

Christian Humility--Christ's School--Friends

by John Newton

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, waiting on the Lord, and ceasing from creatures, and encourages the listener to rely on God alone.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Psalm 62:5, Psalm 119:105, Psalm 146:3, Isaiah 40:31

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Newton emphasizes the importance of waiting only upon God, seeking humility, and learning to cease from relying on creatures or worldly comforts. He reflects on the need to trust in God's sovereignty, even in times of separation, sorrow, and uncertainty, knowing that He provides strength and joy in the midst of trials. Newton encourages a focus on personal growth through daily experiences, viewing them as opportunities for spiritual learning and growth. He also highlights the significance of private prayer and studying God's Word, especially in times when public means of worship are limited or unavailable.

Transcript

1769.

We are much obliged to you for your late visit; and I am glad to find that the Lord is pleased to give you some tokens of his presence when you are with us, because I hope it will encourage you to come again. I ought to be very thankful that our Christian friends in general are not wholly disappointed of a blessing when they visit us.

I hope the Lord will give me an humble sense of what I am, and that broken and contrite frame of heart in which he delights. This is to me the chief thing. I had rather have more of the mind that was in Christ, more of a meek, quiet, resigned, peaceful, and loving disposition, than to enjoy the greatest measure of sensible comforts, if the consequence should be (as perhaps it would) spiritual pride, self-sufficiency, and a want of that tenderness to others which becomes one who has reason to style himself the chief of sinners. I know indeed that the proper tendency of sensible consolations is to humble; but I can see, that, through the depravity of human nature, they have not always that effect. And I have been sometimes disgusted with an apparent want of humility, an air of self-will and self-importance, in persons of whose sincerity I could not at all doubt. It has kept me from envying them those pleasant frames with which they have sometimes been favoured for I believe Satan is never nearer us than at some times when we think ourselves nearest the Lord.

What reason have we to charge our souls in David's words! "My soul, wait thou only upon God." A great stress should be laid upon that word only. We dare not entirely shut him out of our regards, but we are too apt to suffer something to share with him. This evil disposition is deeply fixed in our hearts; and the Lord orders all his dispensations towards us with a view to rooting it out; that, being wearied with repeated disappointments, we may at length be compelled to betake ourselves to Him alone. Why else do we experience so many changes and crosses? Why are we so often in heaviness? We know that He delights in the pleasure and prosperity of his servants; that He does not willingly afflict or grieve his children: but there is a necessity on our parts, in order to teach us that we have no stability in ourselves, and that no creature can do us good but by His appointment.

While the people of Israel depended upon Him for food, they gathered up the manna every morning in the field: but when they would hoard it up in their houses, that they might have a stock within themselves, they had it without his blessing, and it proved good for nothing; it soon bred worms, and grew offensive. We may often observe something like this occurs, both in our temporal and spiritual concerns. The Lord gives us a dear friend to our comfort; but ere long we forget that the friend is only the channel of conveyance, and that all the comfort is from himself. To remind us of this, the stream is dried up, the friend torn away by death, or removed far from us, or perhaps the friendship ceases, and a coolness insensibly takes place, we know not how or why: the true reason is, that when we rejoiced amiss in our gourd, the Lord, for our good, sent a worm to the root of it.

Instances of this kind are innumerable; and the great inference from them all is, Cease from man, cease from creatures, for wherein are they to be accounted of? My soul, wait thou only, only upon the Lord, who is (according to the expressive phrase, Heb. 4:13.) he with whom we have to do for soul and body, for time and eternity.

What thanks do we owe, that though we have not yet attained perfectly this great lesson, yet we are admitted into that school where alone it can be learnt; and though we are poor, slow scholars, the great and effectual Teacher to whom we have been encouraged and enabled to apply, can and will bring us forward? He communicates not only instructions, but capacities and powers. There is none like him; He can make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak: and how great is his condescension and patience! How does He accommodate himself to our weakness, and teach us as we are able to bear! Though all are very dunces when He first receives them, not one was ever turned out as incapable: for He makes them what He would have them to be. O that we may set Him always before us, and consider every dispensation, person, thing, we meet in the course of every day, as messengers from Him, each bringing us some line of instruction for us to copy into that day's experience! Whatever passes within us or around us may be improved (when he teaches us how) as a perpetual commentary upon his good word. If we converse and observe with this view, we may learn something every moment, wherever the path of duty leads us, in the streets as well as in the closet, and from the conversation of those who know not God (when we cannot avoid being present at it), as well as from those who do.

Separation of dear friends is, as you observed, hard to flesh and blood; but grace can make it tolerable. I have an abiding persuasion that the Lord can easily give more than ever he will take away. Which part of the alternative must be my lot, or when, he only knows; but in general I can rely on him to appoint the time, the manner; and I trust his promise of strength suited to the day shall be made good. Therefore I can for the most part rejoice, that all things are in the hand and under the direction of him who knows our frame, and has himself borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, in his own body. A time of weeping must come, but the morning of joy will make amends for all. Who can expound the meaning of that one expression,

"An exceeding, and eternal weight of glory?"

The case of unconverted friends is still more burdensome to think of; but we have encouragement and warrant to pray and to hope. He who called us can easily call others: and he seldom lays a desire of this sort very closely and warmly upon the hearts of his people, but when it is his gracious design, sooner or later, to give an answer of peace. However, it becomes us to be thankful for ourselves, and to bow our anxieties and reasonings before his sovereign will, who doth as he pleases with his own.

Methinks winter is your summer. You have been, like the bee, collecting from many flowers; I hope you will carry good store of honey home with you. May you find the Lord there, and he can easily supply the failure of means and creatures. We cannot be in any place to so much advantage as where the call of duty leads. What we cannot avoid may we cheerfully submit to, and not indulge a vain thought that we could choose a better situation for ourselves (all things considered) than he has chosen for us.

When we have opportunity of enjoying many ordinances, it is a mercy to be able to prize and improve them; but when he cuts us short for a season, if we wait upon him, we shall do well without them. Secret prayer, and the good word, are the chief wells from whence we draw the water of salvation. These will keep the soul alive when creature-streams are cut off; but the richest variety of public means, and the closest attendance upon them, will leave us lean and pining in the midst of plenty, if we are remiss and formal in the other two. I think David never appears in a more lively frame of mind than when he wrote the 42d, 63d, and 84th Psalms, which were all penned in a dry land, and at a distance from the public ordinances.

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