

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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LETTERS

TO MISS F——.

LETTER I.

October 3, 1778.

DEAR MADAM,

You would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a young person, to prevent the world, with all its opening and ensnaring scenes, from drawing the heart aside from God. It is an important question: but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it which you can well expect from me. I could only attempt to answer it from the Bible, which lies open to you likewise. If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that when it turns aside from God, it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near him, but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already received.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and advices in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you should farther ask me, How you shall effectually reduce them to practice? I feel that I am so deficient, and so much at a loss in this matter myself, that I know not well what to say to you. Yet something must be said.

In the first place, then, I would observe, that though it be our bounden duty, and the highest privilege we can propose to ourselves, to have our hearts kept close to the Lord; yet we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly, much less all at once; we shall keep close to him, in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between him and the things which would presume to stand in competition with him, and the folly, as well as ingratitude, of departing from him. But these points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations from creatures. Our judgments may be quickly satisfied, that his favour is better than life, while yet it is in the power of a mere trifle to turn us aside. The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready, in words, to confess that we are weak, we do not so properly know it, till that secret, though unallowed dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves, is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to

hold us up, that we may be safe, is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him.

But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vileness, which we cannot learn (at least I have not been able to learn it) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with his Holy Spirit in his merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is indeed a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when they can observe nothing of consequence to object to us, things may be far from right with us in the sight of him who judges not only actions, but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed, could we for a season so cleave to God, as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures, that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is Prayer; and here, above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow. The second, Attention to the scriptures. Your question is directly answered in Psalm cxix. 9. The precepts are our rule and delight, the promises our strength and encouragement: the good recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their miscarriages are as land-marks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage. The study of the whole scheme of gospel-salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to form our souls to a spiritual and divine taste; and so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles that would draw us from the Lord will lose their influence, and appear divested of the glare with which they strike the senses, mere vanity and nothing. The third grand means is, Consideration or Recollection; a careful regard to those temptations and snares, to which, from our tempers, situations, or connections, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, ere we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this, as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given you a desire to live to him, will be your guard and teacher. There is none teacheth like him.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

March — 1779.

DEAR MADAM,

OUR experiences pretty much tally; they may be drawn out into sheets and quires, but the sum-total may be comprised in a short sentence, "Our life is a warfare." For our encouragement, the apostle calls it a good warfare. We are engaged in a good cause, fight under a good Captain, the victory is sure beforehand, and the prize is a crown, a crown of life. Such considerations might make even a coward bold. But then we must be content to fight; and considering the nature, number, situation, and subtlety of our enemies, we may expect sometimes to receive a wound; but there is a medicinal tree, the leaves of which are always at hand to heal us. We cannot be too attentive to the evil which is always working in us, or to the stratagems which are employed against us; yet our attention should not be wholly confined to these things. We are to look upwards likewise to him, who is our head, our life, our strength. One glance of Jesus will convey more effectual assistance than poring upon our own hearts for a month. The one is to be done; but the other should upon no account be omitted. It was not by counting their wounds, but by beholding the brazen serpent, the Lord's instituted means of cure, that the Israelites were healed. That was an emblem for our instruction. One great cause of our frequent conflicts is, that we have a secret desire to be rich, and it is the Lord's design to make us poor: we want to gain an ability of doing something; and he suits his dispensations, to convince us that we can do nothing: we want a stock in ourselves, and he would have us absolutely dependent upon him. So far as we are content to be weak, that his power may be magnified in us, so far we shall make our enemies know that we are strong, though we ourselves shall never be directly sensible that we are so; only by comparing what we are with the opposition we stand against, we may come to a comfortable conclusion, that the Lord worketh mightily in us, Psal. xli. 11.

If our views are simple, and our desires towards the Lord, it may be of use to consider some of your faults and mine, not as the faults of you and me in particular, but as the fault of that depraved nature which is common with us to all the Lord's people, and which made Paul groan as feelingly and as heartily as we can do. But this consideration, though true and scriptural, can only be safely applied when the mind is sincerely and in good earnest devoted to the Lord. There are too many unsound and half professors, who eagerly catch at it as an excuse for those evils they are unwilling to part with. But I trust I may safely recommend it to you. This evil nature, this indwelling sin, is a living principle, an active, powerful cause; and a cause that is active will necessarily produce an effect. Sin is the same thing in believers as in the

unregenerate: they have indeed a contrary principle of grace, which counteracts and resists it, which can prevent its outbreakings, but will not suppress its risings. As grace resists sin, so sin resists grace, Gal. v. 17. The proper tendency of each is mutually weakened on both sides; and, between the two, the poor believer, however blameless and exemplary in the sight of men, appears in his own view the most inconsistent character under the sun. He can hardly think it is so with others; and, judging of them by what he sees, and of himself by what he feels, in lowliness of heart he esteems others better than himself. This proves him to be right, for it is the will of God concerning him, Phil, ii. 3. This is the warfare. But it shall not always be so. Grace shall prevail. The evil nature is already enervated, and ere long it will die the death. Jesus will make us more than conquerors.

I am, &c.