

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,  
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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**EDINBURGH**

*Printed at the University Press, for*

**PETER BROWN AND THOMAS NELSON.**

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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 XLVI.

### ACCUSERS CHALLENGED.

*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*  
ROM. viii. 33.

THOUGH the collating of manuscripts and various readings, has undoubtedly been of use in rectifying some mistakes which, through the inadvertency of transcribers, had crept into different copies of the New Testament; yet such supposed corrections of the text ought to be admitted with caution, and not unless supported by strong reasons and good authorities. The whole scripture is given by inspiration of God; and they who thankfully receive it as his book, will not trifle with it by substituting bold conjectural alterations, which, though they may deem to be amendments, may possibly disguise or alter the genuine sense of the passage. Some fancied emendations might be pointed out, suggested by very learned men, which do not seem to afford so strong a proof of the sound judgment of the proposers, as of their vanity and rashness. Let the learned be as ingenious as they please in correcting and amending the text of Horace or Virgil, for it is of little importance to us whether their criticisms be well founded or not, but let them treat the pages of divine revelation with reverence.

But the pointing of the New Testament, though it has a considerable influence upon the sense, is of inferior authority. It is a human invention, very helpful, and for the most part, I suppose, well executed. But in some places it may admit of real amendment. The most ancient manuscripts are without points, and some of them are even without a distinction of the words. With the pointing, therefore, we may take more liberty than with the text; though even this liberty should be used soberly. A change in the pointing of this verse and the following, will not alter the received sense, but, as some critics judge, will make it more striking and emphatical. If two clauses should be read with an interrogation instead of a period, the apostle's triumphant challenge may be expressed in the following brief paraphrase.

*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall God himself? So far from it, it is he who justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? Shall Christ? Nay, he loves them, and accepts them. Shall he who died for them, yea, rather who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, on their behalf, who also maketh intercession for them? There is not the least ground to fear, that he who has promised to justify them will lay any thing to their charge; or that he will condemn them, who died to deliver them from condemnation, nor can any charge of their enemies prevail to the condemnation*

of those whom God is pleased to justify, and for whom Christ died, and now intercedes before the throne.

The death, the resurrection, and ascension of Messiah, we have already considered. I shall speak only to two points from this verse.

I. The title here given to believers,—God's elect.

II. Their great privilege, they are justified,—It is God who justifieth them.

I. The persons who will be finally justified by God are here styled his elect. Very near and strong is the connection between peace and truth. Yet a mistaken zeal for truth has produced many controversies, which have hurt the peace of the people of God among themselves; and at the same time have exposed them to the scorn and derision of the world. On the other hand, a pretended or improper regard for peace has often been prejudicial to the truth. But that peace which is procured at the expense of truth, is too dearly purchased. Every branch of doctrine, belonging to the faith once delivered to the saints, is not equally plain to every believer. Some of these doctrines the apostle compares to milk, the proper and necessary food for babes (Heb. v. 13, 14); others to strong meat, adapted to a more advanced state in the spiritual life, when experience is more enlarged, and the judgment more established. The Lord, the great teacher, leads his children on gradually, from the plainer to the more difficult truths, as they are able to bear them. But human teachers are often too hasty: they do not attend sufficiently to the weakness of young converts, but expect them to learn and receive every thing at once; they are not even content with offering strong meat prematurely to babes, but force upon them the bones of subtleties, distinctions, and disputations. But though a judicious minister will endeavour to accommodate himself to the state of his hearers, no gospel-truth is to be tamely and voluntarily suppressed from a fear of displeasing men. In fact, however, the controversies which have obtained among real Christians, have not so much affected the truth as it lies in scripture, as the different explanations, which fallible men of warm passions, and too full of their own sense, have given of it. They who professedly hold and avow the doctrine of an election of grace, are now called *Calvinists*; and the name is used by some persons as a term of reproach. They would insinuate that Calvin invented the doctrine; or at least, that he borrowed it from Austin, who, according to them, was the first of the Fathers that held it. It is enough for me that I find it in the New Testament. But many things advanced upon the subject by later writers, I confess, I do not find there. If any persons advance harsh assertions not warranted by the word of God, I am not bound to defend them. But as the doctrine itself is plainly taught, both by our Lord and his apostles, and is of great importance, when rightly understood, to promote the humiliation, gratitude, and comfort of believers, I think it my duty to state it as plainly as I can. I shall offer my view

of it, in a series of propositions so evidently founded (as I conceive) on acknowledged principles of scripture, that they cannot be easily controverted by any persons who have a real reverence for the word of God, and any due acquaintance with their own hearts.

1. All mankind are sinners (Rom. iii. 23) by nature and practice. Their lives are stained with transgressions, their hearts are depraved, their minds blinded, and alienated from God. So that they are not sensible either of their guilt or their misery; nor so much as desirous of returning to God, till he prevents them with his mercy, and begins to draw their hearts towards himself. Were I to prove this at large, I might transcribe one half of the Bible. Nay, it is fully proved by experience and observation. The Heathens felt and confessed it. My present subject does not require me to account for it, or to reason upon it. That it is so, I appeal to fact.

2. The inestimable gift of a Saviour, to atone for sin and to mediate between God and man (John iii. 16); that there might be a way opened for the communication of mercy to sinners, without prejudice to the honour of the perfections and government of God— this gift was the effect of his own rich grace and love (Rom. v. 6, 8), no less unthought of, and undesired, than undeserved by fallen man.

3. Wherever this love of God to man is made known by the gospel, there is encouragement, and a command given to all men everywhere to repent, Acts xvii. 30, 31. The manifestation of the eternal Word in the human nature, and his death upon the cross, are spoken of as the highest display of the wisdom and goodness of God. Designed to give us, in one and the same transaction, the most affecting sense of the evil of sin, and the strongest assurance imaginable, that there is forgiveness with God, Rom. iii. 24, 25.

4. Men, while blinded by pride and prejudice, enslaved to sinful passions, and under the influence of this present evil world, neither can nor will receive the truth in the love of it, 2 Cor. iv. 4; John v. 40; vi. 44. They are prepossessed and pre-engaged. This, at least, is evidently the case with many people in this favoured nation, who, when the gospel is proposed to them in the most unexceptionable manner, not only disregard, but treat it with a pointed contempt and indignation, Luke iv. 28, 29; Acts xvii. 18. Such was its reception at the beginning, and we are not to wonder, therefore, that it is so at this day.

5. As all mankind spring from one stock, there are not two different sorts of men by nature; consequently they who receive the gospel are no better in themselves (Eph. ii. 3), than they are who reject it. The apostle writing to the believers at Corinth, having enumerated a catalogue, in which he comprises some of the most flagitious and infamous characters (1 Cor. vi. 9–11), and allowed to be so by the common consent of mankind, adds, “such were some of you.” Surely it cannot be said, that they who had degraded themselves below the brutes, by their abominable practices, were better disposed than

others to receive that gospel, which is not more distinguished by the sublimity of its doctrine, than by the purity and holiness of conversation which it enjoins!

6. It seems, therefore, at least highly probable, that all men universally, if left to themselves, would act as the majority do to whom the word of salvation is sent; that is, they would reject and despise it. And it is undeniable, that some, who in the day of God's power have cordially received the gospel, did for a season oppose it with no less pertinacity than any of those who have continued to hate and resist it to the end of life. Saul of Tarsus was an eminent instance, Acts ix. 1. He did not merely slight the doctrine of a crucified Saviour; but, according to his mistaken views, thought himself bound in conscience to suppress those who embraced it. He breathed out threatening, and slaughter, and, as he expresses it himself was exceedingly mad against them (Acts xxvi. 11), and made havoc of them. His mind was filled with this bitter and insatiable rage, at the moment when the Lord Jesus appeared to him in his way to Damascus. Is it possible that a man thus disposed should suddenly become a preacher of the faith which he had long laboured to destroy, if his heart and views had not been changed by a supernatural agency? Or that the like prejudices in other persons can be removed in any other manner?

7. If all men had heard the gospel in vain, then Christ would have died in vain. But this is prevented by the covenanted office and influence of the Holy Spirit (John xvi. 8), who accompanies the word with his energy and makes it the power of God to the salvation of those who believe. He prepares the minds of sinners, and, as in the case of Lydia (Acts xvi. 14), opens their hearts to understand and receive the truth, in the love of it.

8. But who will presume to say, that when God was pleased to make a proposal of mercy to a race of rebels, he was likewise bound to overcome the obstinacy of men in every case, and to compel them to accept it by an act of his invincible power. If he does thus interpose in favour of some, it is an act of free mercy to which they have no claim. For if we had a claim, the benefit would be an act of justice, rather than of mercy. May not the great Sovereign of the world do what he will with his own? Matth. xx. 15. And nothing is more peculiarly and eminently his own than his mercy. Yes, we are assured, that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy (Rom. ix. 18); and whom he will, he may justly leave to be hardened in their impenitence and unbelief. We have all deserved to be so left; but he, as the potter over the clay, has power and right to make a difference, as it seemeth good in his sight. And who will say unto him, What doest thou? Job ix. 12.

9. When sinners are effectually called by the gospel, then they are visibly chosen out of the world (John xv. 19), in the spirit and tempers of which they before lived, disobedient and deceived, even as others. Old things pass away, and all things become new, 2 Cor. v. 17. Their hopes and fears, their

companions and pleasures, their pursuits and aims, are all changed. The change in these respects is so evident, that they are soon noticed and marked, pitied or derided, by those from whom they are now separated. And I think they who really experience this change will willingly ascribe it to the grace of God.

10. But if they are thus chosen in time, it follows of course that they were chosen from everlasting. Both these expressions, when applied to this subject, amount to the same thing; and the seeming difference between them is chiefly owing to our weakness and ignorance. To the infinite and eternal God our little distinctions of past, present, and future, are nothing. We think unworthily of the unchangeable Jehovah, and liken him too much to ourselves, if we suppose that he can form a new purpose. If it be his pleasure to convert a sinner today, he had the same gracious design in favour of that sinner yesterday, at the day of his birth, a thousand years before he was born, and a thousand ages (to speak according to our poor conceptions) before the world began. For that mode of duration which we call time, has no respect to him who inhabiteth eternity, Is. lvii. 15.

With regard to those who reject the declaration of the mercy of God, who though called and invited by the gospel, and often touched by the power of his Holy Spirit, will not come to the Saviour for life, but persist in their determination to go on in their sins, their ruin is not only unavoidable, but just in the highest degree. And though, like the wicked servant in the parable (Matth. xxv. 24), they cavil against the Lord, their mouths will be stopped (Rom. iii. 19), when he shall at length appear to plead with them face to face. Then their cobweb excuses will fail them, and the proper ground of their condemnation will be, that when he sent them light, they turned from it, and chose darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil, John iii. 19.

II. The great privilege of the elect, comprehensive of every blessing is, that they are justified, finally and authoritatively justified from all that can possibly be laid to their charge; for it is God himself who justifieth them.

The justification of a sinner before God, by faith in the obedience and atonement of Christ, is considered by many persons, in these days of refinement, in no better light than as a branch of scholastic theology, which is now exploded as uncouth and obsolete. At the Reformation, it was the turning point between the Protestants and Papists. Luther deemed it the criterion of a flourishing or a falling church; that is, he judged the church would always be in a thriving or a declining state, in proportion as the importance of this doctrine was attended to. How important it appeared to our English reformers, many of whom sealed their testimony to it with their blood, may be known by the writings of Cranmer, Latimer, Philpot, and others; and by the Articles of the Church of England, which are still of so much authority by law, that no person can be admitted into Holy Orders amongst us, till he has

declared and subscribed his assent to them. But I hope never to preach a doctrine to my hearers which needs the names and authority of men, however respectable, for its support. Search the scriptures (John v. 39), and judge by them of the importance of this doctrine. Judge of it by the text now before us. The apostle speaks of it as sufficient to silence every charge, to free from all condemnation, and inseparably connected with eternal life; for those whom God justifies he will also glorify, Rom. viii. 30. Though volumes have been written upon the subject, I think it may be explained in few words. Every one must give an account of himself to God; and the judgment will proceed according to the tenor of his holy word. By the law no flesh can be justified, for all have sinned (Rom. iii. 19, 20): but they who believe the gospel will be justified from all things (Acts xiii. 39), for which the law would otherwise condemn them; and as they who believe not are condemned already (John iii. 18), so believers are already justified by faith, and have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. v. 1), in present life. They plead guilty to the charge of the law; but they can likewise plead, that they renounce all hope and righteousness in themselves, and upon the warrant of the word of promise, put their whole trust in Jesus, as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. x. 4): and this plea is accepted. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. iv. 5), and his sins are no more remembered against him, Heb. viii. 12.

This justification, in its own nature, is authoritative, complete, and final. It is an act of God's mercy, which, because founded upon the mediation of Jesus, may, with no less truth, be styled an act of his justice, whereby the believing sinner is delivered from the curse of the law, from the guilt and power of sin, and is translated into the kingdom of his dear Son, Col. i. 13. It includes the pardon of all sin, and admission to the state of a child of God. It is a passing from death unto life, John v. 24. By faith of the operation of God, the sinner, once afar off, is brought nigh, is accepted in the Beloved, and becomes one with him, as the branch is united to the vine, and the members with the head, John xv. 15. The sanctification of a believer is imperfect and gradual; but his justification, in this sense, from the moment when he begins to live a life of faith in the Son of God, is perfect, and incapable of increase. The principle of life in a new-born infant, and the privileges dependent upon his birth (if he be the heir of a great family), are the same from the first hour, as at any future time. He is stronger as he grows up to the stature of a man, but is not more alive; he grows up likewise more into the knowledge and enjoyment of his privileges, but his right to them admits of no augmentation; for he derives it, not from his years, or his stature, or his powers, but from the relation in which he stands as a child to his father. Thus it is with those who are born from above; they are immediately the children and heirs of



God, though for a time, like minors while under age, they may seem to differ but little from servants (Gal. iv. 1, 2); and it doth not yet appear what they shall be.

But though justification in the sight of God be connected with the reality of faith, the comfortable perception of it in our own consciences is proportionable to the degree of faith. In young converts, therefore, it is usually weak. They are well satisfied that Jesus is the only Saviour, and they have no doubt of his ability and sufficiency in that character, in favour of those who put their trust in him; but they are suspicious and jealous of themselves; they are apprehensive of something singular in their own case, which may justly exclude them from his mercy, or they fear that they do not believe aright. But the weakest believer is a child of God; and true faith, though at first like a grain of mustard-seed, is interested in all the promises of the gospel. If it be true, it will grow (Mark iv. 26), it will attain to a more simple dependence upon its great object, and will work its way, through a thousand doubts and fears (which, for a season, are not without their use), till at length the weak Christian becomes strong in faith, strong in the Lord, and is enabled to say, "I know whom I have believed," 2 Tim. i. 12. Who shall lay any thing to my charge? Who shall condemn? It is God who justifieth. It is Christ who died for me and rose again.

But especially at the great day, the Lord the Judge shall ratify their justification publicly before assembled worlds. Then every tongue that riseth in judgment against them (Is. liv. 17), shall be put to silence. Then Satan will be utterly confounded, and many who despised them on earth will be astonished, and say—"These are they whose lives we accounted madness, and their end to be without honour. How are they numbered among the children of God!" Wisdom, v. 4, 5.

The right knowledge of this doctrine is a source of abiding joy; it likewise animates love, zeal, gratitude, and all the noblest powers of the soul, and produces a habit of cheerful and successful obedience to the whole will of God. But it may be, and too often is, misunderstood and abused. If you receive it by divine teaching, it will fill you with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God, Phil. i. 11. But if you learn it only from men and books, if you are content with the notion of it in your head, instead of the powerful experience of it in your heart, it will have a contrary effect. Such a lifeless form, even of the truth itself, will probably make you heady and high-minded, censorious of others, trifling in your spirit, and unsettled in your conduct. Oh! be afraid of resembling the foolish virgins (Matth. xxv. 1-12), of having the lamp of your profession expire in darkness for want of the oil of grace; lest, when the bridegroom cometh, you should find the door shut against you.