

The Blessed Insight of John Newton as He Fights Remaining Sin in His Own Heart and Mind

I CONSIDER THESE QUOTES AMONG THE MOST ENCOURAGING INSIGHTS INTO MY HEART STRUGGLES THAT I HAVE FOUND SINCE MY CONVERSION IN 1968!! A thankful reader, Joe Novenson

"The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready in words to confess that we are weak, we do not properly know it, till that secret, though unallowed, dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and like a child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up that we may be safe, is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him.

"This is God's way: you are not called to buy, but to beg; not to be strong in yourself, but in the grace that is in Christ...be humble, watchful and diligent in the means (of grace) and endeavor to look through all and fix your eye upon Jesus, and all shall be well." John Newton to his daughter

"The best evidence of faith is the shutting our eyes equally upon our defects and our graces and looking directly to Jesus as clothed with authority & power to save to the very utmost."

"Unbelief, that injurious bar, interposed and starts a thousand anxious thoughts to hide him from us...an evil heart of unbelief fills my sky with many clouds...the primary cause of all our inquietude...for this I sigh and long and cry to the Lord...TO REND THE VEIL OF UNBELIEF, SCATTER THE CLOUDS OF IGNORANCE AND BREAK DOWN WHOCH SIN IS DAILY BUILDING UP TO HIDE HIM FRO OUR EYES."

"The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people. Whereas unbelief makes our hands hang down and our knees feeble, dis-spirits ourselves and discourages others. And though it steals upon us under a semblance of humility, it is indeed the very essence of pride."

"I am nothing. He is all. This is foolishness to the world; but faith sees a glory in it. This way is best for our safety and most for his honor. And the more simply we can reduce our efforts to this one point; "Looking unto Jesus," the more peace, fervor and liveliness we shall find in our hearts. And the more success we shall feel in our striving against sin in all it's branches."

"Indwelling sin will be universally and always felt during our present state. It insinuates into, and mixes with all our thoughts, and all our actions. It is inseparable from us, as the shadow from our bodies when the sun shines upon us. The holiness of a sinner does not consist in a DELIVERANCE FROM IT, BUT IN BEING SENSIBLE OF IT, STRIVING AGAINST IT, AND BEING HUMBLLED UNDER IT, AND TAKING OCCASION FROM THENCE TO ADMIRE OUR SAVIOR, AND REJOICE IN HIM AS OUR COMPLETE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION."

"If you look for a holiness that shall leave no room for the workings of corruption and temptation; you look for what God has nowhere promised, and for what is utterly inconsistent with our present state."

"You say, you find it hard to believe it compatible with the divine purity to embrace or employ such a monster as yourself. You express not only a low opinion of yourself, WHICH IS RIGHT, but too low an opinion of the person, work and promises of the Redeemer; WHICH IS CERTAINLY WRONG!"

"My heart is like a country but half subdued, where all things are in an unsettled state, and mutinies and insurrections are daily happening. I hope I hate the rebels that disturb the King's peace. I am glad when I can point them out, lay hold of them, and bring them to him for justice. But they have many lurking holes, and sometimes they come disguised like friends, so that I do not know them, till their works discover them."

"I want to deliver up that rebel Self to him in chains; but the rogue, like the mythical god Proteus, puts on so many forms, that he slips through my fingers: but I think I know what I would do if I could fairly catch him. My soul is like a besieged city; a legion of enemies without the gates, and a nest of restless traitors within, that hold correspondence with those without; so that I am deceived and counteracted continually. It is a mercy that I have not been surprised and overwhelmed long ago: without help from on high it would soon be over with me."

"We are totally depraved is a truth which no one ever truly learned by only being told it."

"The gospel affords no hope but to those whose hearts are contrite and broken by a conviction of sin; for while we feel not our malady, we cannot prize, or rightly apply to the only Physician."

"Everyday draws forth some new corruption which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees they are weaned from leaning to any wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words, "without me ye can do nothing." John 15:5

"I am a riddle to myself; a heap of inconsistencies"

"I have a troublesome inmate, a lodger, who assumes as if the house were his own and is in perpetual disturbance and spoils all. He has long been noted for his evil ways, but though generally known, is not easily avoided. He lodged with one Saul of Tarsus long before I was born and made him groan and cry out lustily. Time was when, I thought I would shut the door, to keep him out of my house. But my precaution came too late, he was already within; and to turn him out by head and shoulders is beyond my power, nay; I cannot interdict him from any one single apartment. If I think of retiring into the closest corner, he is there before me. We often meet and jostle and snarl at each other; but sometimes (would you believe it?) I lose all my suspicion, and am disposed to treat him as an intimate friend. This inconsistency of mine, I believe, greatly encourages him...we both lay such a strong claim to the same dwelling, that I believe the only way of settling the dispute will be (which the Landlord himself has spoken of) to pull down the house over our heads. There seems something disagreeable in this mode of proceeding; but from what I have read in an old book, I form hope that when things come to this crisis, I SHALL ESCAPE, AND MY ENEMY WILL BE CRUSHED IN THE RUINS!"

"If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames, can read the Bible, go to the Throne of Grace, and mourn, as they ought, over what is amiss, I must say of myself; I CAN AND I CANNOT! Without a doubt I CAN take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I CAN kneel down, and I CAN see that I ought to mourn; but to understand and attend to what I read and engage my heart in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; THESE THINGS, AT SOME SEASONS, I CAN NO MORE DO THAN RAISE THE DEAD; and yet I cannot plead positive inability. I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwells within me. And I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, till this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed."

"The tip-top Christians DO NOT SAY, "Behold, I am perfect!" BUT, "Behold, I am vile!"

"The righteous are said to be scarcely saved (I Peter 4:8) not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favor cannot be disappointed, but in respect to their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful heart, after repeated proofs of their weakness, willfulness, ingratitude and insensibility, they find THAT NONE OF THESE THINGS CAN SEPARATE THEM FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST, JESUS BECOMES MORE AND MORE PRECIOUS TO THEIR SOULS."

"Hereby Christ is made more precious to us when our insurmountable encompass us about like bees-when we see them more in number than the hairs on our head; and then only, we are properly apprised both of the exceeding value and absolute necessity of that better righteousness than our own, whereupon our hope is founded."

"The evils of which we mutually complain, are the effects of a fallen nature; and though we feel them, if the Lord gives us grace to be humbled by them, if they make us more vile in our own eyes, and make Jesus more precious to our hearts, they shall not hurt us, but rather, we may rank them among "the all things that shall work for our good."

"We seem more attached to a few drops of his grace (AND I ADD COMMON GRACE AND NOT SPECIAL GRACE) in our fellow creatures, than to the fullness of grace that is in himself. I think nothing gives me a more striking sense of my own depravity than my perverseness and folly in this respect; yet he bears with me, and does me good continually."

"Though sin wars, it shall not reign; and though it breaks our peace, it cannot separate from his love. Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness and perfection, to manifest his favor to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as IN themselves, but AS ONE with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live by faith."

"The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby, his own power, wisdom, faithfulness and love, are more signally displayed. His power, in maintaining his own work in the midst of so much opposition, IS LIKE A SPARK BURNING IN THE WATER."

Newton would agree with C.S. Lewis who said, "No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good."

Newton said he only knew "light and few" afflictions through out his life.

His mother died two weeks before John's 7th birthday.

His father drowned in a swimming accident one month after John turned 25 years of age.

In 1754 John had an episode of epileptic seizures that ended his sea faring career just after he married and was now jobless.

John had multiple near death experiences in his first three decades of life.

His appointment to Anglican ministry was dragged out for 6 years.

His ministry to poor Olney citizens was filled with their deep trials.

He and his wife could not have their own children.

His first adopted child, Eliza, died of tuberculosis at 14

His second adopted daughter, Betsy had to be institutionalized for depression in a place made famous for its name: "Bedlam."
His 27 year friendship with suicidally depressed William Cowper was as Newton said, "a very great trial to me."

Adulthood was stained by ceaseless memories of brutality and abuse of slaves he both watched and committed.

1746-1747 he was himself enslaved in Guinea, West Africa for 18 months. This took place on Plantane Island. The other slaves pitied him because what they saw him go through. For he was horribly tortured and abused by an African princess. He wrote that he was "depressed to the lowest degree of human wretchedness.

He escaped and found passage back to England on the ship called Greyhound which almost sank at sea in 1748.

BUT HIS VIEW OF ALL OF THESE TRIALS WAS:

"Though he put forth his hand, and seem to threaten our dearest comforts, yet when we remember that it is HIS HAND, when we consider that it is HIS DESIGN, HIS LOVE, HIS WISDOM, AND HIS POWER, we cannot refuse to trust him.

There is no sting in your rod, nor wrath in your cup...only medicinal to promote our chief good...God will suffer nothing to grieve us but what he intends to employ as means for our greater advantage."

There are abominations which, like nests of vipers, lie so quietly within, that we hardly suspect they are there till the rod of affliction rouses them: then they hiss and show their venom. This discovery is indeed very distressing; yet, till it is made, we are prone to think ourselves much less vile than we really are, and cannot so heartily abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes.

Newton calls these "bosom sins."

Self will, self-dependence, the affections cleave to the dust. Affliction shows them for what they are, what the world is, and makes them look upward and long for their rest.