon God, you are enabled to have your conversation according to the gospel, listen not to vain and perplexing reasonings, but commit yourself to the mercy and guidance of the Lord; and he, in his good time, will enable you to see, and to say, that it is not in vain to trust in him. Your path shall be like the advancing light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The Lord has already provided all that you can reasonably desire.

(1.) The means are pointed out, in the use of which you are to be found, and wherein you may expect his blessing. These are chiefly secret prayer, the study of his written word, an attendance on the preached gospel, and free converse (as proper opportunities are afforded) with his believing people. If you continue in the observance of these, and act faithfully to the light you have already received, by breaking off from the evil practices of the world, and watching against those things which you yourselves know to be evil, you will certainly gain ground in light, strength, and comfort. You will see more and more of the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel; and in proportion to your views, you shall be “changed into the same image from glory to glory,” For,

(2.) The promise is sure. What God has said you may assuredly depend on. And what has he said? What, indeed, has he not said for the encouragement of those who are sincerely desirous to seek and serve him? “They that seek shall find,” Matth. vii. 7, 8. “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength,” Is. xl. 29. “They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength,” Is. xl. 31. “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground,” Is. xlv. 3.

If, therefore, you feel yourself a lost sinner, see a beauty and sufficiency in Jesus, have a hunger and thirst after his righteousness, and are made willing to expect the blessing in his way; you may look upon this as a token for good. Such views and desires as these never are found in any heart till he communicates them. By nature we are averse and contrary to them. Give him the glory of what he has begun; and oppose your temptations, fears, and doubts, with this argument, drawn from your own experience, as the wife of Manoah formerly reasoned: “If the Lord had been pleased to kill us, he would not have enabled and encouraged us to call upon him; neither would he at this time have shown us such things as these,” Judges xiii. 23.