

Not Fair

The Nearness of God, an Incentive to Seek Him

Acts xviii, 27, l.c.:—"... Tho' He be
not far from any one of us.

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CXXV

Servant's
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St. Paul, finding in Athens the evi-
dences of a profound respect for reli-
gion, availed himself of this existence
of an altar curiously built for "an
unknown god", to speak ~~to the citizens~~
of Jehovah to the giddy, worldly citi-
zens. He passed at once by all
these idle forms of idolatrous religion
which conceived of deity as imper-
sonal, & began to talk to them of the
living God, "Who made the world, &
all things that are therein". He as-

Said those who heard him that the
Deity dwells not in man-made tem-
ples, but far above, ordaining & di-
recting men's lives; that He fires
breath to all, ~~but~~ in one great
race, & has determined the times
of their migrations hither & thither
over the earth, & the boundaries for
their national divisions, to the end
that, in suitable ~~dwelling~~ situations, they
may seek Him. Thus, at leisure to
acquaint themselves with His works
in their respective lands, they might
perchance feel after Him & find
Him. It was not impossible, Paul
meant, that Eos, "unknown" as these
Athenians called Him, might become
known to them, to all races & all
men. And here follow the words of

our text: "tho' I'de be not far 3
from any one of us." It was a
sentence of grace for these Athe-
mans. Ignorant of the true God, yet
interested enough in the subject of
religion to be going about to esta-
lish a religion for themselves
— building & garnishing many alters
& temples — here they ~~had~~ were told
that God is near them, & may be
known; & were invited to seek Him
with the whole heart, & become reli-
gious not by ceremony merely, but in
truth & to good results.

The text is not too old to be
preached again. It is as true now,
as it was then; and its persuasion
is needed — must I say as much
as in pagan Athens! So any among

4 you, my hearers, join in the build-
ing of temples to him who is not,
indeed, any longer called The Un-
known God, but not well-known
enough to have your heart-wor-
ship? Are you nominal X^{ns},
church-goers, church-supporters, ser-
mon-hearers like Paul's audience,
only? Is God only a Sunday-
idea to you, a religious abstrac-
tion, an indifferent opinion, ra-
ther than the ~~living, reversed~~
~~Masters that Jesus thought him,~~
God of Whom Paul
said to the ~~Roman~~ centurion Julius
(Acts xxvii, 23) "Whose I am, & Whom
I serve", rather than the inflexible
just One Whom Joseph dared not
offend, Whose forgiveness David be-

sought with tears, whose love was
the sweetest joy, that your mother,
perhaps, perhaps your father, ever
named to you? Dear hearer, is this
place where we are now met
together a very gate of Heaven to
your heart, or is it only, for you,
an altar to "the unknown
God"?

To whom it is thus, let me
speak in the name of Paul's ~~letter~~
ter & mine. God is not far from
any one of you: O let this pre-
cious truth move you to seek
Him, and be, in your station in
life, of such devotion to Him as
Paul's!

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Not far from any one of us!
Ah! there are times when these
words could bring in unspeakable
comfort to you, if you would
but allow them. When you
are confronted by any of the
hard ~~facts of~~ oppressions of
life: when you are made to doubt,
to be wearied with to exhaustion,
to fear, to bewail, to shudder,
to despair, to shrink back: when
Success eludes you, love turns
~~away, from you death snatches~~
~~away~~, Enmity conquers, strength
fails, hope dies: — what do you
want but God? No mortal can
dispel doubts — no refreshment

but will yield again to neari-
ness after toil - you can never
forget the specters of fear, besear-
ment, horror, despair, self-dis-
trust; no after success will
pay for one success missed; a
lost love leaves a sore heart,
a triumphant enemy is like Mor-
decai to Haman; fading strength,
what has all the world over
against that? Poor distressed
man, you are not omnipotent,
& you want help of due bliss;
your wisdom is insufficient, you
want supreme wisdom; you are
not merely needy, unhappy, you have
met the bitter truth that you are
a finite, mortal, dependent crea-

8
Thus; you want God! Him
who made you & all things —
who knows you & the world &
the destiny of both — who rules
& governs, & can be called upon
by His needy dependent crea-
tures! And blessed be His dear
& holy Name; He is not far
from any one of us.

But do you ask, How am I to
realize His existence, & His nearness?
I do not see Him, I do not hear His
voice, nor touch His hand; can
He be near me? I know not if
there be any God, for my life is
barren of Him?

Nay, brother, God is near you. Your
food lies dead in the ground, but
does not the rain come & fructify it

that it may feed you, & tell you 9
that He Who made the earth
still lives & cares for it? The lilies
of the field still spring, the laurels
& roses are gladdening your eyes, there
is an ever-living Force that gives
them vigor - & how much better
are you than they! Nor is it
some blind force; it is a think-
ing, feeling Intelligence, a personal
Eod; for above the soil & the rains
are the trees, & above the trees
the lesser animals, & above them
the reasoning soul of man; who
made all these? ~~Man cannot~~
~~make one of them;~~ They are
not evolved one from another -
a stone never became an animal,
nor an animal a reasoning soul;
and man cannot, either, make

10 any one of them; it is beyond
human power to make a liv-
ing plant, a diamond, or a soul.
The maker must be greater than
any of these things made —
~~greater than the rain, the min-
eral, the animal, the soul~~
but the greatest of these is the
your intelligent, thinking, yearn-
ing soul. He who devised that,
who gave it being, your Creator,
^{is greater than you, is wiser,}
understands you, is nigh you; his
works lie scattered all around
you, he is not far away. There
is his rainbow in the cloud,
here is the hot breath of his mind,
see the constant reproduction of
life in all its thousand forms

in air, & water, & earth. Is not "the thunder his voice, & the sighing of the wind? Is not the sunlight his smile, the tempest & the shower his touch, the fragrance of the flowers the proof that he is near, the constant miracle of life & the majesty of its order & continuance his way of ~~showing~~ showing you that he is, that God is not far from any one of us? A Bedouin Arab was asked: How do you know that there is a God? and replied: In the same way that I know, on looking at the sand, when a man on a beast has crossed the desert — by his footprints in the

12 world around me."

[Liddon's "Elements," p. 56.]

Thus questioned the great saint Augustine, the world around him, & in them he found, not themselves as God, but the testimony of the presence of God.

"I asked the earth & it said: I am not Ho; & all that is upon it made the same confession. I asked the sea & the depths, & the creeping things that have life, & they answered: We are not thy God, but thou above us. I asked the breezes & the gales; & the whole air, with its inhabitants, said thus: Anaximenes is in error, I am

not God. I asked the heaven, ¹³
the sun, the moon, the stars:
We too, said they, are not the
God Whom thou seekest. And
I said to all the creatures that
surround the doors of my fleshly
senses; Ye have said to me of my
God that ye are not He; tell me
somewhat of Him. And with a
great voice they exclaimed: He
made us." — Liddon, *id.*, p. 67 [Lough, x, 6].

2. But God is much nearer than
in the mere creations of His
hand. He is near also by His Pro-
vidence. He Who has made your
reason as the guide of your life,
has given it a certain bias, the

14 result of a thousand concurring influences eminently providential. Your mind has that peculiar bent toward industry which is due to its having been given existence in this industrial land; toward refined ~~and~~ speculations in religion, which characterizes modern above medieval or ancient thought; toward boldness or shyness which may be hereditary, or due to some social influence or that of your teacher. He also created your reason, has put it into the present, rather than any other age of the world; has exposed it to these, rather than other, influences; He is near you as your ~~best~~ guide, for He has at least

thus far directed you. Will not
He who made your mind, who
has chosen its time & place, also di-
rect it? He has given it now mainly
into your care. He has more than
mere providential aid, He has face
for you, if you choose to seek it.
He is not far from you.

His nearness is manifest also
in His providential preserving of
your life. No man can tell the
hour of his death - it is in the
hand of His Maker. God preserves his
life, God sets its boundary. Your
existence itself testifies of God's watch-
ful care & providence. While you
sleep, He slumbers not, but watch-
es patiently.

A certain minister, going to

16 meet some fellow - ministers at a
given place & hour, was delayed by
~~the~~ an accident to his hair,
which put his life, for a short
time, in extreme peril. He escaped
safely, however, & on joining his brethren,
desired them to unite with
him in a prayer of thanksgiving
for God's good providence. They were
about to do so, when one of the
number interrupted by saying, that he
had as great reason to make the
request as the other. How so?
said they; you ~~have~~ did not
mention any peril of yours, when
you came in. True, replied he;
my brother has reason to be thank-
ful that God has ^{delivered} saved him from

suffered to overlook him
an peril, — but I, that He '7
spared me to come hither without
any. I was even more providentially
served, than he.

Ah! friends! no picture guardian
angels to our imaginations, or we
speak easily of good-luck or good
fortune; but what is it, as well as
every lesser security & every es-
cape, but the evidence that God
is not far from any one of us?
And shall we not, poor depend-
ent creatures of His hand, in con-
stant, hourly need of His care, take
Paul's counsel from Athens, & be-
come acquainted with Him that
He may be altogether our Friend?

3. But once more, there is
an infinitely higher & grander sense

18 yet, in which God is not far
from any one of us. His works
show Him near, His Provid-
ence shows Him remaining near
us; but His grace shows Him
near as no other proof could do.
How near is He, where the Bible
is! Sit down in the quiet corner
of your busy store, & immerse
your thoughts in its pages: how
far away seems the din of busi-
ness, of trade & the world! ~~How~~
What a change comes over your
spirit in an instant, when in-
stead of the harsh voices of
men, & the roar of the streets,
come the sweet words: "Come
unto Me, all ye that labor & are heavy-
laden, & I will give you rest. Take My

year upon you & learn of me; 19
for I am meet & lowly in heart -
"ye shall find rest unto your
souls." Ah! is not God near you,
yes, with you?

How near is He, whose voice
of prayer ascends! One moment,
poor suffering sick one: listen, ~~to~~
~~the voice~~ not to your sympathizing
neighbor, nor to the counsel of
nurse or physician: hearken to
the word of supplication in your
pastor's mouth: If it be possible,
O Father, let this affliction cease!
nevertheless not our will, but Thine,
O God! be done! Ah! what a holy
Presence has become manifest to
your heart, & your aching body
is almost forgotten in the peace
of thinking: God is near me, ^{is near my dear ones;} He is

not far from any one of us!

Yes, dear hearer: God, not by the
visible X^t, but by His unseen but
felt Spirit, is here, & everywhere,
caring for ~~all~~ the children of
men, breathing upon them, ~~offer~~
~~not ^{propping up & governing} ~~not ^{propping up & governing} protecting their bodily~~~~
~~lives, but~~ not preserving &
governing their bodily lives, only,
but bringing to them the ineffable
love of their Maker, their Preser-
ver, their Savior, & propping to
them with it, eternal welfare. So
near is God, that He is touched
with the feeling of our infirmities;
putting in motion for us the whole
machinery of salvation - the prom-
ises of intercession, the hearing &
answering of prayer; more perceptible

to a dying saint, sometimes, than 2!
nearest & dearest of earthly kin. God
is not far away from you, ever,
now. Do you want help? He is
near. Do you want knowledge?
He is near. Can you discern
His presence? His works testify
of Him all around you — His
care of your life, His ordering
of your lot, reveals Him — the
holy institutions of religion proffer
Him to you: their whole air, the
world, is still & solemn with the
sacred presence of God!
