

Sin--Sanctification--Unsaved Friends

by John Newton

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our own sinfulness and trusting in the Lord's power and sufficiency to heal us and make us holy.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Ecclesiastes 11:1, John 15:5, Romans 7:25, 2 Corinthians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 12:8, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Newton preaches about the struggles with in-dwelling sin, emphasizing the need for humility, patience, and trust in the Lord Jesus as the only Physician for the sickness of the soul. He encourages gratitude amidst grief, reminding believers to expect growth in grace while accepting God's appointed process of sanctification. Newton highlights the importance of feeling our insufficiency to fully appreciate the sufficiency of God's power and grace, drawing from examples of saints in Scripture. He concludes with a call to fix our eyes on Jesus, finding righteousness, peace, and power in Him, and to be hopeful in being used by God to impact others, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

Transcript

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My dear Madam,

The complaints you make are inseparable from a spiritual acquaintance with our own hearts: I would not wish you to be less affected with a sense of in-dwelling sin. It becomes us to be humbled into the dust: yet our grief, though it cannot be too great, may be under a wrong direction; and if it leads us to impatience or distrust it certainly is so.

Sin is the sickness of the soul, in itself mortal and incurable, as to any power in heaven or earth but that of the Lord Jesus only. But he is the great, the infallible Physician. Have we the privilege to know his name? Have we been enabled to put ourselves into his hand? We have then no more to do but to attend his prescriptions, to be satisfied with his methods, and to wait his time. It is lawful to wish we were well; it is natural to groan, being burdened: but still he must and will take his own course with us; and, however dissatisfied with ourselves, we ought still to be thankful that he has begun his work in us, and to believe that he will also make an end. Therefore while we mourn, we should likewise rejoice; we should encourage ourselves to expect all that he has promised; and we should limit our expectations by his

promises.

We are sure, that when the Lord delivers us from the guilt and dominion of sin, he could with equal ease free us entirely from sin, if he pleased. The doctrine of sinless perfection is not to be rejected, as though it were a thing simply impossible in itself, for nothing is too hard for the Lord, but because it is contrary to that method which he has chosen to proceed by. He has appointed that sanctification should be effected, and sin mortified, not at once completely, but by little and little; and doubtless he has wise reasons for it. Therefore, though we are to desire a growth in grace, we should, at the same time, acquiesce in his appointment, and not be discouraged or despond, because we feel that conflict which his word informs us will only terminate with our lives.

Again, some of the first prayers which the Spirit of God teaches us to put up, are for a clearer sense of the sinfulness of sin, and our vileness on account of it. Now, if the Lord is pleased to answer your prayers in this respect, though it will afford you cause enough for humiliation, yet it should be received likewise with thankfulness, as a token for good. Your heart is not worse than it was formerly, only your spiritual knowledge is increased: and this is no small part of the growth in grace, which you are thirsting after, to be truly humbled, and emptied, and made little in your own eyes.

Farther; the examples of the saints recorded in Scripture prove (and indeed of the saints in general), that the greater measure any person has of the grace of God in truth, the more conscientious and lively they have been; and the more they have been favoured with assurances of the Divine favour, so much the more deep and sensible their perception of indwelling sin and infirmity has always been: so it was with Job, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul.

It is likewise common to overcharge ourselves. Indeed we cannot think ourselves worse than we really are; yet some things which abate the comfort and alacrity of our Christian profession are rather impediments than properly sinful, and will not be imputed to us by Him who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. Thus, to have an infirm memory, to be subject to disordered, irregular, or low spirits, are faults of the constitution, in which the will has no share, though they are all burdensome and oppressive, and sometimes needlessly so, by our charging ourselves with guilt on their account. The same may be observed of the unspeakable and fierce suggestions of Satan, with which some persons are pestered, but which shall be laid to him from whom they proceed, and not to them who are troubled and terrified because they are forced to feel them.

Lastly, It is by the experience of these evils within ourselves, and by feeling our utter insufficiency, either to perform duty or to withstand our enemies, that the Lord takes occasion to shew us the suitableness, the sufficiency. the freeness, the unchangeableness of his power and grace. This is the inference St. Paul draws from his complaints, Rom. 7:25; and he learnt it upon a trying occasion from the Lord's own mouth, 2 Cor. 12:8, 9.

Let us then, dear madam, be thankful and cheerful; and while we take shame to ourselves, let us glorify God, by giving Jesus the honour due to his name. Though we are poor, he is rich: though we are weak, he is strong; though we have nothing, he possesses all things. He suffered for us: he calls us to be conformed to him in sufferings. He conquered in his own person, and he will make each of his members more than conquerors in due season.

It is good to have one eye upon ourselves; but the other should ever be fixed on him who stands in the relation of Saviour, Husband, Head, and Shepherd. In him we have righteousness. peace, and power. He

can control all that we fear; so that if our path should be through the fire or through the water, neither the flood shall drown us, nor the flame kindle upon us, and ere long he will cut short our conflicts, and say, Come up hither. "Then shall our grateful songs abound, and every fear be wiped away." Having such promises and assurances, let us lift up our banner in his name, and press on through every discouragement.

With regard to company that have not a savour of the best things, as it is not your choice, I would advise you (when necessary) to bear it as a cross: we cannot suffer by being where we ought to be, except through our own impatience; and I have an idea, that when we are providentially called amongst such (for something is due to friends and relations, whether they walk with us or no), that the hours need not be wholly lost: nothing can pass but may be improved; the most trivial conversation may afford us new views of the heart, new confirmation of Scripture, and renew a sense of our obligations to distinguishing grace, which has made us in any degree to differ.

I would wish when you go amongst your friends, that you do not confine your views to getting safe away from them without loss, but entertain a hope that you may be sent to do some of them good. You cannot tell what effect a word or a look may have, if the Lord is pleased to bless it. I think we may humbly hope, that while we sincerely desire to please the Lord, and to be guided by him in all things, he will not suffer us to take a journey, or hardly to make a short visit, which shall not answer some good purpose to ourselves or others, or both. While your gay friends affect an air of raillery, the Lord may give you a secret witness in their consciences; and something they observe in you, or hear from you, may set them on thinking perhaps after you are gone, or after the first occasion has entirely slipped your memory; Eccles. 11:1.

For my own part, when I consider the power, the freedom of Divine Grace, and how sovereign the Lord is in the choice of the instruments and means by which he is pleased to work, I live in hopes from day to day of hearing of wonders of this sort. I despair of nobody: and if I sometimes am ready to think such or such a person seems more unlikely than others to be brought in, I relieve myself by a possibility that that very person, and for that very reason, may be the first instance. The Lord's thoughts are not like ours: in his love and in his ways there are heights which we cannot reach, depths which we cannot fathom, lengths and breadths beyond the ken of our feeble sight. Let us then simply depend upon Him, and do our little best, leaving the event in his hand.

I cannot tell if you know any thing of Mrs. ****. In a letter I received yesterday she writes thus:--"I am at present very ill with some disorder in my throat, which seems to threaten my life; but death or life, things present or things to come, all things are mine, and I am Christ's, and Christ is God's. O glorious privilege! precious foundation of soul-rest and peace, when all things about us are most troublous! Soon we shall beat home with Christ, where sin, sorrow, and death have no place; and in the mean time our beloved will lead us through the wilderness. How safe, how joyous are we, may we be, in the most evil case!" --If these should be some of the last notes of this swan, I think them worth preserving. May we not with good reason say, Who would not be a Christian?

The Lord grant that you and I, madam, and yours and mine, may be happy in the same assurance, when we shall have death and eternity near in view.

I am, &c.

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