

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 VI.

OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. MATTH. xi. 27.

THE two preceding verses have led us to consider grace (if I may so speak) in the unfathomable depths of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. In this verse our Lord calls us to the contemplation of his own glorious person, authority, and fulness. In him grace is treasured up as in a repository for communications, to be dispensed to needy perishing sinners.

When an ambassador is deputed from an earthly prince, to transact some business of great importance, he produces his commission and authority, without which all he could propose would be little regarded; and those who are most honoured and attended to are entrusted with full powers, that is, with a liberty to act and propose as occasions offer, without farther instructions, and with full security that the king will ratify and confirm whatever they agree to, in the same manner as if he had done it in his own person. Thus (if we may presume to compare small things with great) our Lord Jesus Christ, the great messenger of the Father's love, before he invites every weary, heavy-laden sinner to come to him, with a gracious assurance that he will receive, and pardon, and save them all, he condescends in this verse (as it were) to open his commission, to instruct us in his own personal dignity, and to communicate to us the example and unlimited authority which he has received from God to treat with rebels. He knows what hearts of unbelief we have; how greatly an awakened conscience is terrified with guilt; how busy Satan is to urge us to question either his ability or his willingness to save; and therefore he would leave nothing undone that might encourage us to come to him, and find rest for our souls. May his gracious Spirit enable me to speak aright, and so open your hearts to understand what may be said upon this high subject, that we may have joy and peace in believing!

The words contain a threefold declaration:

1. Of his person: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son."
2. Of his authority: "All things are delivered to me of my Father."
3. Of his office, summarily intimated in the expression, "He to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

To treat these points in their proper extent would be a subject more than equal to the abilities and life of man. Much would be left unsaid at last. We

cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. This is a theme fit for an angel's tongue: the most exalted angel, or all the angels in heaven, would be unable to comprehend it, for it is infinite, as our text declares: "None knows the Son, but the Father." Here we are too prone to think highly of our own knowledge; but when we arrive in yonder world of light, to see him *as he is*, we shall be ashamed of the highest conceptions we had of him, and of our most laboured attempts to express them, while we were imprisoned in this distant land. Then we shall say, with the queen of Sheba, "Behold, the half (the thousandth part) was not told us." In the meantime he is pleased to accept our imperfect stammerings, to assist our feeble inquiries, and does not disdain (as he justly might) to hear us take his name into our polluted lips.

I. The inconceivable dignity of his person is pointed out by two expressions:

1. "No man" (or rather, as it might be rendered here and in many other places, No one¹) knoweth the Father, but the Son." No one—

1st, Not the wisest man in a state of nature. Various degrees of knowledge there are amongst the sons of men. There is a great difference between man and man; between one who knows not his letters, or anything beyond the bounds of his own village, and another who has a large acquaintance with arts and sciences, history and languages, and has surveyed the manners and boundaries of many nations. But with regard to the knowledge of Christ, the philosopher and the shepherd, the king and the beggar, are just upon a level. Of two blind men, one may know many things more than the other, but with regard to the knowledge of light and colours, they will be both ignorant alike.

Some of you perhaps think yourselves wiser than many of your neighbours. But I cannot too often remind you, that if you know not Christ, all your wisdom is folly, and you will find it so at last.

2dly, Neither do his own people know him in the sense of the text. Some knowledge of him indeed they have, which is their differencing character from the world. But how small a portion! That they know him a little is plain, because they love him and trust him; but how little, is plain likewise, because their love is so faint, and their trust so feeble. Their doubts, fears, complaints, and backslidings, are so many mournful proofs that they are but poorly acquainted with him, and sufficiently evidence that a great part of what we account our knowledge, is not real and experimental, but notional only. The literal sense of what we read concerning Jesus is attainable by study and human teaching; but the spiritual import can only be received

¹ Ουδεις.

from him who teaches the heart, who increases it in us by the various exercises and dispensations we pass through; and the best have much more to learn than they have already attained. There are indeed happy moments when he manifests himself to the eye of faith, in his glory and in his love, as he did to Peter on the mount, and to Thomas, when a sight of his wounds conquered his unbelief, and made him, in a transport of joy, cry out, "My Lord, and my God." But these visits, though they have a powerful influence to conquer sin and fear, are transient; and when the cause is withdrawn, there is a proportionable abatement in the effect. The knowledge of Christ, in the present life, may be compared to the knowledge which a shepherd has of the sea, from having viewed it from the top of a cliff. In a sense, it may be said he has seen the sea; but how little has he seen in comparison of what lies beyond the reach of his eye! How inadequate is such a prospect to give him an idea answerable to the length, and breadth, and depth of the immense ocean! Nay, farther,

3dly, The glorified saints and holy angels, who behold as much of his glory as creatures can bear, do not know him as he is. They are filled with his power and love. He comprehends them, but they cannot him. A vessel cast into the sea, can but receive according to its capacity. Thus are they filled with his fulness till they can hold no more; but his glory still remains infinite and boundless. The glorious seraphim, therefore, are represented as hiding their faces with their wings, unable to bear the splendour of his presence. For,

4thly, "None knows the Son but the Father." This proves his divinity. God only knows himself. The Son is his eternal Word, his eternal Wisdom, and therefore beyond the highest reach of finite understanding.

2. "None knows the Father but the Son." Here I might repeat the former particulars. God has made something known of himself in his works, much in his word, more still in his grace. All men have some faint perceptions of his power and presence. He manifests himself to his own family below, still more to his family above; yet, after all, he is said to dwell in light which no man can approach. None knows him but the Son, and he knows him perfectly, knows the incomprehensible God; therefore he is God himself. As he said to Philip, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," John xvi. 9.

Now, if we had no other proof of this doctrine but the passage before us, since this is the declaration of the true and faithful witness, it should be accepted as decisive. But as this is the great mystery of godliness, the pillar and ground of truth, the foundation of all our hopes, I shall take this opportunity to confirm it more largely from other concurrent testimonies of scripture.

By the Son, I mean the person who spake these words: he who was foretold by the prophets: who in the fulness of time came into the world; who, with respect to his divine nature, is called “the Word” (John i. 1.), and, with respect to his human nature, was born of the Virgin Mary: he who was known upon earth by the name of Jesus; whose history is related by the evangelists; who suffered a shameful and accursed death upon the cross, without the gates of Jerusalem. Of him we affirm, “That he was, and is, the true God, and eternal life,” 1 John v. 20. In proof of this, besides what has been already said, let the following particulars be considered,

1st, That the proper and peculiar titles of God are attributed to him frequently in the scriptures; so frequently, that it would be a very long task to transcribe them all. Let a few, the application of which to Christ is express and indisputable, suffice for a specimen: “The Word was God” (John i. 1): “His name shall be called Emmanuel, that is, God with us” (Matth. i. 23): “Jehovah our Righteousness” (Jer. xxiii. 6): “The mighty God,” Isa. ix. 6. In the same style he speaks of himself by his servants the prophets and apostles: “Thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called” (Is. liv. 5): “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else” (Is. xlv. 22): “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Almighty,” Rev. i. 8, 11.

Amidst the variety of testimonies which might be adduced to this purpose, there are two which are peculiarly observable. The Psalmist expresses the majesty, power, and immutability of God, in these sublime terms: “Of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end,” Psal. cii. 25–27. Surely none can deny but this ascription must be incommunicably due to the Almighty; yet the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. i. 10–12.) applies these words directly to the Son of God. The other passage I intend is the vision of Isaiah, recorded in the sixth chapter; which not only proves the point in hand, but irrefragably establishes the doctrine of the Trinity. For the Lord of hosts, whom Isaiah saw and heard, is affirmed by St. John to have been the Son (John xii. 41.), by St. Paul to have been the Holy Ghost, Acts xxviii. 25. Isaiah, therefore, had a manifestation of what was afterwards in explicit words set forth to the faith of the church, “that there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are one,” 1 John v. 7.

2dly, His works upon earth were such as necessarily suppose a divine power. Who can control the elements (Mark iv. 39.), raise the dead (John xi. 43.), command the devils (Luke iv. 36.), search the heart, and forgive sin (Mark ii. 1–11.), but God alone? If it should be said, that many of his servants and followers wrought miracles equal to his by a delegated power, and therefore this argument is not conclusive, I answer, There is an apparent difference in the manner of their working, which proves the disparity between them and him. They could do nothing but in his name, and by his power; they usually addressed themselves to him by prayer, and always ascribed the praise and glory to him, Acts iii. 12–16. But his power was independent, sovereign, and unlimited: “he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” At the breath of his rebuke, the raging tempest and the boisterous seas were instantly hushed into a perfect calm. The deaf heard his voice, and the dead came forth from their graves, at the first call.

3dly, His works of office can be performed by none but God. This might be proved concerning each of the offices he exercises in consequence of his high character as Mediator between God and man; but I shall speak only of two.

(1.) It is his office to keep his believing people in this present evil world. To act the part of a shepherd (Matth. ii. 6. Ποιμαίνει) towards them, to supply their wants of every kind, to direct their steps, to control their enemies, to overrule all things for their good, and to be a very present help in every time of trouble; to execute this important charge, it is necessary that his knowledge, his compassion, his power, and his patience, must be boundless. His eye must be every moment upon all their cases at once; his ear must be incessantly open to receive the prayers of all people, nations, and languages; his arm must be continually stretched out to support so many that stand, to raise up so many that fall, to afford seasonable and suitable supplies, at the same instant, to the distresses and temptations of millions. If this is the office he has undertaken, and if he is acknowledged sufficient and faithful in the discharge of it, what more undeniable evidence can be given, that he has all the attributes we can conceive as essential and peculiar to the Godhead? The provocations, defects, and backslidings, of his people, are likewise so numerous, so often repeated, and attended with such black aggravations, that if he was not God, invincible in goodness, unchangeable in purpose, if his mercy was not, as is his majesty, infinite, he would be wearied out, and provoked to cast them off for ever. The great reason why he bore with his people of old, holds equally strong with respect to us: “I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,” Mal. iii. 6.

(2.) The like may be said of the high office, character, and appointment, he has received, to be the Judge of the world, of angels, and of men. For, besides that it is quite incredible, that God, who is jealous of his glory, should intrust this most illustrious prerogative to any mere creature, it seems evident at first sight, that no creature can be possibly qualified for the discharge of it. To the great and final Judge all hearts must be open, all desires known, and every secret disclosed. He must be intimately acquainted with the counsels and plans that lay hid in God from eternity; he must have a sovereign, comprehensive, intuitive view of every event, of every design, that took place within the limits of time and creation; he must have unlimited authority to pronounce the decisive sentence which will fix the everlasting state of all intelligent beings, and uncontrolled power for the immediate and irrevocable execution of his supreme decree. And what higher than this can our most laboured conceptions reach of the Almighty God! If it be said, that Christ will act by a delegated authority, we answer, It is a contradiction to say, that God can delegate his omniscience to a creature; and without this attribute, any assignable measure of wisdom or power would be insufficient. The power and fulness of the Godhead must so reside in the Judge, as justly to denominate him to be “God over all blessed for ever,” Rom. ix. 5. And this the scriptures assure us is the case in fact. The man, Christ Jesus, who is appointed the Judge of quick and dead, is so intimately and essentially united to, and inhabited by the Deity (Col. ii. 9.), that he is the proper object of our faith, as the true God, and eternal life.

4thly, The honours he claims from us afford a further argument for his proper divinity. He challenges our supreme love, obedience, trust, and worship: “Ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John xiv. 1.); “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (John vi. 23.); “That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father” (John v. 23.); “My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life” (John x. 27, 28.); “I am the light of the world” (John viii. 12.); “I am the resurrection and the life” (John xi. 25). If we could suppose an apostle or an angel speaking of himself in terms like these, requiring our unlimited dependence, and directing our hope and love to centre wholly on him, we might justly reject him as a blasphemer. How the apostles understood these expressions, and that they did not mistake our Lord’s meaning, is evident from the behaviour of Thomas. He saluted his risen Saviour, “My Lord and my God,” John xx. 28. Had his transport of joy carried him too far in giving this ascription to Jesus, he would, doubtless, have corrected him, and provided us with a caution against committing the like fault. For who that has tasted his love, and

been made partaker of the power of his resurrection, can avoid adoring him with the utmost homage their words can express, or their hearts conceive!

From hence we may take occasion to observe,

1. His wonderful condescension, that for us, and our salvation, he stooped so low, drew a veil over his eternal glories, and appeared in the form of a servant, to suffer, and to die: "Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich," 2 Cor. viii. 9. This was love passing knowledge, to pour out his blood, his life, his soul, for those, who by nature and practice, were enemies and rebels, disobedient to his government, and averse to his grace.

2. What a blessed and glorious hope is set before awakened sinners! Add to the consideration of his person, what we have yet to offer from the word of God concerning his authority and purpose, and say if these truths do not give sufficient encouragement to believe and be saved.

3. How awful must be the case of those who shall be found in final rebellion against him, and die in a state of impenitence and unbelief! Alas! poor obstinate sinners, that have stood out so long, will you still harden your hearts, and stop your ears, and rush (like the thoughtless horse in the battle) upon your own destruction? Do you consider whom you are opposing? "Did ever any harden himself against the Lord and prosper?" Job ix. 4. "Have you an arm like God, or can you thunder with a voice like him?" Job xl. Where will you stand, or what will you say, "when he shall arise to shake terribly the earth? when he shall be revealed in fire, to take vengeance on all that know not God, and obey not the gospel?" 2 Thess. i. 8. O, kiss the Son, throw down your arms, and fall prostrate at his footstool, lest his anger awake, and you perish without hope; for in a little time the great day of his wrath will be revealed, which will burn like "a furnace, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch," Mal. iv. 1. Then will it appear, that those, and those only are blessed, who put their trust in him: "For those who trust in him shall never be ashamed: but when Christ who is their life shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory," Col. iii. 4.