

Christian Fellowship--Amusements--Walking in Darkness

by John Newton

John Newton's sermon explores the necessity of true communion with God amidst the distractions of human relationships and worldly amusements.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1, Jeremiah 2:13, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 3:19, Colossians 2:8

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Discerning Truth"

Description

John Newton reflects on his struggles with spiritual dryness and dependence on the Lord, acknowledging his tendency to seek fulfillment in earthly relationships rather than in communion with God. He contrasts the temporary amusements of the world with the eternal treasures found in God's wisdom and love, emphasizing the futility of trusting in man-made creations over the truths of Scripture. Newton encourages discernment and humility in evaluating teachings, reminding believers to prioritize the Word of God above all human wisdom.

Transcript

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My dear Miss,

The Lord brought us home in peace. My visit to **** was agreeable, and I shall often think of it with pleasure; though the deadness and dryness of my own spirit, a good part of the time I was there, proved a considerable abatement. I am eager enough to converse with the Lord's people, when at the same time I am backward and indisposed to communion with the Lord himself. The two evils charged upon Israel of old, a proneness to forsake the fountain of living waters, and to trust to broken cisterns (which can do me no good unless he supplies them), run through the whole of my experience abroad and at home. A few drops of grace in my fellow-worms endear them to me exceedingly. If I expect to see any Christian friends, I count the hours till we meet: I promise myself great benefit; but if the Lord withdraws his influence, the best of them prove to me but clouds without water. It was not, however, wholly so with me all the time I staid with my friends; but I suffer much in learning to depend upon the Lord alone: I have been at this lesson many a long year; but am so poor and dull a scholar, that I have not yet made any tolerable progress in it.

I think I received some instruction and advantage where I little expected it: I mean, at Mr. Cox's Museum. The efforts of his ingenuity amazed me, while at the same time I was struck with their insignificance. His fine things were curious beyond all I had any idea of; and yet what are they better than toys and amusements, suited to the taste of children! And notwithstanding the variety of their motions, they were all destitute of life. There is unspeakably more wisdom and contrivance in the mechanism of a butterfly or a bee, that flies unnoticed in the fields, than in all his apparatus put together. But the works of God are disregarded, while the feeble imitations of them which men can produce gain universal applause.

If you and I could make self-moving dragons and elephants, what would it profit us? Blessed be God, that he has given us some glimpses of his wisdom and love! by which our hearts, more hard and lifeless by nature than the stones in the street, are constrained and enabled to move upwards, and to seek after the Lord. He has given us in his word a greater treasure than all that we ever beheld with our eyes, and a hope which shall flourish when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. What will all the fine things of men's device be worth in that day?

I think the passage you refer to in Mr. ***** justly exceptionable. His intention is good, and the mistake he would censure very dangerous; but he might have explained himself more clearly. I apprehend he and you do not mean the same thing by being in the dark. It is not an uncomfortable, but a careless, frame which he would censure. They who walk in darkness and see no light, and yet are exhorted to stay themselves upon God, Isa. 50:10, are said to hearken to the voice of his servant. Though they cannot see the Lord, they are seeking and mourning after him, and waiting in the use of means, and warring against sin. Mr. ***** had another set of people in view, who trust in the notions of Gospel truth, or some past convictions and comforts; though at present they give no evidence of spiritual desires, but are worldly in their spirit and conversation; talk of trusting in the Lord; account it a weakness to doubt of their state, and think all is well, because they profess to believe the doctrines of grace. In a word, it is the darkness of sin and sloth, not the occasional darkness of an exercised soul, against which his observation is pointed. Or if, indeed, he meant more than this, we are not obliged to believe him.

Remember your privilege; you have the Bible in your hands, and are not bound to follow books or preachers any farther than what they deliver agrees with the Oracles of Truth. We have great reason to be thankful for the instructions and writings of spiritual men, but they are all fallible even as ourselves. One is our master, even Christ: what he says, we are to receive implicitly; but we do not owe implicit subjection to the best of our fellow-creatures. The Bereans were commended that they would not take even the Apostle Paul upon trust, but searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so. May the Lord give us a spirit of humility and discernment in all things.

I am, &c.

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