

GOD OR SELF—WHICH?**NO. 438**

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 9, 1862,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Speak unto all the people of the land and to the priests, saying, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did you at all fast unto Me, even to Me? And when you did eat and when you did drink, did not you eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves.”
Zechariah 7:5, 6.

AFTER the Jewish people had been thoroughly cured of their idolatrous tendencies by their seventy years of captivity, they fell into another evil—they became superstitiously regardful of ceremonies but they lost the life and spirit of devotion and neglected the weightier matters of the Law.

Phariseeism, in the spirit of it, had commenced, in the time of Zechariah. Great attention was paid to the formalities and externals of worship, but the vitality of godliness was unknown. The mint, the anise, the cummin of religion—these were all strictly tithed. But truth, mercy, charity, justice, were trod under foot. They multiplied ceremonies to themselves, apart from God’s Word. They had fasts which Moses never commanded, and feasts of which the tabernacle in the wilderness knew nothing.

They had ordained for themselves a certain fast for the burning of the temple by the Chaldees, and a question which seemed to them very important had arisen, as to whether this fast should be observed now that the temple was rebuilt. The Jews in Persia sent an honorable deputation to Jerusalem upon this important matter. They received no direct answer, for it was nothing to the Lord their God whether they fasted or not, since He had not commanded it, and could not accept their will-worship at their hands.

Learn this, then, with regard to all religious ceremonies whatever. If they are not expressly commanded of God, it is a small matter how men keep them. In fact, it were vastly better if they left them alone. Some time ago in convocation, the very wonderful question was discussed as to whether a child’s father and mother might be its godfather and godmother. Is there not a prior question? Does the Lord ordain such offices in His Word? And again, has He anywhere commanded infants to be sprinkled?

What matters it how the deed is done if the Lord has not ordained it in Holy Scripture? To the Law and to the testimony. If you find it not there, though you keep every rubric of your Church, you have not done it unto God, for He has not required it at your hands. “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” I would that all our Churches were willing to search for the foundation of all their ceremonies in Scripture. This is the way to promote true Christian unity. Not to hide our views but to speak plainly. Not to settle down upon our old rituals, but to examine them and see whether they are of God or not, for let us be sure of this—if we do anything which is not according to God’s Word, in whatever spirit we may do it, or however well we may perform it—it is not a service that God can accept of us.

However, though these deputies obtained no answer upon that point, since it was not material whether they did fast or not, yet they had some information upon a much more vital matter. They were informed by the questions asked of them, that all religion must have God for its object, or else it was nothing before Him. The question was solemnly asked of them and upon its answer all depended—“When you fasted did you fast *unto* Me? Or when you feasted on your solemn feast days did you not eat to yourselves and drink to yourselves?”

I shall try, this morning, to work out this great Scriptural Truth, first showing that *in our religious worship our doing it unto God is the main thing*. Secondly, that *in the world our service to God must be done for His own sake, or else it is nothing*. And, thirdly, we shall use our text as a *test of our condition before God*, asking ourselves solemnly whether we

have lived unto God, or whether we have been all this while living to ourselves, eating to ourselves, and drinking to ourselves.

I. First of all, then, WITH REGARD TO OUR RELIGIOUS WORSHIP. You know, Brethren, there are various modes in which the Christian Church attempts to worship God. And we are not about, this morning, to discuss the acceptableness of these different methods—whether it shall be by book or extemporary—whether it shall be with sound of music or with the joyous voices of men and women. Whether the ceremony shall be pompous or simple—whether it shall be under the consecrated dome, or in an ordinary chamber.

These are matters of secondary importance, for they concern only the carcass, while we have now to deal with the soul of worship. We are apt to fall into a mistake and value the services of Sunday for something which God does not regard. For instance, in the singing of God's praises it is well to have melody that we may sing with our understanding as well as with our spirit. But after all, if any man shall be satisfied because his voice has been in tune and time, in singing the words of the Psalm, and if he shall think that therefore he has praised God, alas, how mistaken he is!

Or in the prayer. If we shall think that a certain fluency, an apparent reverence and propriety of expression are the only necessary things, and if we forget that we are worshipping God, alas, what is our prayer? We might as well have been dumb. And if in preaching our hearers shall regard merely the orthodoxy of the doctrine, or the eloquence, or the fitness of the style, alas, they have not worshipped God, because in all this they forget the question "Have you *heard* as unto God? Have you *sung* as unto God? Did you *pray* as unto God?"

For if not, though the sermon is orthodox and eloquent, though the singing is as the voice of many waters, though the prayer goes up to Heaven and seems to be unexceptionable in expression, yet the worship is only vain and worthless, lacking holiness *unto the Lord*, since it is not done as unto God and is not really an offering unto Him. Take that as the guide, this morning, and I think I may speak home to your consciences.

How many who frequent the House of Prayer, worship God *carelessly*? They sing, but with no more heart than if they were singing in their own houses some common ditty. The prayer is offered and often that is the dullest part of the service, and their eyes are gazing about here and there. Or if the eyes of the head are shut, the eyes of their hearts are open enough, looking not, however, to God, but to vanity. And when the sermon is delivered they care but little for its precious message, or if they lend some attention, yet what a weariness it is!

You see in some congregations nodding heads and eyes that are given to slumber. They think there is nothing particular in hearing the Gospel. They listen to the entreaty of God's ambassador as to a thrice told tale but that is all. Were it an oration upon politics, they might be a great deal more enthusiastic than they are, and if it were anything which touched their personal estates, they would be forward to catch every word. But as it is only about their *souls*, only about *eternity*, only about *God*, it does not mean much!

Now, think—do you really think that your thus coming up to God's House is acceptable in His sight? If you come thus, you have not come to *Him*. You have not come to worship *Him*. How can He take this at your hands? What would you think if a courtier, who should pretend to be doing honor to his monarch, should be nodding before the throne, sleeping in the audience chamber? What would you think if some person should have the audience of a king, and while the petition is yet in his hands, should be gazing about with a vacant stare, or turning his back upon the throne?

Surely this were insult, instead of homage, and well might the gates of the palace be barred forever against the wretch whose conduct should be thus infamous. Let us take care that we are not satisfied with merely sitting in our pews and maintaining an apparently decorous behavior in God's House, for—

*“God abhors the sacrifice,
Where not the heart is found.”*

A larger number of our attendants miss the mark in another way. They are not altogether careless, but still their worship is not done as unto God, for they are content with the service itself. Provided they have sung—have somewhat joined in the prayer—and to some degree enjoyed the service, they are content, although no dew from Heaven rests upon their hearts. They look merely to *man* and no further, and if the minister should be in a low frame of mind—and what mortal can help that at times?—these persons, never having learned to seek God in His sanctuary, say that it was no means of Divine Grace to their souls.

The pitcher was empty and as they had not learned to draw directly from the well, they went home thirsty. They looked to the *man* and never thought of his *Master*. It is no marvel that the opportunity has been a lost one to them. Blessed are they who come up to God's House to use the means, but not to rest in them—but rather desiring to find the God of the means in the means! Oh, how glorious it is when the song carries me up to Heaven's courts! How blessed when the prayer is offered, if my soul can breathe its desire into the ear of Christ and have fellowship with Him. Oh, it is blessed to be in God's House when the Lord Himself is in our midst!

What if the preacher should miscarry?—if all the while I am lifting up my heart to God, desiring that His Truth should be blessed to me, I shall profit under him. He may be clownish, but he will not be so to me. His expressions may be out of order, but they will reach my heart. And even if *his* heart should not be affected, yet mine will be if I am having dealings with God and not with man.

Oh, how many of you come here to hear the *man*, to gratify your curiosity, to regale your ears, to find matter for conversation—but not to behold the beauty of the Lord, nor to enquire in His Temple. Well, we are glad to see you anyhow, for we hope that being in the way, God will meet with you. But I would have you savingly converted, and then you will come here to hear God's Word, to talk to God, to speak to God. Is it not true that some of you do not use the Day of Rest and the House of Prayer for their real purpose, which is that man may meet with God?

There was a man who professed great love to his friend and therefore he would spend a day in his company. He rapped at the door and the servant said the master was not at home. "It does not matter," he said, "I will wait inside and take my ease. I shall do quite as well though the master is not at home if you will bring me abundance to eat and drink." So he entered and took a chair and made himself very comfortable and feasted to his heart's content. And he went home boasting that he had enjoyed the visit.

Then his companions asked him—"Was the master there?" "Oh no, he was not there." "But I thought you went to see *him*?" He had pretended a great desire to have converse with his friend but evidently he was lying, for if he had gone to see the master and the master had not been at home, he would have said—"Well, I will call another day but I have missed my errand this time."

So there are some who go up to the House of God. They think they go there to worship *the Lord*. They have no enjoyment of His Presence, they have no communion with His Son, they have no indwelling of His Spirit but they enjoy the day for all that, which shows they did not go to worship God at all. When we put the question to them—"Did you at all fast unto the Lord" their answer must be—"No, verily, we only sought self. We did not seek the Master's Presence."

But there are others and these are not a few, who think they worship God acceptably when they merely do so as a *matter of custom*. It is a lamentable fact that in many of the suburban parts of this great city, where new villas are rising up, thousands of the people never attend any place of worship—I will not say because, being in the country, they are withdrawn from the wholesome restraints of society, but because, at any rate they do not feel its constraints.

They can spend the morning in bed, or the afternoon in the garden, too glad that they are not under the sorrowful burden of going to a place of worship. But with some of you it is the reverse. You are in such a position that you would hardly be counted respectable if you did not frequent a Church or Chapel—and so you go. The Sunday morning very properly sees you arrayed in your best garments and you enter the House of God with the multitude. But if you go there only as a matter of custom, do not think that God accepts your worship, for you rather obey your neighbors than your God.

Have you ever heard of the traveler, who, when he was in Protestant England, was accounted a devout follower of the Reformers? Sometime, when his course of journey led him to Rome, and as often as there was the mass, he might be observed among the crowd, bowing as they bowed, a thorough Papist. Soon he made a journey to Mecca that he might see the world and there, among the Mohammedan, he was as reverent as any—quite willing to receive the dogma of the Prophet.

Some who heard of it said, "What is this? How can you act so?" And he said, "Oh, when I am in Rome, I do as Rome does. And when I am at London, I do as London does. And when I am at Mecca I do as Mecca may do. It is all the same to me," and straightway all who knew him despised him. We have some such in England. They happen to live near Christian

people and they do the same as they do. Oh, my dear Hearers, I fear many of you would have been idolaters if that had been the custom of the country, and if so, what is the value of your worship?

No doubt, also, there is a small sprinkling of people attending all places of worship who come as a *matter of profit*, which is detestable. We have heard of some country towns—I do not think it takes place much in London, for it does not pay—where people ask, “Which is the most respectable congregation in this town? We must take a seat there.” Now what are they doing when they pretend to be worshipping God? Why, Sirs, if that is the reason why they go to a certain place of worship, they are following their trade on the Lord’s day—and as far as the sin of it goes, they might as well have their shop open as shut—for they carry their shops on their backs to the place of worship.

We suspect that some come among us for this reason. Christ had such followers. There were loaves and fishes to be given away, and therefore they fell into raptures—“What a sweet Preacher! What a profitable ministry! We are so fed under Him.” And they flocked in multitudes to listen to Him that they might afterwards eat and be filled.

I remember one case of this kind that came under my own knowledge. Preaching about in the country, I had often noticed in a certain county, a man in a smock frock who was a regular follower. He seemed to be amazingly attentive to the service, and thinking that he looked an extremely poor man, I one day gave him five shillings. When I preached twenty miles off he was there again, and I gave him some more help fancying that he was a tried child of God. When I was preaching in another place in the same county, he was there again! The thought suddenly struck me whether that man did not find something more attractive in the palms of my hands than in the words of my lips, so I gave him no more.

The next time I saw him he put himself in my way but I avoided him. And then, at last being again in the same county, he came up and asked me to give him something. “No,” I said, “you will not have anything now. I see what you have come for. You have only come pretending to delight in the Word and to be so profited by it, whereas it is profit you get out of me, not profit from the Gospel.” These people—there are such in all congregations—ought, at least, to be well aware that their pretended worship of God is detestable in His sight.

If you have had meat in your hands and a dog has followed you, you might feel pleased that the dog had taken a great affection to your person. But as soon as the meat was gone, when he turned his tail, you discovered that it was an affection for the *meat* and not for you. Such are some who come to God’s House. They have an affection for what is given by the charity of the saints, but they have no love to the saints nor to the saints’ Master. The sooner such people mend their ways, the better. This cupboard love, this love of God for what they get out of Him, is despicable to honest men, and it must be an abomination in the sight of the Most High.

Once more only upon this point. Beyond a doubt, some public worship is offered by those who attend our sanctuaries, *in the idea that they are getting merit by it*. Well, Sir, and so you prayed because you thought to atone for sin by it? You sang to help yourself to Heaven? You heard a sermon to help yourself to be accepted before God? You have done it to yourself, and the Lord’s voice to you is—“Did you at all fast unto Me, even to Me? Did you not eat unto yourselves and drink unto yourselves?”

All religious worship done with a view that we may thereby be meritoriously saved, is really only a service rendered unto our own interests and not unto God. How can we expect the Eternal One to accept as an offering to Himself, what is really an offering to our own selfishness? “But is not a man to do anything to save himself?” you ask. No, I answer—NO! NO! NO! He is to let Christ save him. By faith, he is to put himself in Christ’s hands, that Christ may save him. Then after that he may *do* as much as ever he can out of *gratitude* to his Savior.

Why, Sirs, when your servile works are done to gain a righteousness, do you think you win the approbation of Heaven? What? Build a palace for God out of the mud of your selfishness? Think that God can be bribed to bless you by deeds which you have done with self as a motive? God hates that which a man does with the idea that he can win the Lord’s love. You must come to God as undeserving of anything at His hands. Take His love and His mercy freely, and *then* go and do good works, and pray, and sing, and preach if you can, but never with a view of getting good to yourselves—but only that you may glorify Him and at last may enter into His rest.

I say, and with this I leave the point, that that Worship, and that worship only, which is for God and not for self in any sense, God accepts. And whether it is with a view to temporal profit, or from mere custom, or with a view to merit, that we attend to spiritual ordinances, rites, ceremonies, or what not—we have done nothing that God can receive—and we might as well have left the whole undone.

II. But now I shall turn to a wider circle for a moment or two. BY THIS WE MAY TEST ALL THE OTHER RELIGIOUS ACTS OF MEN.

Many a brave deed has been done with the sound of which the world has rung for years which nevertheless has never been received by the Most High. Some have served God out of ostentation, that they might show what great things they could do. Remember Jehu when he said, “Come, see my zeal for the Lord God of Hosts.” Jehu has many imitators.

“Lend me your pen, Sir.” “Yes.” “I hereby write my name for five thousand pounds at the head of the list. Is not that an acceptable offering to God? There are very few in England that will give as much as I have—report it in all the newspapers. Shouldn’t the world know that there still exists one liberal man?” Is not that splendid gift accepted? No, Brethren, certainly not, because it was given for his own praise and for his own glory and not for the glory of God.

If it is our earnestness in preaching the Gospel, if we are only earnest in order that people may think us earnest—if we are only zealous that men may say of us, “That man does more than the rest. What a zealous, earnest man he is”—we have offered *nothing* to God. We have been sacrificing on our own shrines and offering incense before our own image.

A certain king had a minstrel and he bade him play before him. It was a day of high feasting. The cups were flowing and many great guests were assembled. The minstrel laid his fingers among the strings of his harp and woke them all to the sweetest melody, but the hymn was to the glory of himself. It was a celebration of the exploits of song which the bard had himself performed. He had excelled high Howell’s harp and emulated great Llewellyn’s lay. In high-sounding strains he sang of himself and all his glories.

When the feast was over the harpist said to the monarch, “Oh King, give me my guerdon. Let the minstrel be paid.” And the king said, “You have sung unto yourself—pay yourself—your own praises were your theme. Be yourself the paymaster.” He cried, “Did I not sing sweetly? O, king, give me the gold!” But the king replied, “So much the worse for your pride that you should lavish such sweetness upon yourself.”

Brethren, even if a man should grow gray-headed in the performance of good works, yet when at the last, if it is known that he has done it all to himself, his Lord will say, “You have done well enough in the eyes of man but so much the worse, because you did it only to yourself, that your own praises might be sung, and that your own name might be extolled.” That is a singular text in Hosea—“Israel is an empty vine. He brings forth fruit unto himself.” There was fruit, only it was brought forth to *himself*, which before God is *emptiness*.

Take care of ostentation. Be ready to serve God when none can see you. Prefer not to let your right hand know what your left hand does. Shun the very thought of getting a market for your own honor. Go behind the wall and serve your Master, sooner than sound the trumpet before you in the streets. When Mr. Morrison, the Missionary to China, needed an assistant, Mr. Milne, afterwards the celebrated Dr. Milne, offered himself. As soon as the examiners had talked with him, they saw that his heart was right enough but he had a clownish look and a dullness of expression.

When the youth was gone out of the room, one of the examiners said, “He is scarcely a proper person to send, we need a man of greater intellect.” At last they agreed that they had better send him as a servant, the servant of the mission, to do the work of the household—clean Dr. Morrison’s boots and such like things, I suppose. So Dr. Phillip was requested to communicate this to him and he told him that the committee did not feel he was qualified to go as a Missionary, would he mind going as a servant? The youth’s eye sparkled and he said, “It is too much honor for me even if I am but a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the Lord my God.”

And thus he went forth and afterwards, as you know, became one of the most useful of missionaries. How many a man would have said, “Gentlemen, I did not come for that. This is treating me with a want of respect. Surely you do not know who I am, or else you would not suppose for a moment that I would be willing to be a mere drudge, and menial servant!” They know not the Lord who only desire His service for the honor which it brings—but they have their hearts right before Him who want no honor for themselves but only desire that *His* name may be extolled above the hills—that *He* may be made famous in the earth.

What would you say of a workman whom you should employ to build a house for you and who, when the house was done, should prepare a piece of stone with his own name upon it to be put right in the front so that everybody might say that he had built it? Why, you would say, “No, Sir, it is mine to choose the inscription. It is my house, not yours.” Did you ever hear of a pen that after a book had been written, required its own name placed at the bottom? It was enough for the real author to be known. What mattered it whether it was a gold pen, or a steel pen, or a quill pen that wrote it?

So you and I are only God's pens. He uses us and why ought we to care to be known? No, let the real Author be known, for "we are *His* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." There was the difference between John Wesley and George Whitfield. Mr. George Whitfield had all the popularity of Mr. Wesley and all the opportunity that John had to make a denomination but he said, "No. I do not condemn my Brother, John, but I could not do what he does. Let my name perish. Let only Christ's name last forever."

The day will come when the man who was willing that his name should perish rather than it should supplant the brighter name of Christ, will shine all the brighter for this self-denial. Let us mind that we have no sinister ends, no self-ish objects in view. But let it be God alone, Christ alone, and His glory alone, or else we may ask ourselves the question afresh—"Did you at all fast *unto Me*, even *to Me*? And when you did eat and when you did drink, did not you eat *for yourselves* and drink *for yourselves*?"

Again upon this point. How many of our religious actions, our attempts to propagate the Gospel of Christ have been very greatly promoted by strife and rivalry? Sometimes the strife has occurred in a single congregation, and a new Chapel has been built because some few disrespectful words were spoken and a slight disagreement ripened and rotted into a quarrel. The general public has thought, "Well, the persons who contributed to that new place must certainly have done some service to God." But it may be that it was really service to the devil, for they only built it that they might gratify their own resentments and say to those whom they left, "See how well we can do without you."

How often have different Christians strived to increase their congregations or their denominations out of a spirit of jealous rivalry? The Wesleyans were awake, therefore the Baptists must be. Or the Church of England had a school and therefore the Dissenters must. How many have run in the race that they might keep up with, or exceed their rivals? Now concerning religious rivalry and religious strife, whatever others may have said of it, we only say, "These things are not of God." The Lord may say of all that we have ever done out of mere denominational pride, out of jealousy and to make our own names great in the earth—"Did you at all fast *unto Me*, even *to Me*? When you did eat and when you did drink, did you not do it unto yourselves?"

I would to God we were all contending earnestly for the faith and provoking one another to love and to good works! But to do good for the mere sake of doing more than some person whom I look upon as my rival is not serving God. It is indulging my weaker passions under the pretense of honoring the Lord. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, I have had to ask myself this question scores of times, "Have I done it unto God?" I have gone groaning from this platform because I could not preach as I wished, but this has been my comfort, "Well, I did *desire* to glorify Christ. I did *desire* to free my conscience of the blood of men. I did want to tell men the whole Truth of God whether they liked it or not."

But sometimes when I have got on better and the words have flowed fluently and the sentences have had a little polish about them (they have not much at any time) I have thought, "Well, I went on pretty well this morning." Just then my conscience has smote me—"You made the people pleased but did you glorify your Master? Did you lay the axe at the foot of the tree? Did you come down on their consciences? Did you strive to drive the nail right into their hearts? You might have done better with rougher words than with those garnished utterances."

I have no uneasiness about rough sentences, but I have, when I have not been earnest in my Master's cause. Oh, I think it must be so with you, sometimes. You Sunday school teachers, are you sure that you teach for Jesus Christ? May it not be possible that you teach for custom, or that you do it because you like the association of your fellow teachers? You tract distributors, are you sure that when you distribute the tracts it is with an idea of winning souls to Christ? Is it not because your conscience tells you you ought to be doing *something*?

And you who go out preaching, are you sure that you preach only for Christ's glory? Does it not sometimes happen that you are tempted to glorify yourselves, and try to be fine and great when you ought to be simple and plain and earnest with the souls of men? Oh, when I think of some who spend all the week writing out their sermons and touching up every line and every sentence, I fear there must be something of self there! And when I hear some preachers with such splendid diction, with words so nicely picked, I cannot help thinking that there must be a sacrificing to the genius of oratory or to the beauty of eloquence, rather than to the Master's cause. I say of everything that is done for self—down with it! Down with it! Let Dagon fall! Break these images, every one of them—smite them like the proud Philistine or the boastful Babylonian king. What have we to do with idolatrous self-worship? O Lord, deliver us from it!

I shall not detain you longer upon this point when I have said another word. Though this is a Protestant land it is beyond all question that there are some Popish enough to perform great religious acts by way of merit. What a goodly row of almshouses was erected by that miserly old grinder of the poor as an atonement for his hoarding propensities! What a splendid donation to that hospital! A very proper thing, indeed, but the person who left it never gave a farthing to a beggar in his life! And he would not have given it now, only he could not take it with him and so he has left it as an atonement for sin.

Sometimes persons think that the doing of some outrageous religious act will take them to Heaven—frequenting Church prayer twice a day, fasting in Lent, decorating the altar with needlework, putting stained glass in the window, giving a new organ or such like. At the suggestion of their priest they do many such things, and thus they go on working like blind asses at a mill, from morning to night and make as much real progress. Do I address any such persons here? I do not find fault with you for what you do, but I do find fault with you for *why* you are doing it. If you dream that you are saving yourselves, remember that your acts are selfish acts and that there is nothing good in them.

They may be good things in themselves, but as they are done not unto God, but evidently with a view to your own welfare, they are done to yourselves and He will not, therefore, accept them. Let there be never such splendid deeds of alms-giving, never such marvelous mortifications of the flesh, never such devout attendance at daily prayer—they avail nothing before God—when they proceed from a self-righteous heart. Away with them! Away with them all! They are dross and dung before the Most High, if you bring them to Him with a view of purchasing salvation. No, you must have done with these, and trust in Jesus only. When a man can say, “I am saved. Christ is mine”—then he can serve God acceptably and his deeds shall be received through Christ Jesus.

III. Now for our last point. It seems to me that our text may be a TEST OF OUR SPIRITUAL STATE.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, may I solemnly ask you now to put your souls into the scales for a few minutes by way of self-examination. What can you and I say with regard to our lives since we have known the Lord? Have we lived unto Christ? Dare we take the Apostle Paul’s motto—“For me to live is Christ, to die is gain”? Oh, Beloved, it is not what we *have done*, so much as with what *object* we have done it. For every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the *heart*. Have we in our hearts longed to serve *Him*?

“Oh,” I hear one say, “it was little I could do, Sir. I was poor. I could not give Him gold. I was uneducated, I could not give Him words.” Ah, my Brethren, it is possible that what you have been able to do may be more acceptable than what some others have done, if you can say, “I did not desire my own honor. I was content to be humble, to be obscure, to be unknown and to be forgotten, if I might but lift *Him* up and praise *Him* in my little sphere and make *Him* glorious among men.”

I fear, Beloved Brethren, that some of us do but little for Christ, even outwardly, and I blush to confess that in that little which we do there is so much that is spoiled by our looking after self. Have we not sometimes prayed at the Prayer Meeting with the view of being thought gifted men! Have we not joined a Church that we might be a little better thought of? May we not have labored more abundantly that there might be the whisper about—“So-and-So is a flourishing Christian, a useful man”?

Do we not compliment ourselves thus—“Well, people think very highly of me. They say such-and-such, and it must be all right”? Are we not smuggling over the frontier some of the merchandise of pride? It has been lately remarked, and not before it was necessary, that this is an age in which the word *pride* means what it never meant before. You hear gentlemen on the platform say, “I am proud.” You hear the minister, himself, when speaking of something that has been done for him, “I am proud.” The words, “I am proud,” do not mean any hurt now, because we have forgotten that pride in any shape and in every shape is detestable in the eyes of God.

We even talk of a *decent* pride. I saw a good young woman the other day—I dare say she is here this morning—and she told me she could not come now on a Sunday because her clothes were getting so bad. And she said, “I thought it was decent pride to stop coming.” And I said, “No, my Sister, no pride is decent.” I saw her last Sunday standing down there and I have no doubt she enjoyed what was said as well in her cotton dress as she would have done if she could have worn her silk one. All pride is *indecent*.

A few Sundays ago, when we had the mourning for Prince Albert, some people could not go to Church because the dress-makers had been so busy that they could not get their black things ready and it was called *decent pride* which kept them at home. But I say again—it was *indecent pride*—indecent pride such as the Lord God of Hosts abhors. We must have done with these prides, but yet I do fear that pride has so mixed with all we have done and so stained our best acts, that we have reason to cry out this morning, “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Lord have mercy upon us, for Jesus’ sake.”

There is another arrow in my quiver and it must be shot. Alas, alas! I address some this morning who never did anything for God in their lives. To whom it would make no difference if there were no God at all, except that they would be rather glad than otherwise. A man—a man, mark that—made in the image of his maker and yet he has never said a good word for his Creator! The breath in his nostrils this morning is the gift of God. The comforts of his home are gifts from the liberality of the God that has made him, and yet he has never done anything for that God in his life!

Touch him upon the point of what he has done for man and he may have done much—let men applaud him. If a great general has won battles for men, let men honor him. If a philanthropist has done much for men—let men be grateful. If you have spent your time for your families, let your families thank you. But there are some here who have done nothing for God. “Hear, O Heavens and give ear O Earth. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner and the ass his master’s crib but they know not, neither do they consider.”

A man would not keep even a dog which never looked to him with thankfulness, never frisked about his feet with joy at his liberality. And yet here are men more brutish than their own dogs—fed by God and never thankful to Him—they have never done anything for Him in all their lives! I know there are many here who, if their consciences sleep not, must stand convicted. Again I repeat it, we will not touch you upon the point of what you have done for *man*—but let me remind you that *man* did not make you—that it is not your deeds for others that can save you, it is not your nation that can save your soul.

It is God! It is God and yet you have forgotten Him and He is not in all your thoughts. You can go to bed without a prayer to Him. You can rise in the morning without a hymn of thankfulness! A God forgotten in His own world, a God unknown by His own creatures, a God—and such a God! So good, so gracious, so tender, so loving—a God who has given His own Son to die, and yet by His own creature so lightly deemed, that he gives Him not a word or thought.

Well, Soul, well, Sinner, what a mercy it is that God has not forgotten *you*. If He had forgotten to give you your bread, where had you been? If He had forgotten to let the sun shine on you—if He had forgotten to let the fields yield their harvests—if He had forgotten to keep back the fever—if He had forgotten you when you were lying last year upon a sick bed—or when you were out in that storm at sea and the wind had rent away the mast—or when your gun exploded in your hand—you had been howling in Hell now! But He has not forgotten you and you are yet alive. Oh, may His long-suffering lead you to repentance for having lived as if there were no God to love and yourself the only thing worth caring for!

But, Soul, let me remind you that long-suffering does not last forever. The Roman judges were attended by lictors, as you know. These lictors carried on their shoulders a bundle of rods, and in the center an axe. Now, when the judge condemned any man to be beaten by the rods, the following scene always took place. The rods were tied about with leather thongs, which were knotted a great many times. When the judge condemned the man to be beaten, his back was stripped, the lictor then untied one knot, and then another and another, which took some little time and during all this time the judge was looking in the face of the person to be scourged, watching him to see if he saw hardness of heart and rebellion there.

If he did, then the blows came heavy, and perhaps the axe followed. But if he looked in the criminal’s face and saw repentance expressed there, it often happened that before the last knot was untied, the judge would say, “the punishment is remitted, tie up the rods again.”

Now, you that have forgotten God, remember His rods, too, are bound up with many knots. Many of those knots have been untied for some of you. Six years ago you laid ill with the cholera. There was a knot untied then. Before that you had had many warnings that were like loosening of the knots. And now, this morning, the fingers of Eternal Justice are loosening another of the knots.

Sinner, it may be it is the last, and God is looking in your face. And what does He see there? Does He see a brow of brass? Is your heart saying, “I have loved pleasure and after it I will go”? Then it is possible that Justice will untie the last knot and then comes the axe. Take heed, Sinner, when once God’s axe is taken, you can not escape it. He shall dash you in pieces and there is none to deliver.

O God of mercy, touch the sinner’s heart and make him repent. Compel him to feel his need of Christ. Lord, lead him to Jesus and then, by Your Grace, the rods shall never be untied and he shall never be smitten!