

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, DIS-  
COURSES 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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1830.

MESSIAH  
OR  
FIFTY EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES  
ON THE SERIES OF  
SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES  
WHICH FORM THE SUBJECT OF HANDEL'S CELEBRATED  
ORATORIO  
OF THAT NAME,  
PREACHED IN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1785,  
IN THE  
PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,  
LOMBARD STREET,  
LONDON.

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—————Ah!  
Tantanne rem, tam negligenter, agere!—TER.  
Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this!—DEUT. xxxii. 29.

## SERMON XXVII.

### MESSIAH THE SON OF GOD.

*For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?* HEBREWS, i. 5.

THOUGH every part of a revelation from God must of course be equally true, there may be a considerable difference even among truths proposed by the same authority, with respect to their immediate importance. There are fundamental truths, the knowledge of which is essentially necessary to our peace and holiness: and there are others of a secondary nature, which, though very useful in their proper connection, and though the right apprehension of them is greatly conducive to the comfort and establishment of a believer, are not so necessary, but that he may be a true believer before he clearly understands them. Thus our Lord pronounced Peter blessed (Matt. xvi. 17), for his acknowledgment of a truth, which had been revealed to him, not by flesh and blood, but from above, though he was at that time very deficient in doctrinal knowledge. It is not easy to draw the line here, and precisely to distinguish between fundamental and secondary truths; yet some attention to this distinction is expedient; and the want of such attention has greatly contributed to foment and embitter controversies in the Church of Christ; while fallible men, from a mistaken zeal for the faith once delivered to the saints, have laboured to enforce all their religious sentiments with an equal and indiscriminate vehemence. It is evident, that the truths essential to the very being of a Christian must be known and experienced by all, of every nation, people, and language, who are taught of God (Is. liv. 13); for they, and they only, are Christians indeed, who are thus taught. And therefore it seems to follow, that no doctrine, however true in itself, which humble and spiritual persons, who study the scriptures with prayer, and really depend upon divine teaching, are not agreed in, can be strictly fundamental. And perhaps the chief part of the apparent diversity of their sentiments does not so often respect the truth itself, as the different acceptation they put upon the words and phrases by which they endeavour to express their meaning to each other.

However, if there be any doctrine fundamental, and necessary to be rightly understood, what the scriptures teach concerning the person of Messiah the Redeemer, must be eminently so. Mistakes upon this point must necessarily be dangerous. It cannot be a question of mere speculation, whether the Saviour be God or a creature; he must either be the one or the other; and the whole frame of our religion is unavoidably dependent upon the judgment we form of him. If he be a man only, or if he be an angel, though of the highest order, and possessed of excellencies peculiar to himself; still, upon

the supposition that he is but a creature, he must be infinitely inferior to his Maker, in comparison of whose immensity the difference between an angel and a worm is annihilated. Then all they who pay divine worship to Jesus, who love him above all, trust him with all their concerns for time and eternity, and address him in the language of Thomas, "My Lord, and my God" (John xx. 28), are involved in the gross and heinous crime of idolatry, by ascribing to him that glory which the great God has declared he will not give to another, Is. xlii. 8. On the contrary, if he be God over all blessed for ever, Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, then they who refuse him the honour due unto his name, worship they know not what, John iv. 22. For there is but one God; and, according to this plan, they who know him not in Christ, know him not at all, but are without God in the world, Ephes. ii. 12. The judgment we form of the Saviour demonstrates likewise how far we know ourselves. For it may be fairly presumed, that they who think a creature capable of making atonement for their sins, or of sustaining the office of Shepherd and bishop of their souls, have too slight thoughts, both of the evil of sin, and of the weakness and wickedness of the human heart.

We ascribe it therefore to the wisdom and goodness of God, that a doctrine so important; the very pillar and ground of truth, is not asserted once or in a few places of scripture only. It does not depend upon texts which require a nice skill in criticism, or a collation of ancient manuscripts, to settle their sense; but, like the blood in the animal economy, it pervades and enlivens the whole system of revelation. The books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, all testify of Him, who was styled the Son of God in so peculiar a sense, that the apostle, in this passage, considers it as a sufficient proof that he is by nature superior to all creatures. The form of the question implies the strongest assertion of this superiority; as if he had said, Conceive of the highest and most exalted of the angels, it would be absurd to suppose that God would say to him, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."

The verse contains three terms which require explanation, *My Son—Begotten—This day*. But who is sufficient for these things? If I attempt to explain them, I wish to speak with a caution and modesty becoming the sense I ought to have of my own weakness, and to keep upon safe ground; lest, instead of elucidating so sublime a subject, I should darken counsel by words without knowledge. And I know of no safe ground to go upon in these inquiries, but the sure testimony of scripture. It would be to the last degree improper to indulge flights of imagination, or a spirit of curiosity or conjecture upon this occasion. These are the deep things of God, in which, if we have not the guidance of his word and Spirit, we shall certainly bewilder ourselves. Nor would I speak in a positive dogmatizing strain; at the same time I trust the scripture will afford light sufficient to preserve us from a cold and comfortless uncertainty.

The gracious design of God in affording us his holy scripture, is to make us wise unto salvation, 2 Tim. iii. 15. His manner of teaching is therefore accommodated to our circumstances. He instructs us in heavenly things by earthly. And to engage our confidence, to excite our gratitude, to animate us to our duty by the most affecting motives; and that the reverence we owe to his great and glorious Majesty, as our Creator and Legislator, may be combined with love and cheerful dependence, he is pleased to reveal himself by those names which express the nearest relation and endearment amongst ourselves. Thus he condescends to style himself the Father, the Husband, and the Friend of his people. But though in this way we are assisted in forming our conceptions of his love, compassion, and faithfulness, it is obvious that these names, when applied to him, must be understood in a sense agreeable to the perfections of his nature, and in many respects different from the meaning they bear amongst men. And thus, when we are informed that God has a Son, an only Son, an only begotten Son, it is our part to receive his testimony, to admire and adore; and for an explanation adapted to our profit and comfort, we are to consult, not our own preconceived ideas, but the further declarations of his word, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, attending with the simplicity of children to his instructions, and avoiding, as much as possible, those vain reasonings, upon points above our comprehension, which, though flattering to the pride of our hearts, are sure to indispose us for the reception of divine truth. A distinction in the divine nature, inconceivable by us, but plainly revealed in terms, must be admitted, upon the testimony and authority of him, who alone can instruct us in what we are concerned to know of his adorable essence. "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one," 1 John v. 7. To each of these three the perfections of Deity are attributed and ascribed in various parts of scripture. Each of them therefore is God; and yet we are sure, both from scripture and reason, there is, there can be but one God. Thus far we can go safely; and that we can go no farther, that our thoughts are lost and overwhelmed, if we attempt to represent to ourselves how or in what manner three are one, and one are three, may be easily accounted for, if any just reason can be given, why a worm cannot comprehend infinity. Let us first, if we can, account for the nature, essence, and properties of the things with which, as to their effects, we are familiarly acquainted. Let us explain the growth of a blade of grass, or the virtues of the loadstone. Till we are able to do this, it becomes us to lay our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust. Far from attempting to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to my hearers, I rather wish to leave an impression upon your minds, that it is to us (and perhaps to the highest created intelligences) incomprehensible. But if it be contained in the scripture (which I must leave to your own consciences to determine in the sight of God), it is

thereby sufficiently proved, and humble faith requires no other proof.

Allow me to confirm my own sentiments, by an observation of a celebrated French writer\* to the following purport:—"The whole difference, with respect to this subject, between the common people and the learned doctors, is—that while they are both equally ignorant, the ignorance of the people is modest and ingenuous, and they do not blush for being unable to see what God has thought fit to conceal. Whereas the ignorance of their teachers is proud and affected: they have recourse to scholastic distinctions, and abstract reasonings, that they may not be thought upon a level with the vulgar."

The form of baptism prescribed by our Lord for the use of his church, is thus expressed, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," Matth. xxviii. 19. It is evident, by comparing this sentence with that which I before recited from the Epistle of John, that the Word and the Son are synonymous terms, expressive of the same character. They are both the titles of Messiah. Of him John spoke, when he said, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" and of him God the Father said, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Had God spoken thus to an angel, it would have been in effect saying, Thou art the Word, which in the beginning was with God, and was God, by whom all things were made. But to which of all the angels would the great God use language like this?

Our Lord, in his conference with Nicodemus, was pleased to say, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," &c. John iii. 16. It was undoubtedly his design, by this expression, to give to Nicodemus, and to us, the highest idea possible of the love of God to sinners. He so loved the world, beyond description or comparison, that he gave his only begotten Son. Surely then the gift spoken of must not be limited to signify the human nature only. This was not all that he gave. The human nature was the medium of the acts and sufferings of Messiah: but he who assumed it was the Word, who was before all, and by whom all things were made. It is true the human nature was given, supernaturally formed by divine power, and born of a virgin. But he who was in the beginning God with God, was given to appear, obey, and suffer, in the nature of man for us, and for our salvation. And to him are ascribed the perfections and attributes of Deity; for which the highest angels are no more capable than the worms which creep upon the earth.

I cannot, therefore, suppose, that the title of Son of God is merely a title of office, or belonging only to the nature which he assumed; but that Messiah is the Son of God, as he is God and man in one person. If the forming a perfect and spotless man, like Adam when he was first created, could have affected our salvation, it would have been a great and undeserved mercy to have vouchsafed the gift; but I think it would not have required such very

\* Abbadie.

strong language as the scripture uses in describing the gift of the Son of God. The God-man, the whole person of Christ, was sent, came forth from the Father. The manhood was the offering; but the Word of God, possessed of the perfections of Deity, was the altar necessary to sanctify the gift, and to give a value and efficacy to the atonement.

The term *begotten*, expresses with us the ground of relation between father and son, and upon which an only son is the heir of a father. I feel and confess myself at a loss here. I might take up your time, and perhaps conceal my own ignorance, by borrowing from the writings of wiser and better men than myself, a detail of what have been generally reputed the more prevailing orthodox sentiments on this subject. But I dare not go beyond my own ideas. I shall not, therefore, attempt to explain the phrase, *eternal generation*, because I must acknowledge that I do not clearly understand it myself. Long before time began, the purpose of constituting the Mediator between God and sinners was established in the divine counsels. With reference to this, he himself speaks, in the character of the Wisdom of God: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Then I was by him, as one brought up with him, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men," Prov. viii. 22, 31. If the Word of God had not engaged, according to an everlasting and sure covenant, to assume our nature, and to accomplish our salvation, before the earth was formed, he would not have appeared afterwards; for we cannot with reason conceive of any new determinations arising in the mind of the infinite God, to whom what we call the past and the future are equally present. In this sense (if the expression be proper to convey such a sense), I can conceive that he was the begotten Son of God from eternity; that is, set up and appointed from eternity for the office, nature, and work, by which, in the fulness of time, he was manifested to men. But if the terms, *begotten*, or *eternal generation*, be used to denote the manner of his eternal existence in Deity, I must be silent. I believe him to be the eternal Son; I believe him to be the eternal God; and I wish not to exercise my thoughts and inquiries more than is needful, in things which are too high for me.

The scripture, in different places, evidently applies the purport of this phrase, "I have begotten thee," to transactions which took place in time, *This day*, and particularly to two principal events.

1. His incarnation.—Thus the angel to Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God," Luke, i. 35. So the apostle, "In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son made of a woman," Gal. iv. 4. And in the passage we are next to consider, "When he bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, And

let all the angels of God worship him.”

2. His resurrection.—To this purpose our text is quoted from the second Psalm. “The promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same to the children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art a my Son, this day have I begotten thee,” Acts xiii. 32, 33. And in another place he teaches us, that he who was of the seed of David, according to the flesh, was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Rom. i. 4.

After all, I would remind you, that the best knowledge of the doctrine of the person of Christ, that which affords life and comfort to the soul, is to be obtained, not so much by inquiry and study on our part, as by a gracious manifestation on his part. Prayer, attention to the great Teacher, a humble perusal of the scripture, and a course of simple obedience to his known will, are the methods which he has prescribed for our growth in grace, and in the knowledge of himself. Thus even babes are made wise; while they who are wise and prudent in their own sight, the more they endeavour to investigate and ascertain the sense of scripture, are frequently involved more and more in perplexity. He has given a promise and direction, for the encouragement of those who sincerely seek him. “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him.” John xiv. 21.

This is he with whom we have to do. In and by this Son of his love, we have access by faith unto God. Unworthy and helpless in ourselves, from hence we derive our plea; here we find a refuge; and on this we rest, and build our hope, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; who is so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they, Heb. i. 4.