

The Failure of Moralistic Preaching--Calvinism--Moral Inability

by John Newton

The speaker argues that moralistic preaching is insufficient to produce true change and that only the blood of Jesus can atone for disobedience.

Scripture: Matthew 13:45, John 3:3, John 3:16, Romans 3:23, Hebrews 9:22

Topics: "Moral Inability", "Christian Transformation"

Description

John Newton, in a letter to a friend, expresses his desire to maintain a candid and respectful dialogue despite differing views, emphasizing the importance of mutual freedom and understanding in communication. He encourages his friend to seek the pearl of great price, alluding to a personal transformation through faith. Newton highlights the necessity of acknowledging disobedience and the atonement through the blood of Jesus. He also challenges his friend to consider a more convicting preaching style that addresses the sinful nature of humanity and the need for forgiveness and transformation through Christ's grace.

Transcript

October 21, 1775

My Dear Friend,

The calls and engagements which I told you engrossed and anticipated my time when I wrote last, have continued without any intermission hitherto, and I am still far behind-hand with my business. I am willing to hope, that the case has been much the same with you, and that want of leisure has been the only cause of my not having been pleased with so much as a note from you since my return from London.

I am loath, for my own sake, to charge your silence to an unwillingness of continuing that intercourse which I have been, and still find myself, desirous to improve on my part. For though we are not agreed in our views, yet while our preliminary agreement, to allow mutual freedom, and to exercise mutual candour, in expressing our sentiments, subsists, we may, and I hope shall, be glad to hear from each other. It may seem to intimate I have a better opinion of myself than of you, that while I seem confident your freedom will not offend me, I feel now and then a fear, lest mine should prove displeasing to you. But friendship is a little suspicious when exercised with long silence, and a plain declaration of my sentiments has more than

once put amiable and respectable persons to the full trial of their patience.

I now return your sermons: I thank you for the perusal; I see much in them that I approve, and nothing in them but what I formerly espoused. But in a course of years, a considerable alteration has taken place in my judgment and experience. I hope, yea, I may boldly say I am sure, not for the worse. Then I was seeking, and now through mercy, I have found the pearl of great price. It is both the prayer and the hope of my heart, that a day is coming when you shall make the same acknowledgment. From your letters and sermons, I am encouraged to address you in our Lord's words, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." I am persuaded the views you have received will not suffer you to remain where you are. But fidelity obliges me to add, "Yet one thing thou lackest." "That one thing," I trust the Lord will both show you, and bestow upon you, in His due time. You speak somewhere of "atoning for disobedience by repentance." Ah! my dear sir, when we are brought to estimate our disobedience, by comparing it with such a sense of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God, and the spirituality, extent, and sanction of His holy law, as He, and He only, can impress upon the heart of a sinner, we shall be convinced, that nothing but the blood of the Son of God can atone for the smallest instance of disobedience.

I intimated, in my letter from London, one defect of your scheme, which will probably be the first to engage your notice. I am sure you have a desire to be useful to the souls of men, to be an instrument of reclaiming them from that course of open wickedness, or lifeless formality, in which you see them enslaved; and, in a word, to prevail with them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, according to the just and comprehensive sense you have given of those words, in your sermon on Tit. ii. 11, 12. Now, inward experience, and a pretty extensive observation of what passes abroad, have so perfectly convinced me there is but one mode of preaching which the Holy Spirit owns to the producing of these effects, that I am not afraid to pronounce confidently, you will not have the desires of your heart gratified upon your present plan: the people will give you a hearing, and remain just as they are, till the Lord leads you to speak to them as criminals condemned already, and whose first essential step it is, to seek forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, and a change of heart and state by His grace, before they can bring forth any fruit acceptable to God.

As I have little time for writing, and little hope of succeeding in a way of argumentation, I have substituted, instead of a longer letter, the heads of some sermons I preached nine or ten years ago, on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. However, when I have heard that you are well, and that you are still disposed to correspond with me, I shall be ready to give a more particular answer to the subjects you pointed out to me in the letter you favoured me with the day before I left London. I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe, that I am with sincerity, &c.

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