

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 VIII.

THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD REVEALED IN JESUS 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 love we bear to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the confidence we place in him, will always be exactly proportioned to the apprehensions we form of him. Therefore, to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of him” (2 Pet. ii. 18.), are spoken of as inseparably connected. On this account the scriptures are frequent and full in describing him to us, that we may have a large acquaintance with his all-sufficiency, and be delivered from our sins and fears. An awakened conscience, that sees the need of a Saviour, well knows that the person who can deservedly lay claim to its trust, must have these three properties, power, authority, and intention to save. How these eminently belong to Jesus, we learn from his own words here. Power belongeth to him, for he is a divine person, the Creator, Possessor, and Upholder of all things. Authority is his, for all things are delivered to him. Thus far we have proceeded, and are now to speak of his intention or office, the design of his appearance, and for which he is authorised. This is intimated in the close of my text. We are therefore now to speak,

III. Of his office, summarily included in this one thing, *To reveal the knowledge of God.* “Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

The knowledge of God here spoken of, intends something more than merely to know that there is a God. Some faint apprehensions of this all men have by nature. This great truth is so clearly manifested in the works of creation and providence, that any man would be greatly offended, if he was supposed to be ignorant of it. But as it is one thing to know that there is a king over the nation, and quite another thing to know the king, so as to have liberty of access to him, and an interest in his favour; so is it in the case before us. Our Lord did not come to tell us that there is a God (the devils know this, and tremble), but to reveal to us such a knowledge of God as may stand with our comfort, to teach us how poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinners may draw near to God with hopes in his mercy, and call him their Father and their friend.

Now, besides the revelation of this knowledge in the Old Testament, which may be properly ascribed to Christ, inasmuch as he was the Lord, the guide, and teacher of his church from the beginning, and instructed Moses

and the prophets in the things concerning himself,—I say, besides this (which was made at sundry times, and in divers manners, in a more dark and imperfect way), our Lord Jesus, through his incarnation, has vouchsafed us a twofold revelation of that knowledge of God in which standeth our eternal life,—1. In his Person; and, 2. By his Spirit.

I. In his Person. In this respect he is said to be “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his¹ substance,” Heb. i. 3. That God is great, and good, and wise, appears in part from his works; but it is only a small portion of these attributes we can spell out in this way; and there are other perfections in God, of which we can gain no certain knowledge, without a farther revelation. But would we see a glorious display of the great God, let us turn our eyes to Jesus, and behold him by faith in two principal views:

1. As hanging upon the cross. Could we have seen this awful transaction, and been in a right frame of mind, we should naturally have asked such questions as these: Who is he? What has he done? Had we been told, This person, thus destitute and tormented, is the beloved Son of God, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; we must have farther asked, Why then was he scourged, wounded, and nailed to the tree? Why are those barbarous men permitted to mock his sufferings? Why does he not deliver himself, and destroy his enemies? The proper answer to these questions includes a revelation of the divine perfections.

1st, Wisdom. We had deserved to perish, but his mercy designed to save us with an everlasting salvation. Yet this must be in a way worthy of himself. Sin must be punished, and the honour of his broken law vindicated. How could this be done, and the righteousness of God made to harmonize with our peace? A wisdom astonishing to angels is manifested in devising this wonderful means. No sacrifices (Heb. x. 4–7.) or offerings, no acts of obedience or mediation, which creatures could supply, would have been of the least avail when the injured majesty of God demanded a satisfaction. But the eternal Word, united to our nature, afforded a propitiation worthy of God, and suitable for us. Jesus, by his obedience unto death, has made an end of sin (Dan. ix. 24), and brought in an everlasting righteousness, available for all those who flee to him as the hope set before them, for refuge from approaching wrath.

2dly, Love. “God *so loved* the world.”—If you ask, How? judge from this instance; words cannot express it. He so loved sinners, enemies, rebels, that for their sakes he abandoned and delivered up his beloved Son into the hands of wicked men, permitted him to be assaulted by the powers of

¹ της υποστασεως

darkness; yea, it pleased the Father himself to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. This is love without parallel, and beyond conception. We can only admire, and say, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us," 1 John, iii. 1. When Jesus Christ, as crucified, is clearly apprehended by faith, then we have the most convincing, the most affecting proof, that God is love.

3dly, Justice. Wonder not that God's own Son is thus treated. He stands in the place of sinners, and therefore he is not, he cannot be, spared. The words his enemies use (Matth. xxvii. 42.) to his reproach, will, in the lips of his redeemed people, be an expression of his highest praise. Having undertaken to save others, and being determined not to give up their cause, it is, in that respect, absolutely impossible for him to save himself.

Again, this justice, which was once as a flaming sword, to forbid and exclude every hope of salvation to fallen man, is now engaged in our behalf. For since it has pleased the Father to charge sin upon his own Son, his wrath will turn away from all who believe. The immense debt is already paid, and justice will not exact it twice, from henceforth God is not only gracious and merciful, but (1 John, i. 9.) just and faithful, in the forgiveness of sin, and declares his own righteousness in justifying the believer in Jesus, Rom. iii. 26.

2. The knowledge of God is made known in the person of Christ, if we contemplate him as reigning in glory. He is no longer a man of sorrows, oppressed and despised. He is now upon the throne. In him the fulness of the Godhead dwells, and from him, as light from the sun, the unsearchable riches of his goodness are communicated to indigent, unworthy sinners. All the divine perfections shine gloriously in him, as the God-man, the Mediator, who is exalted above all conception and praise, and doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

1st, Grace. The great God is pleased to manifest himself in Christ as the God of grace. This grace is manifold, pardoning, converting, restoring, persevering grace, bestowed upon the miserable and worthless. Grace finds the sinner in a hopeless, helpless state, sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Grace pardons the guilt, cleanses the pollution, and subdues the power of sin. Grace sustains the bruised reed, binds up the broken heart, and cherishes the smoking flax into a flame. Grace restores the soul from wandering, revives it when fainting, heals it when wounded, upholds it when ready to fall, teaches it to fight, goes before it in the battle, and at last makes it more than conqueror over all opposition, and then bestows a crown of everlasting life. But all this grace is established and displayed by covenant in the Man Christ Jesus, and without respect to him

as living, dying, rising, reigning, and interceding in the behalf of sinners, would never have been known.

2dly, Power. The whole creation proclaims that power belongs unto God. But in nothing will his power be more illustriously displayed than in the wonders of redeeming love! What power is necessary to raise those who are spiritually dead in sin, to soften the heart of stone, to bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion? Wherever his gospel is faithfully preached, it is always confirmed by this accompanying power. How quickly, how easily, did he change Saul from a persecutor to an apostle? Again, how is his power illustrated by the care he takes of all who believe in his name, affording to every one of them seasonable, suitable, and sufficient supplies in every time of need? So that his weak, helpless, and opposed people, are supported, strengthened, and enabled, to hold on, and to hold out, against all the united efforts of the world, sin, and Satan.

3dly, Bounty. How glorious is Jesus in his kingdom! Exalted beyond all conception and praise; wearing upon his vesture, and upon his thigh, the name that is above every name; and having all thrones, principalities, and powers, obedient to his will, and adoring at his feet. But all his riches and honours (so far as their capacities can receive) he condescends to share with his people. He owns their worthless names, he permits them to claim the most tender relation to him, and to call him their brother, their friend, and their husband. Yea, he says concerning them, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne," Rev. iii. 21. To him therefore we must look for the most astonishing and affecting display of the divine bounty.

Thus the knowledge of God is revealed in the person of Christ by the word. But great and important as these truths are, we cannot receive and understand them merely by reading. The Lord Jesus therefore has favoured his church with a farther revelation. That is,

II. By his Spirit. This was one principal fruit of his ascension and intercession, Acts ii. 33. With the promise of his Spirit he cheered his disciples when sorrowing under the apprehension of his departure: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," John xvi. 7. The offices of the Holy Spirit are various as our wants; he teaches, comforts, sanctifies, and seals the children of God; but he affects all these benefits by revealing the knowledge of God, as manifested in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

1. In convincing sinners of their lost estate, which is absolutely necessary to their deliverance. None will prize the Saviour but those who feel their need of him. Two things are necessary to convince a man of his lost condi-

tion by nature and practice as a sinner,—the spirituality of the law, and the sufferings of Christ: the one shows the universality of sin, the other its demerit. But these can only be truly discerned by the light of the Spirit of Christ. While St Paul (who was never absolutely without the law) was ignorant of the law's spirituality, "I was (says he) alive," Rom. vii. 9. I had so little knowledge, both of the law and of myself, that I trusted to it for righteousness, and vainly thought that I yielded it obedience, and grounded my hopes of salvation thereon. "But when the commandment came," when the Spirit explained and enforced it in its full extent, as reaching to the very thoughts of the heart, and requiring an obedience absolutely perfect, "then sin revived, and I died." All my hopes vanished; I saw every principle, affection, and action, polluted, and the corruptions which I supposed were tamed, broke forth with redoubled vigour. Again, though sin is declared to be displeasing to God, and destructive to man, by all the evils and miseries with which the world is filled, and all the punishments which the righteous Judge of all the earth has inflicted on the account of it; yet the just demerit of sin is not to be learned by the destruction of Sodom or of the old world, but only from the sufferings of Christ, who has borne the curse for sinners. Nor is it sufficient to know historically that he did suffer, and how he suffered. Where these things are not known by the light of the Spirit, they are no more regarded than a worn-out tale. But where the Spirit of Christ reveals by the word, the nature, cause, and end of his sufferings, then sin appears exceedingly sinful. Nothing less than this can make the soul abhor it.

2. The Spirit produces faith in Jesus, as having once suffered, and now mighty to save. His blood, his righteousness, his intercession, compassion, and power, are presented to the soul in a light which bears down the objections of guilt, unbelief, and Satan. Then the wounds made by sin are healed. Then old things pass away, all things become new, all difficulties are solved, and God is revealed experimentally to the soul, as holy, righteous, and true, in justifying the believer in Jesus.

3. Those whom the Spirit thus comforts, he also seals, Ephes. i. 13. He impresses the image of Christ upon them. Such is the power of the views he gives them of his glory, that they are transformed into the resemblance of their Lord, 2 Cor. iii. 18. Though the first traces of this delineation are faint and indistinct in the sight of men, yet they are perfect in kind. The Spirit impresses feature for feature, and grace for grace (John i. 16.) and in the chief thing he designs and effects by all his subsequent dispensations while the soul remains in the body, is to heighten and finish the heavenly signature. Together with this, and in the same degree, he seals and ratifies to their consciences an interest in all the promises of the gospel; and by

infusing into their hearts the temper of children, he gives them confidence at the throne of grace, enables them to cry, Abba, Father, and bears witness with their spirits that they are born of God. Thus God is revealed not only to them, but in them; and they are made conformable to him in whom they believe, in all righteousness, goodness, and truth.

Let me once more address,

1. Poor mourning souls. Are you seeking to Jesus? you have good reason; you see he is a mighty Saviour. He is furnished with full authority, and came expressly on purpose to save such as you. He assures you that none shall sincerely seek him in vain. Believe his word, and dismiss your fears. He has begun his good work, by revealing to you your misery, danger, and helplessness, by leading your thoughts to himself. He will not stop here; he will, in due time, accomplish his whole commission, by revealing to you that knowledge of God in which standeth your present peace and eternal life.

2. Careless sinners. How greatly will your guilt be aggravated if you receive this grace of God, the gospel of salvation, in vain? Do not your hearts tremble when you think of meeting the Lord Jesus in glory? Have you an answer ready, when he shall ask you why you refused his instruction, and cast his words behind you? The light of truth has visited you: how long will you resist it? how long will Satan blind your eyes? To those who accept not his revelation of grace, he will be ere long revealed in flaming fire. O humble yourselves before him, while the hope of mercy is yet afforded; and pray for the Spirit we have been speaking of, that you may be recovered out of the snare of the devil, and made partaken of the knowledge and image of God.

3. Believers. This subject is the food of your souls. You remember when you had dark, hard, and uncomfortable thoughts of God; but you have seen his glory in the person of Christ, you have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God (1 Cor. ii. 12.), that you may know the things that are freely given you of God. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, Eph. v. 8. Walk then as children of the light; remember your calling, your privileges, your obligations, your engagements. Let these all animate you to press forward, to endure the cross, to despise the shame. Let it not grieve you to suffer with Christ here, for hereafter you shall reign with him. The hour is swiftly approaching, when you shall be out of the reach of changes and sorrow for ever. Then "thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord Shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended," Isaiah lx. 20.