

INEXCUSABLE IRREVERENCE AND INGRATITUDE

NO. 2257

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 22, 1892,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JULY 13, 1890.

*“They are without excuse: because that, when they knew God,
they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.”*
Romans 1:20, 21.

THIS first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a dreadful portion of the Word of God. I should hardly like to read it all through aloud—it is not intended to be so used. Read it at home and be startled at the awful vices of the Gentile world. Unmentionable crimes were the common pleasures of those wicked ages. But the chapter is also a striking picture of heathenism at the present time. After a missionary had gone into a certain part of India and had given away New Testaments, a Hindu waited upon him and asked him this question—“Did you not write that first chapter in the Epistle to the Romans after you came here?” “No,” replied the missionary, “I did not write it at all. It has been there nearly two thousand years.” The Hindu said, “Well, if it has not been written since you came here, all I can say is that it might have been so written, for it is a fearfully true description of the sin of India.” It is also much more true, even of London, than some of us would like to admit. Even here are committed those vices, the very mention of which would make the cheek of modesty to crimson. However, I am not going to talk about Hindus—they are a long way off. I am not going to speak about the ancient Romans—they lived a couple of thousand years ago. I am going to speak about ourselves and about some persons here whom my text admirably fits. I fear that I am speaking to some who are “without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.”

I. The first charge against those who are mentioned in my text is LACK OF REVERENCE. “They knew God,” but “they glorified Him not as God.” They knew that there was a God—they never denied His existence—but they had no reverence for His name. They did not render Him the homage to which He is entitled—they did not glorify Him as God.

Of many this is still true in this form, *they never think of God*. They go from year to year without any practical thought of God. Not only is He not in their words, but He is not in their thoughts. As the Psalmist puts it, “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not at all in his thoughts.” The marginal reading is very expressive—“All his thoughts are, There is no God.” Whether there is a God or not makes no practical difference to the wicked—they have so little esteem for Him that, perhaps, if we could prove that there were no God, they would feel easier in their conscience. There must be something very wrong with you when you would rather that there would be no God. “Well,” said one, “I do not care much whether there is a God or not. I am an agnostic.” “Oh!” I replied, “that is a Greek word, is it not? And the equivalent Latin word is, ‘Ignoramus.’” Somehow he did not like the Latin nearly as much as the Greek. Oh, dear friends, I could not bear to be an “ignoramus” or an “agnostic” about God! I must have a God. I cannot do without Him. He is to me as necessary as food to my body and air to my lungs. The sad thing is that many, who believe that there is a God, yet glorify Him not as God, for they do not even give Him a thought. I appeal to some here, whether that is not true. You go from the beginning of the week to the end of it without reflecting upon God at all. You could do as well without God as with Him. Is not that the case? And must there not be something very terrible in the condition of your heart when, as a creature, you can do without a thought of your Creator, when He that has nourished you and brought you up, is nothing to you, one of whom you never think?

These people, further, *have no right conceptions of God*. The true conception of God is that He is all in all. If God is anything, we ought to make Him everything. You cannot put God in the second place. He is Almighty, All-Wise, All-Gracious, knowing everything, being in every place, constantly present,

the emanations of His power found in every part of the universe. God is infinitely glorious—and unless we treat Him as such, we have not treated Him as He ought to be treated. If there is a king and he is set to open the door or do menial work, he is not honored as a king should be. Shall the great God be made a lackey for our lusts? Shall we put God aside and say to Him, “When I have a more convenient season, I will send for You—when I have more money, I will attend to religion”? Or, “When I can be religious and not lose anything by it, then I will seek You”? Do you treat God so? Oh, beware; this is high treason against the King of Kings. Wrong ideas of God, groveling thoughts of God come under the censure of the text, “When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God.”

Again, dear friends, there are some who think of God a little, but *they never offer Him any humble, spiritual worship*. Do not imagine that God can be worshipped by anything which is merely mechanical or external—and which is not from the heart. A strange god must that god be who is pleased with what some men call worship. I have been into many a Roman Catholic Church and seen upon the altar paper flowers that would have been a disgrace to a tap-room. And I have said, “Is God pleased with this kind of thing?” Then I have been into a better building and I have seen crucifixes and altars adorned like a fine lapidary’s shop—and I have said to myself, “They might adorn a bride, but God cares not for jewels.” Is your conception of God that He desires your gold and your silver, your brass and your fine linen and all these adornments? You think that He is such a one as yourself. Surely you have poor conceptions of God. When the organ peals out its melodious tones, but the heart is not in the singing, do you think that God has ears like a man that can be tickled with sweet sounds? Why have you brought Him down to your level? He is spiritual. The music that delights Him is the love of a true heart, the prayer of an anxious spirit. He has better music than all your organs and drums can ever bring to Him. If He wanted music, He would not have asked you, for winds and wave make melodies transcendently superior to all your chief musicians can compose. Does He want candles when His torch makes the mountains to be great altars, smoking with the incense of praise to the God of creation? Oh, brethren, I fear that it has been true of many who externally appeared to be devout—“When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God!” Weep over your sin—now you have glorified Him as God. Fall on your face and be nothing before the Most High—now you have glorified Him as God. Accept His righteousness. Adore His bleeding Son. Trust in His infinite compassion. Now you have glorified Him as God, for “God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” How far, my dear hearers, have you complied with that requisition?

Further, the people mentioned in my text did not glorify God, *for they did not obediently serve Him*. My dear hearer, have *you* served God? Have you looked upon yourself as a servant of God? When you awoke in the morning, did you say, “What does God expect me to do today?” When you have summed up the day, have you applied this test, “How far have I endeavored to serve God today?” There are many who serve only themselves, and there is no master more tyrannical than unsanctified self! Many are toiling like slaves at the galleys for wealth, for honor, for respectability, for something for themselves. But remember, if the Lord is God and He made us, we are bound to serve Him. How is it that God has kept you alive these 40 years, perhaps twice forty, and you have never glorified Him as God by rendering Him any service whatsoever? This is a very solemn inquiry. I should like everyone whom it concerns to take it home to his own conscience.

There is another charge to be brought against those who glorified not God, although they knew Him. That is, *they did not trust Him*. The place for man is under the shadow of God’s wings. If He made me, I ought to seek Him in the hour of trouble. In the time of my need I should apply to His bounty. If I feel unhappy I should look to Him for comfort. My dear hearers, are there not some of you who have never did trust God yet? You run to your neighbors as soon as ever you are in difficulties. You trust your old uncle, but you never trust your God. Oh, what a wretched business is this, if God, who is all truth and all love, does not have the confidence of His own creatures! Remember how the Lord spoke by the mouth of Jeremiah—“Cursed is the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see good when it comes; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat comes, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought; neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” The people mentioned in the text knew God, but they did not trust Him.

In addition to this, *they did not seek to commune with Him*. Are there not some here who never tried to speak to God? It never occurred to you, did it? And God has not spoken to you—at least you have not known whose voice it was when He did speak. It is a very sad business when a boy, who has been at home with his father and mother for years, has never spoken to them. He came down in the morning and ate his breakfast. He came in and devoured his dinner. He took his supper with them by night, but never spoke to them. Would you have a boy of that kind living with you? You would be obliged to say. “John, you must leave—it pains me to send you away, but I cannot bear to have you sitting here in silence. If I speak to you, you never answer me.” Some of you cannot remember the time when you spoke to God, or God spoke to you. It is so very long ago, if it ever did occur in your past experience. There is a man somewhere here who did speak to God the other day. He called upon God with a foul and blasphemous oath. When he was telling a lie, he called upon God to witness it. Ah, yes, you have broken the silence, but it would have been better not to have spoken than to have uttered those vile blasphemies against the Most High! Your horrible words have entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth, and as the Lord lives, you will have to answer for them to the great Judge of all men unless you seek His face and find forgiveness through His Son. Our Savior said that for every *idle* word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the Day of Judgement—how much more shall they be required to answer for every evil, false, slanderous, blasphemous word they have spoken!

But are there not many persons who have never uttered an oath and are scrupulously careful about speaking the truth, who have never had any spiritual converse with God? Wretched creatures indeed are you, even though you are healthy and prosperous, you have missed the highest good, the best blessing that man can know.

There are some who, although they know God, *they do not want to be reconciled to Him*. There is a way of perfect reconciliation between God and man. Whosoever believes in Christ Jesus is at once forgiven—he is adopted into the family of God, he drinks the wine of the love of God—he is saved with an everlasting salvation. There are many who know this in their minds, but it never excites any desire for it in their hearts. No, whether reconciled or unreconciled, does not trouble them. Do you not know, O man, that the English of it is, “I defy God. I neither want His love, nor fear His hate. I will lift my face before His thunderbolts and dare Him to do His worst”? Oh, fatal defiance of the blessed God! May the Spirit of God work upon your conscience now, to make you see the evil of this condition and turn from it! While I speak, I feel deeply troubled to have to say what I do, but I am only speaking of what many a conscience here must confess to be true. You live, some of you, knowing God, but not glorifying Him as God.

II. Now I take from my text the second accusation which is certainly quite as sad as the other. Those who are mentioned by Paul are accused of LACK OF GRATITUDE. It is said of them that, “When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.”

I cannot say anything much worse of a man than that he is not thankful to those who have been his benefactors, but when you say that he is not thankful to God, you have said about the worst thing you can say of him. Now look not merely at the people who lived in Paul’s day, but at those who are living now. I will soon prove ingratitude on the part of many. There are many counts in the indictment we have to bring against them in God’s high court of justice.

First, *God is despised*. You young men and women who are beginning life, if you are intelligent and wise, say, “We wish that we knew what we ought to do for our own preservation and happiness. And we should also like to know what to avoid lest we should do ourselves harm.” Well, now. The book of the law of the ten commands is simply the sanitary regulation of the moral world, telling us what would damage us and what would benefit us. We ought to be very thankful to have such plain directions. “You shall.” “You shall not.” But see. God has taken the trouble to give us this map of the way and to direct us in the right road—yet some have despised the heavenly guide. They have gone directly in the teeth of the law of God. In fact, it looks as if the very existence of the law has been a provocation for them to break it. Is not this a piece of dreadful ingratitude? Whenever God says, “You shall not,” it is because it would be mischievous for us to do it. Sometimes, in London, when the ice in the parks is not strong enough to bear, they put up boards on which is the word, “Dangerous.” Who but a fool would go where that danger signal is? The ten commands indicate what is dangerous—no, what is fatal. Keep clear of all that is forbidden.

Next, *God's Day is dishonored* by those who are not thankful to Him. God has, in great mercy, given us a day—one day in seven, wherein to rest, and to think of holy things. There were seven days that God had in the week. He said, "Take six and use them in your business." No, we must have the seventh as well. It is as if one upon the road saw a poor man in distress and having but seven shillings, the generous person gave the poor man six—but when the wretch had scrambled to his feet, He followed his benefactor to knock him down and steal the seventh shilling from him. How many do this! The Sabbath is their day for sport, for amusement, for anything but the service of God. They rob God of His day, though it be but one in seven. This is base unthankfulness. May not many here confess that they have been guilty of it? If so, let no more Sabbaths be wasted, but let their sacred hours, and all the week between, be spent in diligent search after God. And then, when you have found Him, the Lord's-Day will be the brightest gem of all the seven, and you will sing with Dr. Watts—

*"Welcome, sweet day of rest,
That saw the Lord arise;
Welcome to this reviving breast,
And these rejoicing eyes!"*

Moreover, *God's Book is neglected* by these ungrateful beings. He has given us a Book—here is a copy of it. Was there ever such a Book so full of wisdom and so full of love? Let a man look at it on bended knees, for he may find heaven between those pages. But when God has taken the trouble to make this wonderful Book, there are many who do not take the trouble to read it. Ah, me, what ingratitude! A father's love letter to his son and his son leaves it unread. Here is a Book, the likes of which is not beneath the cope of heaven, and God has exercised even His omniscience to make it a perfect Book for all ranks and conditions of men, in all periods of the world's history—and yet, such is man's ingratitude, that he turns away from it.

But there is something much worse—*God's Son is refused* by the unthankful. God had but one Son—and such a Son—one with Himself, infinite, holy, His delight! He took Him from His bosom and sent Him to this earth. The Son took our nature and became a servant and then died the death of a felon—the death of the cross—and all to save us, all for the guilty, all for men who were His enemies. I feel guilty myself while I am talking about it, that I do not burst into tears. This must be one of the mysteries that the angels cannot comprehend, that after Christ had died, there were found sinners who would not be saved by Him. They refused to be washed in the fountain filled with blood. They rejected eternal life, even though it streamed from the five great founts of His wounded body. They chose hell rather than salvation by His blood. They were so in love with their dire enemy, sin, that they would not be reconciled to God, even by the death of His Son. Oh, ingratitude, you have reached your utmost limit now, for you have trodden under foot the Son of God and have counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of grace! Is it not terrible?

I might stop here, but for the sake of pricking the conscience of some, I want to say, dear friends, that there are some persons so ungrateful that *God's deliverances are forgotten*. Some years ago I spoke with a soldier who rode in the fatal charge at Balaclava. And when he told me so, I took him by the hand—I could not help it—though he was a stranger to me, the tears were in my eyes, and I said, "Sir, I hope that you are God's man after such deliverance as that." Almost all the saddles emptied, shot and shell flying to the right and left, death mowing down the whole brigade, yet he escaped. But I did not find that he had given his heart to Christ. Over there is a man who has been in a half-a-dozen shipwrecks and if he does not mind, he will be shipwrecked to all eternity! One here has had yellow fever. Ah, sir, there is a worse fever than that on you now! I cannot speak of all the cases here of strange deliverances, but I do not doubt that I address some who have been between the jaws of death. They have looked over the edge of that dread precipice, beneath which is the fathomless abyss. You vowed that if God would spare your life, you would never be what you were before—and in truth you are not—you are worse than ever. You are now sinning against the light and in shameful ingratitude. God have mercy upon you!

How often, dear friends, is there ingratitude on the part of unconverted men in the matter of *God Providence* ignored! Why, look at some of you! You never missed a meal in your lives. When you went to the table, there was always something on it. You never had to lose a night's rest for need of a bed. Some of you, from your childhood, have had all that heart could wish. If God has treated you so, while many are crushed with poverty, should He not have some gratitude from you? You had a good mother. You had a tender father. You have gone from one form of relationship to another with increasing com-

fort. You are spared and your mother is spared—your wife and children are spared. Indeed, God has made your path very smooth. Some of you are getting on in business, while other men are failing—some of you have every comfort at home, while others have been widowed and their children have fallen, one after the other. Will you never be grateful? Hard, hard heart, will you never break? Will any mercy bend you? I appeal to some here, whose path has been so full of mercies that they ought to think of God and turn to Him with sincere repentance and faith.

But one says, “I have had good luck.” What can be worse than that? Here is unthankfulness to God, indeed, when you ascribe His good gifts to “good luck.” “Well, you know, but I have been a very hard-working man.” I know you have, but who gave you this strength for your work? “I have a good supply of brains while others do not.” Did you make your own brains? Do you not feel that any man who talks about his own wisdom and his own wit writes “FOOL” across his forehead in capital letters? We owe everything to God. Shall we give God nothing? Shall we have no gratitude to Him from whom all our blessings have come? God forgive us if it has been so—and give us grace to alter our past course at once!

Once more, there is another piece of ingratitude of which many are guilty; *God’s Spirit is resisted by them*. The Spirit of God comes to them and gently touches them. Perhaps He has done so tonight while you have been sitting here. You have said, “Do not talk quite so plainly to us. Give us a little comfort, a little breathing space. Do not be quite so hard on us.” I hope that it was the Spirit of God rather than the preacher who was dealing with you. At any rate, He has done so a good many times and you have tried to drive from your heart your best Friend. You have been so ungenerous to Him that when He came to lead you to Christ, you summoned all your strength and the devil came to help you. And up till now, you have resisted the Spirit of God with some degree of success. The Lord have mercy on you! How true is my text still, even of many who are found in the house of prayer, “When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful!”

III. Now I finish with my third point which is that THIS IRREVERENCE AND INGRATITUDE WERE AGAINST KNOWLEDGE. “When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.”

Will you kindly notice that, according to my text, *knowledge is of no use if it does not lead to holy practice?* “They knew God.” It was no good to them to know God for “they glorified Him not as God.” So my theological friend over there, who knows so much that he can split hairs over doctrines—it does not matter what you think or even what you know unless it leads you to glorify God and to be thankful. No, your knowledge may be a millstone about your neck to sink you down in woe eternal, unless your knowledge is turned to holy practice.

Indeed, *knowledge will increase the responsibility of those who are irreverent and ungrateful*. Paul says, “They are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.” Whatever excuse might be made for those who never heard of God, there was none for these people. My dear hearers, you also are “without excuse.” Many of you have had godly parents. You have attended a gospel ministry. Your Sunday school teachers and Christian friends have taught you the way of salvation—you are not ignorant. If you do not glorify God, if you are not thankful to Him, it will be more tolerable for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah at the Day of Judgment than for you, for they never had the privileges that you have despised. Remember how the Savior upbraided the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done because they repented not—“Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto you, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” I hardly know which is the greater wonder—that the poor people who saw Christ’s mighty works did not repent—or that those who would have repented if they had seen those works were not permitted to see them.

I wish, dear friends that you could go out of this state of not glorifying God and not being thankful. Surely, you only want to have the case stated and the Spirit of God to speak to your conscience to cause you to say, “I cannot bear to be in such a dreadful condition without regard to God any longer.” May God enable you to repent tonight! Change your mind. That is the meaning of the word “repent.” Change your mind and say, “We will glorify God. There is a Great First Cause. There is a Creator. There must be an omnipotent, all-wise Being. We will worship Him. We will say in our hearts, ‘This God shall be our God and we will trust Him, if He will but accept us.’”

Then remember the years that are past. They involve a great debt and you cannot pay it, for if you go on serving God without a flaw to the end of your life, there is the old debt still due. There are the years that are gone and “God requires the years that are past.” Well now, hear what He has done. He has given His dear Son to “bear our sins in His own body on the tree”—and if you will trust Christ—then know of a surety that Christ has put away your sin and you are forgiven. “Look”—that is His word—“Look unto Me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth.” When the bronze serpent was lifted up, all those who were bitten had to do was to look at the serpent of brass—and everyone that looked, lived. If any man of that crowd had looked at Moses that would not have healed him. If he had looked at the fiery serpents and tried to pull them off, that would not have healed him. But as he looked to the bronze serpent and as his eyes caught the gleam of the brass, the deadly serpent’s bites were healed and the man lived. Look to Jesus. Look now. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to do so!

“I do not feel fit,” says one. That is looking to yourself. “I do not feel my need enough,” says another. That is trusting to your sense of need. Away with everything that is in you or about you, and just trust Christ—and you shall immediately be saved. Whoever in this great congregation will but look to Jesus shall be saved upon the spot. However great your iniquities, however stony your heart, however despairing your mind, look, look, look, look. And then, when you look to Christ, your ingratitude will be forgiven and it will die. You will love Him who has loved you and you shall be saved and saved forever.

When we received 82 into the church last Lord’s-Day evening, I could not help breathing an earnest prayer that this might be the beginning of a revival. May it come tonight and may many in these two galleries and down below be carried away by that blessed tide of mighty grace that shall sweep them off their feet and land them safe on the Rock of Ages!

Will you, dear friends, pray for this? I shall feel that even my poor, weak instrumentality will be quite sufficient for the greatest work if I have your prayers at my back. Will you, tonight, at the family altar or at your own bedsides make it a special subject of prayer that men and women who knew God, but glorified Him not as God, and were not thankful, may tonight turn to God? If I could get at some of you who are living without Christ, I should like to do what the Roman ambassadors used to do. When they came to a king who was at war with the empire, they said to him, “Will you have peace with Rome, or not?” If he said that he must have time to think it over, the ambassador, with his rod, drew a ring around the man and said, “You must decide before you cross that line, for if you do not say, ‘Peace,’ before you step out of it, Rome will crush you with her armies.” There are no doors to the pews, otherwise I would say, “Shut those doors, and do not let the people out until God decides them.” Lord, shut them in! Lord, arrest them, hold them fast, and let them not go till each one of them has said, “I believe; help You my unbelief.” May God bless you all, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON *ROMANS 1:1-25*

Verse 1. *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.* Paul had not seen the Romans when he wrote this epistle. They were strangers to him and therefore he begins by asserting his apostleship, “called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” That expression should be true of every Christian minister. We are not apostles, but we are “separated unto the gospel of God.” I do not think that we are called to have anything to do with party politics, or social problems, or any such questions—we are set apart for this purpose—“separated unto the gospel of God.” There are plenty of people who can attend to those things better than we can. If we mind our own business, or rather, if we mind our Master’s business, we who are ministers will have quite enough to do. “Separated unto the gospel of God.” There are some brethren who in preaching are as timid as mice—but on a political platform they can roar like lions. Had not they better take to what they like best and give up the work at which they are not at home? For my part, I believe that I am like Paul when he says that he was “separated unto the gospel of God.” I am set apart unto the gospel, cut off from everything else so that I may preach the glorious gospel of the blessed God to the perishing sons of men.

2. *(Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures).* Notice, brethren, how reverent the apostles were to Holy Scripture. They had no doubt about its inspiration. They quoted the Old Testament and delighted to make it a kind of basis for the New Testament—“which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”

3, 4. *Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* What a glorious Lord we serve! He is God's Son—"Jesus Christ our Lord." In His human nature, He is a man of royal race—"of the seed of David." He was a man, therefore He died, but He rose again, for He was more than man—"declared to be the Son of God with power."

5, 6. *By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: among whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ.* That is a sweet name for every truly converted man, "called of Jesus Christ." He has called you personally. He has called you effectually. He has called you out of the world. He has called you into fellowship with Himself—"the called of Jesus Christ." The revised version has it—"called to be Jesus Christ's." Those who are called by Christ are called to be His.

7, 8. *To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.* What contrasts we have in the seventh verse! "In Rome, beloved of God." "In Rome called to be saints." God has beloved ones in the darkest parts of the earth. There is all the more reason for them to be saints because they are surrounded by sinners. They must have had true faith, or they could not have confessed Christ between the jaws of a lion, for they lived in Rome, with Nero hunting after Christians as if they had been wild beasts, and yet they were not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

9. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.* This man, Paul, did a great deal by prayer. I remember a minister, who is now with the Lord, who was thanked by his people for his wonderful sermons. But he said to them, "You never thanked me for my prayers, yet they were the best part of my service for you." When men of God are mighty in prayer, we owe much to them.

10. *Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.* Paul wanted to go to Rome, but I do not suppose that he ever thought that he would go there at the expense of the government, with an imperial guard to take care of him all the way. We pray and God gives us the answer to our petitions—but often in a way in which we would never have dreamed. Paul goes to Rome as a prisoner for Christ's sake. Now suppose Paul had gone to Rome in any other capacity—he could not have seen Caesar. He could not have obtained admission into Caesar's house. The prison of the Palatine was just under the vast palace of the Caesars and everybody in the house could come into the guard room—and have a talk with Paul if they were minded to do so. I suppose that whatever I might be willing to pay, I could not have preached in the palace of the Queen, even in this nominally Christian country. But Paul was installed as a royal chaplain over Caesar's household in the guard room of the Palatine prison. How wonderfully God works to accomplish His divine purposes!

11, 12. *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith of you and me.* Paul wanted his faith to establish theirs and their faith to establish his. Christians grow rich by an exchange of spiritual commodities, but I am afraid some Christians are very poor because they do not engage in the spiritual bartering with one another. You know how it was in the old time, "They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another." Shall I tell you how it is now? They that fear not the Lord speak often one against another. That is a very sad difference. Oh, for more Christian communion, for when we blend our "mutual faith," we are "comforted together"—each believer grows stronger as he cheers his brothers and sisters in the Lord!

13. *Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also even as among other Gentiles.* Ah, Paul, you could not go when you wished. Caesar must convoy you. Your Master would have you go to Rome under the protection of the eagles of the empire. God has servants everywhere—He can make Satan himself provide the bodyguard for His faithful apostle's journey.

14. *I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.* Paul felt a debt to everybody. The God who saved him had saved him that he might preach the gospel in every place he could reach. Brethren, if you have received much from God, you are so much the debtor to men and you are debtors not only to the respectable, but to the disreputable—debtors not only to those

who come to a place of worship, but to the dwellers in the slums—“to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; to the wise and to the unwise.”

15. *So, as much as in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.* Many other people were ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It was too simple—it had not enough of mystery about it. It had not enough of worldly wisdom about it. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,” and then gives his reason for not being ashamed of it—

16, 17. *For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.* The gospel tells us about this living by faith, this believing, this receiving righteousness through believing and not through working. This is the sweet story of the cross, of which Paul was not ashamed.

18. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* Those last words may be read, “Who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.” They will not let the truth work upon their hearts. They will not allow it to operate in their minds, but they try to make it an excuse for their sin. Is there anybody here who is holding down the truth to prevent its entering his heart? I fear that there are some such persons who have come here for years—and the truth has pricked them, troubled them, made them lie awake at night—but they are holding it down, like one who grasps a wild animal by the ears and holds it down for fear it should bite him. Oh, sirs, when you are afraid of the truth, you may well be afraid of hell! When you and the truth quarrel, you had better end your fighting soon, for you will have the worst of it if you do not yield, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.”

19, 20. *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.* Men who never heard the gospel can see God in His works, if they open their eyes. There is written upon the face of nature enough to condemn men if they do not turn to God. There is a gospel of the sea, of the heavens, of the stars, and of the sun—and if men will not read it, they are guilty—for they are willfully ignorant of what they might know and ought to know.

21, 22. *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.* The way to be a fool is to pretend to be wise. A short cut to wisdom is the confession of folly. The near way to folly is the profession of wisdom.

23, 24. *And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.* It is very easy to make a beast of yourself when you have made a beast to be your god, as the Egyptians did, when they worshipped the god that they had made in the form of an ox, or a crocodile, or a cat.

25. *Who changed the truth into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.* There are many preachers who have “changed the truth into a lie”—and by their exaltation of man, they have “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” God save all of us from such idolatry as that! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—545, 527, 606.

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