

God's Love--Backsliding--London Grace

by John Newton

John Newton emphasizes God's unwavering love and support during affliction, the necessity of spiritual discipline, and the importance of genuine faith amidst worldly challenges.

Scripture: Psalm 46:1, Psalm 119:75, Proverbs 3:5, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 12:6, James 1:2, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Divine Discipline", "Spiritual Maturity"

Description

John Newton preaches about the faithfulness and compassion of the Lord in times of affliction, emphasizing the necessity of correction and chastisement due to the deeply rooted evil in human nature. He highlights the importance of trusting in God's wisdom and not mistaking His discipline for lack of love. Newton encourages believers to find solace in prayer, acknowledging the constant care and power of God, who can turn afflictions into moments of great consolation. He also warns about the dangers of worldly influences, particularly in places like London, and the need for genuine grace and spiritual maturity amidst trials and temptations.

Transcript

1769.

I found this morning among my unanswered letters one from you, but hope I left it among them by mistake. I am willing, however, to be on the sure side, and would rather write twice than be too long silent. I heard of your being laid on the bed of affliction, and of the Lord's goodness to you there, and of his raising you up again. Blessed be his name! He is all-sufficient and faithful; and though he cause grief, he is sure to shew compassion in supporting and delivering.

Ah! the evil of our nature is deeply rooted and very powerful, or such repeated, continual corrections and chastisements would not be necessary; and were they not necessary, we should not have them. But such we are, and therefore such must be our treatment; for though the Lord loves us with a tenderness beyond what the mother feels for her sucking child, yet it is a tenderness directed by Infinite Wisdom, and very different from that weak indulgence which in parents we call fondness, which leads them to comply with their children's desires and inclinations, rather than to act with a steady view to their true welfare. The Lord loves his children, and is very indulgent to them so far as they can safely bear it, but he will not spoil them.

Their sin-sickness requires medicines, some of which are very unpalatable; but when the case calls for such, no short-sighted entreaties of ours can excuse us from taking what he prepares for our good. But every dose is prepared by his own hand, and not one is administered in vain, nor is it repeated any oftener than is needful to answer the purposed end. Till then, no other hand can remove what he lays upon us; but when his merciful design is answered, he will relieve us himself; and in the mean time he will so moderate the operation, or increase our ability to bear, that we shall not be overpowered. It is true, without a single exception, that all his paths are mercy and truth to them that fear him. His love is the same, when he wounds as when he heals, when he takes away as when he gives. We have reason to thank him for all, but most for the severe.

I received a letter from you which mentions dear Mrs. ****'s case, a very trying one; but in this likewise we see the Lord's faithfulness. Our own experience, and all that we observe of his dealings with others, may convince us that we need not be afraid to intrust ourselves and our dearest concerns in his hands; for he can and will make every thing work for good.

How little does the world know of that intercourse which is carried on between heaven and earth; what petitions are daily presented, and what answers are received at a Throne of Grace! O the blessed privilege of prayer! O the wonderful love, care, attention, and power of our great Shepherd! His eye is always upon us; when our spirits are almost overwhelmed within us, he knoweth our path. His ear is always open to us: let who will overlook and disappoint us, he will not. When means and hope fail, when every thing looks dark upon us, when we seem shut up on every side, when we are brought to the lowest ebb, still our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. To him all things are possible; and before the exertion of his power, when he is pleased to arise and work, all hindrances give way and vanish, like a mist before the sun. And he can so manifest himself to the soul, and cause his goodness to pass before it, that the hour of affliction shall be the golden hour of the greatest consolation.

He is the fountain of life, strength, grace and comfort, and of his fulness his children receive according to their occasions: but this is all hidden from the world; they have no guide in prosperity, but hurry on as they are instigated by their blinded passions, and are perpetually multiplying mischiefs and miseries to themselves; and in adversity they have no resource, but must feel all the evil of affliction, without inward support, and without deriving any advantage from it.

We have therefore cause for continual praise. The Lord has given us to know his name as a resting-place and a hiding-place, a sun and a shield. Circumstances and creatures may change; but he will be an unchangeable friend. The way is rough, but he trod it before us, and is now with us in every step we take; and every step brings us nearer to our heavenly home. Our inheritance is surely reserved for us, and we shall be kept for it by his power through faith. Our present strength is small, and without a fresh supply would be quickly exhausted; but he has engaged to renew it from day to day; and he will soon appear to wipe all tears from our eyes; and then we shall appear with him in glory.

I am very sorry if our friend Mr. **** appears to be aiming to reconcile things that are incompatible. I am indeed afraid that he has been for some time under a decline; and, as you justly observe, we meet with too many instances to teach us, that they who express the warmest zeal at their first setting out do not always prove the most steady and thriving afterwards; yet I am willing to hope, in this case, that he will revive and flourish again. Sometimes the Lord permits those whom he loves to wander from him for a season; and when his time comes to heal their backslidings, they walk more humbly, thankfully, and fruitfully afterwards, from a sense of his abounding mercy, and the knowledge they have by experience acquired of

the deceitfulness and ingratitude of their hearts. I hope and pray it will be so with him. However, these things for the present are grievous; and usually, before the Lord heals such breaches, he makes his people sensible, that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake him when he led them by the way.

Indeed London is a dangerous and ensnaring place to professors. I account myself happy that my lot is cast at a distance from it. It appears to me like a sea, wherein most are tossed by storms, and many suffer shipwreck. In this retired situation, I seem to stand upon a cliff; and, while I pity those whom I cannot help, I hug myself in the thoughts of being safe upon the shore. Not that we are without our trials here; the evil of our own hearts, and the devices of Satan, cut us out work enough; but we are happily screened from many things which must be either burdensome or hurtful to those who live in the way of them; such as political disputes, winds of doctrine, scandals of false professors, parties for and against particular ministers, and fashionable amusements, in some measure countenanced by the presence of persons in other respects exemplary.

In this view, I often think of our dear friend's expression, upon a certain occasion, of the difference between London and country grace. I hold it in a twofold sense. By London grace, when genuine, I understand grace in a very advanced degree. The favoured few who are kept alive to God, simple-hearted, and spiritually minded (I mean especially in genteel life), in the midst of such snares and temptations, appear to me to be the first-rate Christians of the land: I adore the power of the Lord in them, and compare them to the young men who walked unhurt in the midst of the fire. In another sense, the phrase London grace conveys no great idea to me. I think there is no place in the kingdom where a person may set up for a professor upon a smaller stock. If people can abstain from open immoralities, if they will fly to all parts of the town to hear sermons, if they can talk about the doctrines of the Gospel, if they have something to say upon that useless question, Who is the best preacher? If they can attain to a speaking acquaintance with some of an acknowledged character, then they expect to pass muster. I am afraid there are many who, upon no better evidences than these, deceive both themselves and others for a course of years.

Though I feel not in a writing cue to-day, I have almost filled the sheet somehow; and if a line or a word may be a means of suggesting a seasonable and comfortable thought to you, I have my end. Through mercy, we are all pretty well. My soul is kept alive as it were by miracle. I feel much inward warfare; the enemy thrusts sore at me, that I may fall; and I have abundant experience of the evil and deceitfulness of my heart: but the Lord is gracious, and, in the midst of all conflicts, I have a peace springing from the knowledge of his power and grace, and a consideration that I have been helped to commit myself to him.

I am, &c.

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