

THE  
**WORKS**  
OF  
**THE REV. JOHN NEWTON**

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF  
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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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## LETTER XXXIV.

(2.) ON MAN IN HIS FALLEN ESTATE.

*“Lord, what is man!”*

DEAR SIR,

THE nature of fallen man agrees to the description the apostle has given us of his boasted wisdom: it is earthly, sensual, devilish. I have attempted some general delineation of it in the preceding letter; but the height of its malignity cannot be properly estimated, unless we consider its actings with respect to the light of the gospel. The Jews were extremely wicked at the time of our Lord’s appearance upon earth; yet he said of them, “If I had not come and spoken to you, ye had not had sin;” that is, as the light and power of his ministry deprived them of all excuse for continuing in sin, so it proved the occasion of showing their wickedness in the most aggravated manner; and all their other sins were but faint proofs of the true state of their hearts, if compared with the discovery they made of themselves, by their pertinacious opposition to him. In this sense, what the apostle has observed of the law of Moses, may be applied to the gospel of Christ: it entered, that sin might abound. If we would estimate the utmost exertions of human depravity, and the strongest effects it is capable of producing, we must select our instances from the conduct of those to whom the gospel is known. The Indians, who roast their enemies alive, give sufficient proof that man is barbarous to his own kind; which may likewise be easily demonstrated without going so far from home; but the preaching of the gospel discovers the enmity of the heart against God, in ways and degrees, of which unenlightened savages and heathens are not capable.

By the gospel, I now mean, not merely the doctrine of salvation, as it lies in the holy scriptures, but that public and authoritative dispensation of this doctrine which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to his true ministers, who, having been themselves, by the power of his grace, brought out of darkness into marvellous light, are, by his Holy Spirit, qualified and sent forth to declare to their fellow-sinners, what they have seen, and felt, and tasted, of the word of life. Their commission is, to exalt the Lord alone, to stain the pride of all human glory. They are to set forth the evil and demerit of sin, the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God, the total apostasy of mankind; and from these premises to demonstrate the utter impossibility of a sinner’s escaping condemnation by any works or endeavours of his own; and then to proclaim a full and free salvation from sin and wrath, by faith in the name, blood, obedience, and mediation of God manifest in the flesh; together with a denunciation of eternal misery to all who

shall finally reject the testimony which God has given of his Son. Though these several branches of the will of God respecting sinners, and other truths in connection with them, are plainly revealed, and repeatedly inculcated in the Bible, and though the Bible is to be found in almost every house, yet we see, in fact, it is as a sealed book, little read, little understood, and, therefore, but little regarded, except in those places which the Lord is pleased to favour with ministers who can confirm them from their own experience, and who, by a sense of his constraining love, and the worth of souls, are animated to make the faithful discharge of their ministry the one great business of their lives; who aim not to possess the wealth, but to promote the welfare, of their hearers; are equally regardless of the frowns or smiles of the world, and count not their lives dear, so that they may be wise and successful in winning souls to Christ.

When the gospel, in this sense of the word, first comes to a place, though the people are going on in sin, they may be said to sin ignorantly; they have not yet been warned of their danger. Some are drinking down iniquity like water; others more soberly burying themselves alive in the cares and business of the world; others find a little time for what they call religious duties, which they persevere in, though they are utter strangers to the nature or the pleasure of spiritual worship; partly, as thereby they think to bargain with God, and to make amends for such sins as they do not choose to relinquish; and partly because it gratifies their pride, and affords them (as they think) some ground for saying, "God, I thank thee, I am not as other men." The preached gospel declares the vanity and danger of these several ways which sinners choose to walk in. It declares and demonstrates, that, different as they appear from each other, they are equally remote from the path of safety and peace, and all tend to the same point, the destruction of those who persist in them. At the same time, it provides against that despair into which men would be otherwise plunged, when convinced of their sins, by revealing the immense love of God, the glory and grace of Christ, and inviting all to come to him, that they may obtain pardon, life, and happiness. In a word, it shows the pit of hell under men's feet, and opens the gate, and points out the way to heaven. Let us now briefly observe the effects it produces in those who do not receive it as the power of God unto salvation. These effects are various, as tempers and circumstances vary; but they may all lead us to adopt the psalmist's exclamation, "Lord, what is man!"

Many who have heard the gospel once or a few times, will hear it no more; it awakens their scorn, their hatred, and rage. They pour contempt upon the wisdom of God, despise his goodness, defy his power; and their very looks express the spirit of the rebellious Jews, who told the prophet Jeremiah to his face, "As to the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all." The ministers who

preach it are accounted men that turn the world upside down; and the people who receive it, fools or hypocrites. The word of the Lord is a burden to them, and they hate it with a perfect hatred. How strongly is the disposition of the natural heart manifested, by the confusion which often takes place in families, where the Lord is pleased to awaken one or two in a house, while the rest remain in their sins! To profess, or even to be suspected of an attachment to the gospel of Christ, is frequently considered and treated as the worst of crimes, sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations of relation or friendship. Parents, upon such a provocation, will hate their children, and children ridicule their parents. Many find, agreeably to our Lord's declaration, that from the time a sense of his love engaged their hearts to love him again, their worst foes have been those of their own household; and that they who expressed the greatest love and tenderness for them before their conversion, can now hardly bear to see them.

The bulk of a people will perhaps continue to hear, at least now and then; and to those who do, the Spirit of God usually, at one time or other, bears testimony to the truth. Their consciences are struck, and for a season they believe and tremble. But what is the consequence? No man who has taken poison seeks more earnestly or speedily for an antidote, than those do for something to stifle and smother their convictions. They run to company, to drink, to anything, for relief against the unwelcome intrusion of serious thoughts; and when they succeed, and recover their former indifference, they rejoice, as if they had escaped some great danger. The next step is, to ridicule their own connections; and next to that, if they see any of their acquaintance under the like impressions, to use every art, and strain every nerve, that they may render them as obstinate as themselves. For this purpose, they watch as a fowler for the bird, flatter or revile, tempt or threaten; and if they can prevail, and are the occasion of hardening any in their sins, they rejoice and triumph, as if they accounted it their interest and their glory to ruin the souls of their fellow-creatures.

By frequent hearing, they receive more light. They are compelled to know, whether they will or not, that the wrath of God hangs over the children of disobedience. They carry a sting in their consciences, and at times feel themselves most miserable, and cannot but wish they had never been born, or that they had been dogs or toads, rather than rational creatures. Yet they harden themselves still more. They affect to be happy and at ease, and force themselves to wear a smile, when anguish preys upon their hearts. They blaspheme the way of truth, watch for the faults of professors, and, with a malicious joy, publish and aggravate them. They see, perhaps, how the wicked die, but are not alarmed; they see the righteous die, but are not moved. Neither providences nor ordinances, mercies nor judgments, can stop them; for they are determined to go on, and perish with their eyes

open, rather than submit to the gospel.

But they do not always openly reject the gospel-truths. Some who profess to approve and receive them, do thereby discover the evils of the heart of man if possible in a yet stronger light. They make Christ the minister of sin, and turn his grace into licentiousness. Like Judas, they say, Hail Master! and betray him. This is the highest pitch of iniquity. They pervert all the doctrines of the gospel. From election they draw an excuse for continuing in their evil ways; and contend for salvation without works, because they love not obedience. They extol the righteousness of Christ, but hold it in opposition to personal holiness. In a word, because they hear that God is good, they determine to persist in evil. "Lord, what is man!"

Thus wilful and impenitent sinners go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word which they despise, becomes to them a saviour of death unto death. They take different courses, but all are travelling down to the pit; and, unless sovereign mercy interpose, will soon sink to rise no more. The final event is usually twofold. Many, after they have been more or less shaken by the word, settle in formality. If hearing would supply the place of faith, love, and obedience, they would do well; but by degrees they become sermon-proof. The truths which once struck them, lose their power by being often heard; and thus multitudes live and die in darkness, though the light has long shone around them. Others are more openly given up to a reprobate mind. Contempt of the gospel makes infidels, deists, and atheists. They are filled with a spirit of delusion to believe a lie. These are scoffers, walking after their own lusts; for where the principles of religion are given up, the conduct will be vile and abominable. Such persons sport themselves with their own deceivings, and strongly prove the truth of the gospel, while they dispute against it. We often find that people of this cast have formerly been the subjects of strong convictions; but when the evil spirit has seemed to depart for a season, and returns again, the last state of that person is worse than the first.

It is not improbable that some of my readers may meet with their own characters under one or other of the views I have given of the desperate wickedness of the heart, in its acting against the truth. May the Spirit of God constrain them to read with attention. Your case is dangerous, but I would hope not utterly desperate. Jesus is mighty to save. His grace can pardon the most aggravated offences, and subdue the most inveterate habits of sin. The gospel you have hitherto slighted, resisted, or opposed, is still the power of God unto salvation. The blood of Jesus, upon which you have hitherto trampled, speaks better things than the blood of Abel, and is of virtue to cleanse those whose sins are scarlet and crimson, and to make them white as snow. As yet you are spared; but it is high time to stop, to throw down your arms of rebellion, and humble yourselves at his feet. If you do,

you may yet escape; but if not, know assuredly that wrath is coming upon you to the uttermost: and you will shortly find, to your unspeakable dismay, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the bands of the living God.

I am, &c.