

# John Berridge

by J.C. Philpot

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*J.C. Philpot's sermon on John Berridge highlights his profound faith, the simplicity of his hymns, and his enduring legacy in Christian ministry.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 27:2, Matthew 23:12, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 4:6

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Gospel Preaching"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot reflects on the remarkable period of the 18th century where ministers like Whitefield, Toplady, Berridge, Newton, Romaine, Huntington, and Hawker preached the same gospel despite differing in gifts. Philpot emphasizes the importance of humility and unity among ministers, comparing them to planets revolving around the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ. He provides a detailed sketch of John Berridge, highlighting his honesty, simplicity in language, self-destitution, self-abhorrence, deep understanding of the gospel of grace, and the sweet savor that rests upon his hymns.

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## Transcript

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The middle and latter end of the last century was a remarkable period. A chain of ministers, commencing with Whitefield, and embracing in its links Toplady, Berridge, Newton, Romaine, Huntington, and Hawker, extends itself down to our degenerate days. However differing in gifts, all these men were evidently taught by the same Spirit, and preached the same gospel. Toplady, like a lamp fed with spirit, flamed forth, blazed, and died, from shortness of wick, not from lack of supply. Newton, snatched from Africa's burning shore, and from worse than African servitude, united to much sound wisdom great tenderness of spirit, and an experience of divine things which, if not very deep, was sound and varied. He knew much of his own heart, was singularly frank and sincere, had much sympathy with the tried and afflicted, and, being gifted with an easy, fluent style, has left behind him many useful and excellent letters. Romaine was a burning and shining light, who lived the faith which he preached, and in the midst of the metropolis for half a century had but one theme, one subject, one object--Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

In many points widely differing, but united by the same faith to the same glorious Head of influence, light, life, liberty, and love, was John Berridge. As all the lines of a circle radiate towards the center, all

necessarily meet in one point. So, however the servants of Christ may differ in ability, gifts, time, place, and usefulness, yet all meet in one point the central Sun of the system--the crucified, risen, ascended, and glorified Son of God. We hear of "the music of the spheres." But without harmony, music there is none. If there be music in the revolving spheres, it is because each planet preserves its circuit, rolling round the sun at the appointed distance, and with the appointed velocity. And what are the servants of God but planets to the Sun of Righteousness, each having his appointed orbit, fixed as definitely by decree, as the orbit of the earth, and enjoying only light, warmth, and motion in proportion to his proximity to the glorified Immanuel? Shall they then jar and quarrel, and seek to mingle orbits, envying each other's grace, gifts, or usefulness? The light of each and all is but reflected light, the light of the Sun of Righteousness shining into their hearts; "for what have they which they have not received?"

Pride, cursed pride, is the root of that jealousy which is cruel as the grave. Did ministers but view themselves, and did others but view them, as mere instruments, they could and would no more quarrel on the ground of superiority and inferiority than the flute would quarrel with the violin, or the chisel with the saw. Romaine poring over Hebrew roots in his study at Lambeth, and Berridge preaching from a horse-block at Potton, mingling smiles and tears, and the quaintest humour with the deepest pathos, were as different in natural disposition and constitution as can well be imagined. But each sighed and groaned under a body of sin and death, each dearly loved, and each highly exalted the dying Friend of sinners, each was honored and blessed in his work, and each is now in the bosom of his Lord and God. Of Berridge we now propose a slight sketch.

John Berridge was the eldest son of a wealthy farmer and grazier, and was born at Kingston, Nottinghamshire, March 1st, 1716. His father's intention was to bring him up to his own business, but partly through some early religious impressions and partly through an innate love to study, the youthful farmer could never learn how to hold a plough or handle a bullock. He was sent therefore to the University of Cambridge, his father probably thinking that his first-born might have sufficient talent to read prayers and preach a sermon, if not to learn the mysteries of a four-shift course or sell a broken-mouthed ewe. To Cambridge, therefore, John went; and when his father was asked what had become of the youthful student, he is said to have jocularly replied that "he was gone to be a light to the Gentiles." At the University he studied hard, but lost much of his early religious impressions, so much so as to give up almost entirely secret prayer for ten years, and to have drunk deeply into Arian and Socinian views, which at that time were widely prevalent. These last sentiments, however, he abandoned, from seeing that they lowered God the Father, as well as God the Son, and were destructive of all vital religion.

The experience of Berridge is best seen in his hymns. In them his whole heart is open. They were written in the furnace of a long and trying illness, and the fruits of the furnace are seen in them.

1. What honesty and sincerity are stamped upon them! Berridge knew himself. The Holy Spirit had taken him into the chambers of imagery, and shown him "The creeping things portrayed upon the walls round about." The veil of self-righteousness and self-complacency had been taken from off his heart, and he had seen light in God's light. This made him honest. No disguise, he knew, could shroud him from the eyes of Omniscience. "You God see me" was engraved on his heart. And to this we owe the transparency of his character, his freedom from deceit and hypocrisy.

2. Though a man of learning, his language was simplicity itself. Simplicity is always beautiful. God's works in nature, how beautifully simple! From a blade of grass to an oak; from a fly to an elephant; from the sand under our feet to the stars in the sky! Wherever the fingers of God are there is simplicity. And his word how

simple! The parables of Jesus, the sermon on the mount, the farewell chapters with his disciples in the Gospel of John, what beauty! what simplicity shine throughout! True religion, real experience, vital godliness, wants no rouge upon its cheek. It shines forth with the luster of God, as the face of Moses when he came down from the mount of communion. It is falsehood and hypocrisy that want disguise. Truth needs no adventitious ornaments to set off its intrinsic beauty. To adorn it is to spoil it--to array the virgin in the garb of a harlot. This beautiful simplicity was a marked feature in the character of Berridge, and is stamped on all his writings. He could afford to be sincere, as he alone can in whom the fear and grace of God dwell.

3. We admire, too, in Berridge the emptiness and self-destitution which form such prominent features in his character. He knew what Pharisaism was from a long experience of it in his own heart; and he abhorred the resident.

4. With this feature of destitution, poverty, and soul-emptiness which characterize Berridge, we see combined its inseparable companion, self-abhorrence. How feelingly he says,

"Self-condemned and abhorred,

How shall I approach the Lord."

And again,

"I drop my vile heart in the dust."

5. But Berridge knew also the gospel of the grace of God. Here he preeminently shines. The gospel flowed purely into his soul, and thence pure out of his mouth, not turbid and tainted like a ditch with the rotting leaves that Adam would gladly have covered himself with, but bright and sparkling as the river of life. Christ was indeed his all in all.

6. One point more we would call attention to lest we dwell too long upon this part of our subject. We mean the sweet and indescribable savor that rests upon Berridge's Hymns. They are "seasoned with salt," and are thus preserved from corruption. How many thousands of sermons, hymns, and tracts have been written and published within this last century! And who reads them now? They lacked that which God commanded never to be lacking from the meat offering, (Lev. 2:13) "salt." Their sacrifice was not seasoned with salt, (Mark 9:46; Col. 4:6,) and therefore lacked both savor and preservation. Not so with Berridge. His hymns are seasoned with salt; have therefore savor and flavor; have been preserved to our time, and will go down to all generations.

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