

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.

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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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**COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.**

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# SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE PARISH-CHURCH OF OLNEY.  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

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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 V.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE ASSERTED AND ILLUSTRATED.

*Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight, MATTH. xi. 26.*

THAT the doctrine in the preceding verse is true in fact, is sufficiently evident from common observation. The greatest part of those whom the world esteems wise and prudent, and all to a man who think themselves so, pay but small regard to the truths of the gospel. They are hid from their eyes, and revealed to babes, to those whom they despise on account of their ignorance and insignificance. And if a few who are favoured with considerable advantages in point of genius, education, or rank, do receive the truth in the love of it, they have been at least taught that they are no better than babes, and are glad to count all outward things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

If we could give no other reason for this dispensation of grace than that which is assigned in our text, it ought to be satisfactory, and would be so, if it was not for the pride of our hearts. Surely that which seems good in the sight of God, must be holy, and wise, and good in itself. How vain and presumptuous is blinded man, who would dare to reply against his Maker, to charge his holiness with injustice, his wisdom with mistake, his goodness with partiality! All their vain cavils will be silenced at the great day, when the secrets of all hearts are opened, and God will be justified when he condemns. However, though we dare not venture too far into the depths of the divine counsels, yet, from the light he has afforded us in his word, we may, in our feeble manner, assert and prove that his ways are just and equal; and, besides the argument of his sovereignty, that so it has pleased him, he has been pleased to favour us with some of the reasons why it has so pleased him. And this is the subject I propose to lead your meditations to from these words. May his Spirit assist me, that I may not darken counsel by words without knowledge!

Let us begin with inquiring, What might be his principal ends in sending his Son into the world, that we might have life through him? These, I apprehend, were chiefly two:

1. The redemption and complete salvation of all who believe. All mankind are by nature in the same state of sin and misery. But we are told, that at the great day there will be an unspeakable difference in the circumstances between some and others. Many will then stand trembling at his left hand, to whom the King shall say, "Depart." But those on the right hand will hear those joyful words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit

the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” If you ask, To what is this difference primarily owing? The answer is provided: “Jesus loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood; he redeemed them out of every nation, and people, and language; they came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne.” It was then for their sakes, who should be hereafter found at the right hand of God, that “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

2. But besides this, God had another and a still higher end in the work of redemption, namely, the manifestation of his own glory. It was unspeakable love to us that he provided the means of salvation at all; and we cannot wonder, much less ought we to complain, that in justice to himself he appointed such means, and such a way, as that all the praise and glory of the contrivance should in the end redound to himself alone. In order to this, it was necessary that the following things should be manifested with the fullest evidence.

1st, The greatness of man’s depravity, guilt, and misery; that it was not a small thing, but a case worthy the interposition of almighty power and infinite grace.

2dly, The utter insufficiency of man to relieve himself; that so God might have the whole honour of his recovery, and we might be for ever debtors to his free undeserved mercy.

3dly, That whereas there are, to outward appearance, a great variety of characters among mankind, it was necessary the dispensation of his grace should be so conducted as to show, that no case was too hard for his power, or too low and miserable for his compassion and condescension.

Upon these grounds we may see something of his wisdom in the methods he has appointed, and in the subjects of his choice; why it has seemed good in his sight, to hide these things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes; for such reasons as these:—1. To stain the pride of all human glory; 2. To exclude every pretence of boasting; 3. That there might be a ground of hope provided for the vilest and meanest; and, 4. That the salvation of believers might be sure, and not subject to miscarry.

I. In the first place, then, the Lord of hosts hath proposed it, “to stain the pride of all human glory,” Isaiah xxiii. 9. How much men are disposed to admire their own wisdom, learning, and fancied accomplishments, is sufficiently obvious. But now the pride of all this glory is stained, inasmuch as it is proved by experience to be utterly useless in the most important concerns. One man has talents to rule a kingdom, but is himself a slave to the vilest lusts and passions. Another has courage to face death in a field of bat-

tle, yet, with regard to religion, is a mere coward: overawed by the feeble breath of the multitude, he is both ashamed and afraid to practise what his conscience convinces him is his duty. Another almost pretends to count the number of the stars, and to call them all by their names; yet has no more thought of the God that made the heavens and the earth, than the beasts that perish. Another delights in books and languages which few can understand but himself; nothing so false or foolish but he accounts it worth his study, if it has but the stamp of antiquity to recommend it; only the book of God (though much more ancient than all his fables), because it may be read in plain English, is thrown by as unworthy his notice. Another, who professes to be scripture-wise, perverts the scriptures, and abuses his own reason, to establish the most absurd errors, or to overturn the plainest truths. Another amuses himself with setting forth the praises of virtue and morality, while his own conduct furnishes a standing proof, either of the weakness of his scheme, or the insincerity of his heart. Time would fail to recount all the achievements of these wise and prudent men. But behold the pride of them all stained! In the midst of all their acquisitions and inventions, they are strangers to God, to themselves, and to peace; they are without Christ, and without hope: those things which alone are of real importance, are hid from their eyes. Here the desperate depravity and deceitfulness of the heart are manifested, to the glory of God; and it is clearly seen, that if he does not interpose to save, men are wholly unable to save themselves.

II. To exclude boasting. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded." As the apostle speaks in another place, "If Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory" ( Rom. iv. 2.): so, if men were saved, either in whole or in part, by their own wisdom and prudence, they might in the same degree ascribe the glory and praise to themselves. They might say, My own power and wisdom gave me this; and thus God would be robbed of the honour due to his name. But now this is prevented. The word of the Lord is, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord," Jeremiah ix. 23, 24. For whatever outward advantages some may seem to possess, as to the things of God, they stand altogether upon a level with the meanest. These things cannot be understood by any sagacity on our parts, but must be revealed by the Father of lights. What could be done in this way, you may collect from St. Paul's representation in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. Many of the Heathens were eminent for wisdom and abilities, and made great proficiency in science; but with regard to the knowledge of God, the result of all their researches was error, superstition, and idolatry; professing themselves to be wise they became

fools, and their disquisitions had no other effect than to leave them without excuse. Their practice (as will always be the case) was correspondent to their principles; and in the midst of a thousand refinements in theory, they were abandoned to the grossest and most detestable vices. If it be said, These had not the light of revelation, we may observe the same or similar effects where the gospel is known. With this superior light, men are still equally vain in their imaginations; and though they do not pay an outward and formal worship to stocks and stones, they are gross idolaters; for they serve, love, and trust the creature more than the Creator. When there is a difference, it is owing to grace, and grace is acknowledged. Such will readily say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise," Psal. cxv. 1. Thus all pretence to boasting is effectually excluded; and he that can glory upon good grounds, must glory only in the Lord.

If it should be supposed that this representation of things tends to discourage a diligent and serious inquiry after truth, I answer, When rightly understood, it will have just the contrary effect. What can be more suited to excite diligence, than to point out the method in which it will assuredly be crowned with success? You cannot succeed without the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit; but if conscious of this, and aware of your own insufficiency, you will seek his direction and guidance by humble prayer, it shall be afforded you. If you know not this, you will certainly be wearied in the end by repeated disappointments; but if you depend upon his teaching and co-operation in the use of the means he has appointed, your knowledge shall advance as the growing light.

III. This method of the divine procedure opens a door of hope to the vilest and the meanest. Let not any be cast down on account of any peculiar incapacity or difficulty in their case. If none but the wise and the learned, the rich, and those who are esteemed well-behaved and virtuous, could be saved, or if these stood in a fairer way for it than others, the greatest part of mankind might give up hope, and sit down in despair at once. But the case is exactly the reverse. It is true, the persons I am speaking of are not the worse for these distinctions, whenever they are sensible how vain and insufficient they are, and betake themselves as poor, helpless, miserable, blind, and naked, to flee for refuge to the mercy of God in Christ. But, alas! their supposed qualifications too often harden them to reject the counsel of God against themselves. They think themselves whole, and therefore see not the necessity or value of the physician. You who are sensible you have nothing of your own to trust to, take encouragement; the Lord has suited his gospel to your circumstances.

1. Are ye poor? The Lord Jesus Christ has sanctified the state of poverty by taking it on himself. He had not where to lay his head. He will not there-

fore despise you on this account. Only pray that you may likewise be poor in spirit. He looks through all outward distinctions, and often passes by a palace to make his presence and power known in a mud-walled cottage. Perhaps he appointed this state in mercy to your souls, that you might not be distracted with many things, nor take up with a portion in this world. You cannot be in a lower or more afflicted state than Lazarus, who, while he lay neglected at the rich man's gate, oppressed with want, and full of sores, was a child of God, and the charge of angels.

2. Are you ignorant? If you cannot read, you miss indeed a considerable advantage which you might derive from the perusal of his good word, and I would wish you to attain it if practicable. If not, give so much more diligent attention to the preaching of the gospel; entreat others to read the scriptures to you; but especially pray. The Lord can teach you without a book, and make up for every defect. It is very possible for you to attain to know and love God, to love your neighbour, to rejoice in Christ, to keep his precepts, to be content with your station, to live by faith, and to die with comfort, though you cannot distinguish one letter from another. The prophet Isaiah, in the prospect of gospel-times, gives a description of the way of salvation, which is peculiarly suited for your comfort. "And a high way shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein," Isa. xxxv. 8.

3. Have you been notorious, open sinners? Then you are in the less danger of trusting to your own righteousness. And as to the rest, if you are sick of sin, if you sincerely desire to be freed, as well from the power as from the guilt of it, you stand as fair for salvation as the most sober and regular person upon the earth. St. Paul, speaking to those who had been partakers of the saving grace of God, after he had made an enumeration of the blackest sins which man can be guilty of, adds, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11.

IV. In this way the salvation of believers is sure. If it depended on anything in man, it might miscarry. Man's boasted wisdom is soon changed. A few hours of a fever, a small blow on the head, may change a wise man into a fool. "But it is of grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed." Rom. iv. 16. Adam had a stock of wisdom, yet when he was trusted with his own happiness, he could not preserve it. But the second Adam is all-sufficient. Our dependence is upon him. To those who are babes, he is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and all that they want. If this concern had been left to the wisdom of man, it is most probable that Christ would have lived and died in vain, without a single real disciple. But now the dispensation of grace is in his hands, we are sure that some will



believe in him; and we are likewise sure, that those who truly do so shall never be ashamed of their hope.

Now, from what has been said,

1. Inquire what is the temper of your minds with regard to this appointment. Our Lord rejoiced in it as the wise and holy will, the good pleasure of his heavenly Father. If you are displeased at it, is it not a proof that you have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus? If God wills one thing, and you will another, where must the contention end? To what purpose, or with what pretence can you use that expression in the Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done," when in effect your hearts rise with enmity against it? This is one topic from whence we may confirm the declaration of scripture, that man by nature is not only a transgressor of the law, but an enemy, yea enmity itself, against God, Rom. viii. 7. They may pay some profession of regard to the power that made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and the fountains of water, while they worship they know not what, according to their own vain and dark imaginations. But the attributes and characters of God revealed in scripture, his holiness, justice, truth, and sovereignty, they cannot bear. They are enemies to the declared strictness of his moral government, and enemies to the methods by which he has proposed to communicate his grace. But he is God, and who can control him? Who can say unto him, What hast thou done? You must either submit to his golden sceptre in time, or his rod of iron will fall upon you for ever.

2. Does it not appear from hence, that the doctrine of free sovereign grace is rather an encouragement to awakened and broken-hearted sinners than otherwise? If you are most unworthy of mercy, and destitute of every plea, should you not be glad to hear, that the Lord does not expect worthiness in those whom he saves, but that he himself has provided the only plea which he will accept, and a plea which cannot be over-ruled, the righteousness and mediation of his well-beloved Son?