

Bishop Wilson's Meditations on His Sacred Office, No. 2.-- Monday

by J.H. Newman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Scripture, prayer, and study in understanding God's Word and in being effective preachers.

Scripture: Psalm 25:14, Psalm 119:19, Matthew 5:8, Matthew 11:25, Luke 6:39, Luke 22:32, John 7:17, Acts 6:4, 1 Timothy 4:13, James 1:5

Topics: "Pastoral Ministry", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of being persuaded and determined by God's grace to teach and maintain doctrines necessary for eternal salvation as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. He emphasizes the need for pastors to continually exercise themselves in prayer and the Scriptures to instruct and exhort with wholesome doctrine, relying on God for true understanding and wisdom. Newman prays for enlightenment, discernment, and a religious heart to fulfill the ministry with humility and to ascribe all success to God's Spirit. The sermon underscores the significance of seeking wisdom from God, living a holy life, and humbly following divine instructions to effectively preach and teach the Gospel.

Transcript

Question from the Office of Consecration

.Â--Â--ARE YOU PERSUADED THAT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES CONTAIN SUEFICIENTLY ALL DOCTRINE REQUIRED OF NECESSITY TO ETERNAL SALVATION THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST? AND ARE YOU DETERMINED, OUT OF THE SAME HOLY SCRIPTURES, TO INSTRUCT THE PEOPLE COMMITTED TO YOUR CHARGE, AND TO TEACH OR MAINTAIN NOTHING AS REQUIRED OF NECESSITY TO ETERNAL SALVATION, BUT THAT WHICH YOU SHALL BE PERSUADED MAY BE CONCLUDED AND PROVED BY THE SAME ?Â--Ans. I AM so PERSUADED AND DETERMINED BY GODÂ'S GRACE.

Question

.Â--WILL YOU THEN FAITHFULLY EXCERCISE YOURSELF IN THE SAME HOLY SCRIPTURES, AND CALL UPON GOD BY PRAYER FOR THE TRUE UNDERSTANDING¹, OF THE SAME; SO AS YOU MAY BE ABLE BY THEM TO TEACH AND EXHORT WITH WHOLESOME DOCTRINE, AND TO

WITHSTAND AND CONVINCING GAINSAYERS ?-- Ans. I WILL DO SO BY THE HELP OF GOD.

O GOD, the fountain of all wisdom, enlighten my mind, that I myself may seek and be able to teach others, the wonders of Thy law; that I may learn from Thee, what I ought to think and speak concerning Thee; and that whatever in Thy Holy Word I shall profitably learn, I may in deed fulfil the same. Direct and bless all my labours. Give me a discerning spirit, a sound judgment, and an honest and a religious heart, that in all my studies my first aim may be to set forth Thy glory, by setting forward the salvation of men. And if, by my ministry, Thy kingdom shall be enlarged, let me, in all humility, ascribe the success, not unto myself, but unto Thy Good Spirit, which enables us both to will and to do what is acceptable to Thee, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. Amen.

Acts vi. 4. "But we will give ourselves continually unto prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Luke vi. 39. "Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?"

1 Tim. iv. 13. "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Quesnelle says, Not to read, is to tempt GOD; to do nothing but study, is to forget the ministry. To read, in order to appear more learned, is a sinful vanity. But to read, in order to exhort, and to instruct with wholesome doctrine, this is according to GOD'S will and word.

James i. 5. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of GOD, who giveth to every man liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." Wisdom being the gift of GOD, and this gift the fruit of prayer, a prayer that is humble, earnest, and persevering, will assuredly be blessed with this excellent gift. O JESUS, cause me to read, to understand, to love, to practise, and to preach Thy Word.

John vii. 17. "If any man will do (that is, is disposed, desires to do) His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself." Light and truth discover themselves to such as desire to follow them.

Ps. xxv. 14. "The secret of the LORD is among them that fear Him, and He will shew them His covenant." It was the saying of a learned man, saith Dr. Lightfoot, that he got more knowledge by his prayers than by all his studies.

Matth. xi. 25. "I thank Thee, O FATHER, LORD of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." My GOD and SAVIOUR, imprint on my heart the amiable characters of simplicity and humility, which are the marks of Thy elect, of such to whom Thou wilt reveal Thyself. It is a dangerous mistake to think that any man can have a right understanding of divine things, without being illuminated by divine grace, and without leading an holy life.

Ps. cxix. 19. "I have more understanding than my teachers, because I keep Thy commandments." There is a light arising from a sincere good life, which dispelleth all darkness, and is the best defence against error and sophistry.

Ps. xxv. 10. "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His Testimonies." That is; to such as do so, all the ways of GOD, and whatever He hath revealed, will appear to be the effect of infinite wisdom, goodness, justice, and truth. He giveth light and understanding unto the simple.

Matt. v. 8. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD."

Luke xxii. 32. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." GOD grant that we may all of us consider the absurdity of going about to convert others, without being converted ourselves. To understand the Holy Scriptures aright, is to understand them as the Primitive Church did.

1 Sam. iii. 9. "Speak, LORD, for Thy servant heareth." Speak to my heart, that I may obey Thy word. "Teach me to do Thy will, for thou art my GOD." It belongs to GOD, to give the true understanding of His own word.

Matt. vii. 5. "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." That is, purify your own heart from all worldly aims; mortify your own passions, which are the cause of your blindness; study that Word which alone can enlighten you; and lay aside all prejudices which are contrary to piety. A Pastor should never undertake to teach a virtue which he has never practised himself.

Luke v. 5. "We have toiled all the night, and taken nothing." So does every preacher, who does not beg GOD'S blessing upon his labours. It is impossible for any man to teach well, who does not live well.

"My people perish for want of knowledge." The design of Religion being to lead men to GOD, how he is to be served, appeased, attained; the business of a preacher should be to show how all the parts of religion contribute to these ends. He that reads the Sacred Scriptures, and understands the things concerning the kingdom of GOD, and the way of conducting men thither, need not complain for want of learning. In preaching, we must speak to the heart, as well as to the understanding and to the ear. The end of preaching is, to turn men from sin unto GOD, that they may be saved. He that has not this in his view will do little good. A preacher should accustom himself to give a practical turn to every thing. He that leaves it to his hearers to apply what he has said, leaves to them the greatest part of his own duty. To be heartily in love with the truth one recommends, is the great secret of becoming a good preacher.

John vii. 16. "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." To preach our own thoughts, forsaking GOD'S word, is like an ambassador, who neglects his prince's instructions, and follows his own fancy. With what truth can it be said, that "the sheep hear his voice," when the shepherd speaks of things, or in such a manner, as is above their capacity? Grant, O LORD, that I may read thy word with the same spirit with which it was written. Learning does not always lead men to GOD; it often carries them from him. Indeed, when they study to find out, and correct their own weakness, their folly, and the corruption of their nature; to be convinced of the evil of sin, of the vanity of the world; to fill their souls with heavenly wisdom and devout affections towards GOD; and all this, that they may be better able to convince and edify their neighbour; such learning leads men indeed to GOD:--the rest is folly. Have mercy upon all that sit in darkness; and may the saving truths of the Gospel be received in all the world! He that sets his heart upon the world, is not in a capacity of understanding the Gospel. Give me that true wisdom which consists in knowing how to save myself and them that hear me. Remember, that a man may have the knowledge of the Word, without the Spirit.

Obscurity of the Scriptures

Serves to subdue the pride of man; to convince us, that to understand them, we have need of a light superior to reason, and that we may apply to GOD for help. May I ever understand the true language of thy Word, O LORD, and profit by it! Vouchsafe, O GOD, to give me a love for thy Sacred Scriptures, and a true understanding of them, that I may see therein the wonders of thy conduct, and thy love for us, thy miserable creatures.

Sermons

Should be instructions, not declamations, or displaying curious thoughts, which may amuse, but not edify Christians. If GOD suffers even an holy pastor not presently to see the fruits of his labours, it is to convince him, that the success of his labours belongs to GOD; that he ought to humble himself, and pray much, and fear lest the fault should be in himself.

Pride and irreligion meet with darkness in the midst of light; raise vain disputes, unprofitable reflections and inquiries; while humility attains to light, in the midst of darkness and difficulties.

Whenever GOD vouchsafes to open the heart, be the understanding and parts never so small, we see the reasonableness and beauty of His Word, we taste the sweetness, and feel the power thereof.

John xii. 16. "These things understood not His disciples at the first; but when JESUS was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him." We often read the Scripture, without comprehending its full meaning; however, let us not be discouraged; the light, in GOD'S good time, will break out, and disperse the darkness, and we shall see the mysteries of the Gospel. Grant me, O LORD, a persevering love of Thy Word, and so much light, as is necessary for myself, and those that hear me.

John xii. 30. "JESUS said, This voice came not for Me, but for your sakes." The way to profit by reading the Scriptures, is to apply to ourselves that which is spoken in general to all; this truth, this command, this threat, this promise, this intimation, is to me.

John xii. 49. "I have not spoken of myself, but the FATHER which sent me gave me a command, what I should say, and how I should speak." He preaches with a well-grounded confidence, who advances nothing merely of his own head, but what he has received from GOD. He may then expect a blessing. But then, let him take care not to disguise it by a language foreign from GOD'S Word. O HOLY SPIRIT of grace, cause me both to understand and love thy Word.

Acts i. 1. "The former treatise have I made of all that JESUS began both to do and teach." This is the whole of a Pastor's life. For a man to preach the Gospel before he has practised it, is to be a very bad imitator of the Prince of Pastors. LORD, grant that I may imitate thee by a life conformable to thine; by all ways becoming my station in the Church; and lay hold of all the opportunities which Thou shalt put into my hands. It is GOD who does all good by the labours of His ministers. To Him, therefore, must be all the praise. More sinners are converted by holy, than by learned men. Inflammé my heart, O GOD, with an ardent love for Thy Word, an ardent zeal for Thy Glory, with a pure and disinterested love for Thy Church, and with an hearty desire of establishing Thy kingdom. Who can say it is not owing to himself, that his flock are ignorant of their duty?

Rom. ii. 21. "Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Unhappy that person who has in his hands the rule of knowledge and of the truth, and makes no other use thereof, but to set up for a teacher of others, without applying to himself those truths with which his mind is filled. A mind full of light, and a heart full of darkness, how dreadful is that man's condition! "Without holiness no man shall see the LORD." In all our studies, we should take care to beg of GOD to preserve us from error, and to lead us to, and keep us in, all truths necessary to salvation, by His HOLY SPIRIT.

Col. iv. 4. "That I may make it manifest, (that is, the mystery of the Gospel) as I ought to speak." All preachers do not speak as they ought. A man may have the skill to give Christian truths a turn agreeable to the hearers, without affecting their hearts. Human learning will enable him to do this. It is prayer only that can enable him so to speak as to convert the heart. May I ever speak to the hearts, and to the capacities of my flock.

2. Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3, &c. "I charge thee, before GOD and the LORD JESUS CHRIST, preach the Word. Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and gravity. For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, make full proof of (or fulfil) thy ministry." Preaching is a duty, but not the only duty of a Pastor. He is to take all occasions to instruct those that seek the truth; refute such as oppose it; reprove those that do not practise it; and confirm such as have embraced it. And the more we perceive the times of Apostasy approaching, the more zealous ought we to be to defend sound doctrine. We deceive ourselves, if we fancy that we have done our duty when we have given our people a sermon one day in seven: we must try all ways to gain a soul. It will be no comfort to a Pastor, that the world praises him for some one part of his duty, while GOD condemns him for the neglect of another.

I Pet. iv. 11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of GOD." That is, worthy of GOD, not weakening it by softening interpretations, nor altering it by human inventions, nor degrading it by a profane eloquence. If we find that people do not attend to the Sacred Scripture, as the Word of GOD, with eagerness and attention, we ought to fear that the fault is in those that preach it after such a manner as is not proper or likely to make them believe it to be the Word of GOD. It is good to know what GOD has revealed, and to be ignorant of what he has not thought fit to make known to us.

Ejaculations before reading the Holy Scriptures.

Give me, O GOD, a love for thy Scriptures, and a true understanding of them. O JESUS, open my understanding, cause me to love Thy Word, and to order my faith and life according to it. May I, O JESUS, love Thy Word, make Thy Gospel my delight, and continue in the practice of Thy law unto my life's end.

Reading Scripture.

John xvi. 13. "The HOLY SPIRIT shall guide you into all truth." O HOLY SPIRIT, make me to understand, embrace, and love the truths of the Gospel. Give, O GOD, Thy blessing unto Thy Word, that it may become effectual to my conversion and salvation, and to the salvation of all that read or hear it. Give me grace to read Thy Holy Word with reverence and respect becoming the gracious manifestation of Thy Will to men; submitting my understanding and will to Thine. Let Thy gracious promises, O GOD, contained in Thy Word, quicken my obedience. Let Thy dreadful threatenings and judgments upon sinners, fright me from sin, and oblige me to a speedy repentance, for JESUS CHRIST His sake. Cause me, O GOD, to believe Thy Word, to obey Thy commands, to fear Thy judgments, and to hope in, and depend upon, Thy gracious promises contained in Thy Holy Word, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake. Grant, O LORD, that in reading Thy Holy Word, I may never prefer my private sentiments before those of the Church in the purely ancient times of Christianity. Give me a full persuasion of those great truths, which Thou hast revealed in Thy Holy Word. The Gospel will not be a means of salvation to him who reads or hears it only, but to him who reads, loves, remembers, and practises it by a lively faith. Cause me, O GOD, rightly to understand, and constantly to walk in the way of Thy commandments. Grant us in this world knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake. Amen. From hardness of heart and

contempt of Thy Word, Good LORD deliver us. Give us all grace to hear meekly Thy Word, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the SPIRIT, to amend our lives according to Thy Holy Word.

Luke xxiv. 45. "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Unless Thou, O JESUS, openest our understanding, all our pains, all our learning, will signify little.

Matt. xiii. 36. "Declare unto us this parable." This should instruct us, that the knowledge of GOD'S Word, and the mysteries of the Gospel, are favours which we must always beg of GOD.

OXFORD,

The Feast of St. Michael.

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