

THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

Vernon C. Grounds

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD (II)

IN HIS LETTER TO THE ROMANS, the apostle Paul writes stingly concerning the stupidity of human wisdom. Listen to his castigation of man's reason when it is not rooted and grounded in God:

"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: 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, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:20-23).

Yet how amazing it is that, when their minds are perverted by sinful pride, human beings will even stoop to the senseless practice of idolatry. As Paul says, they change **"the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."**

Because he is incurably religious, man must worship something; and so, if he no longer worships his Creator, he makes idols before which he bows in adoration.

India's Mahatma Gandhi was a powerful personality and undoubtedly possessed a brilliant mind. As a matter of fact, his admirers, who are legion, looked upon him as a twentieth-century saint whose every word was freighted down with the wisdom of the ages. He was educated in England and was graduated from one of its leading universities. He was a lawyer whose talents were internationally respected. Yet Gandhi once voyaged from Great Britain to India, spending his time squatting on deck, clad only in a loin cloth — making idols out of mud!

He was thoroughly acquainted with the teachings of the gospel and repeatedly referred to the New Testament; but he turned his back upon the true and living God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and surrendered to Oriental superstitions. Professing himself to be wise, he indulged in the folly of idolatry. For all absurdities, the worship of a self-made image is by long odds the most stupid.

Isaiah ironically exposes the folly of this in these famous words,

“They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god” (Isaiah 44:9-17).

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as in our own country, thousands of sophisticated citizens no longer profess faith in God. They are too wise for that. But do you know that while religion has declined, there has been a corresponding and surprising growth in the crudest kind of superstition? Too wise to believe in God, many of Russia's enlightened atheists nevertheless put their trust in the power of a rabbit's foot, or in the clairvoyance of an astrologer. Listen to this statement from an official newspaper:

“In schools just those children who are absolutely outside of any church influence prove to be the most inclined to the crudest superstitions. They do not believe in God, but they do believe in charms and amulets; they attribute no force to prayer, but a mystical connotation to meeting a funeral procession or dropping a book from a desk. They make magic knots and whisper magic formulae in order to prevent being asked the lesson.”

And Dr. W. S. Timasheff, an authority on Russia, says:

“Superstition is widespread among miners, sailors, drivers, fliers, and the like who boast of being atheists.”

Here in the United States conditions are no different. I know of men who mock at God but who will not undertake a new venture on Friday, the thirteenth. I know of men who mock at God but run away from a black cat. I know of men who mock at God but make a long detour to avoid walking under a ladder. I know of men who mock at God but who are afraid of cemeteries.

As Ray Tucker, one of Washington's best-known columnists, recently wrote in a syndicated article:

"The most popular and profitable business in the capital today are those carried on by fortunetellers, palmists, astrologists, tealeaf diviners, and psychiatrists. Washington has gone 'nuts' about foreseeing its personal and collective future.

"Diplomats from foreign principalities first introduced the idea. They never threw a party without hiring a voodoo artist and ensconcing her in an upstairs room where she psychoanalyzed the guests. Her fee was around twenty dollars, plus a bottle of good wine.

"The fad has spread since Washington became the center of domestic and overseas leaders. They consult these stargazers regularly. Some of our topnotch officials frame their policies in accordance with the soothsayings of these oracles.

Consider that in turning away from the knowledge of the true and living God, men become fools because they do not know how to live decently or sanely. Centuries ago the prophet Jeremiah made a devastating comment regarding the nation Israel, which may be applied to the world at large.

"For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge"
(Jeremiah 4:22).

Once men turn away from God, they lose the knowledge of how to do good, and they are wise only when it comes to doing evil. If you have any doubt about that, look out upon the world today where humanity with its perverted intelligence is engaged in self-destruction. When it comes to war, the nations function superbly, organizing their resources, mobilizing their armies, and inventing new instruments of destruction, astounding in their ingenuity. But when it comes to peace, the nations are baffled. They do not know how to cope with the problems of overpopulation, unemployment and depression.

As Fulton J. Sheen has said:

"Never before has man had so much power, and never before has that power been so amassed for the destruction of human life. Never before has there been so much education and never before so little coming to a knowledge of the truth. Never before has there been so much wealth and never before so much poverty. Never before did we have so much food and never before so many hungry men . . . Man is surrounded by luxuries and conveniences of which previous generations never dreamed, yet he was never so frustrated, never so miserable, never so uncertain of the future."

No wonder the famous French author, Lavredan, who had long professed to be an atheist, when confronted by the horrors of World War I during which he witnessed the insane destruction in his own country, made this gripping confession:

"I laughed at faith and thought myself wise. Finally this laughter became hollow and vain for I saw France bleeding and mourning. What would become of France if her children did not believe, if her women did not pray?

“Oh, a people whose fields are covered with the dead! How difficult it is to remain an atheist on this national cemetery! I cannot! I cannot! I have deceived myself and you who have read my book. It was a delusion, a giddiness, an evil dream. I see death and call for life. Hands equipped with weapons make death; folded hands bring life. France, turn back to faith! To forsake God means to be lost!”

Surely Solomon knew whereof he spoke:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).

This godless world of ours needs to have that thundered into its ears continually, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** A man may know all the facts concerning history, philosophy, science, psychology, and literature. He may be a perambulating encyclopedia. But unless he knows God, he is simply a learned ignoramus, a fool puffed up in his own conceit. On the other hand, a man may know nothing about history, philosophy, science, psychology and literature; he may not know the alphabet or the multiplication table; nor even how to write his own name. Yet if he knows God, he is wiser than all of the world’s godless philosophers.

How, then, can a man know God? Not simply know that He exists or know about Him, but really know God in loving, intimate fellowship? Here is what Paul says:

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:21-24).

So, while Christianity is not at all irrational, we must insist that man does not reason his way into fellowship with God. A man comes to know God personally, intimately, and redemptively only through the exercise of a childlike trust. For, as Paul explains it, through the foolishness of the cross God has been pleased to save them that believe. And when a man through faith in the all-pardoning sacrifice of Calvary comes to know God, he is truly wise because he possesses Christ in whom **“are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”**

Thus when by faith a man possesses Christ he likewise possesses, you see, the very wisdom of God; then, no matter what the foolish wisdom of the world may say, he knows that there is a God, and all the arguments of all the atheists cannot shake his serene assurance of God’s reality.

Once by faith a man possesses Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, then no matter what the foolish wisdom of the world may say, he knows that God is holy and hates sin. No matter what the foolish wisdom of the world may say, the saved person knows that God is merciful and loves sinners. He knows that God is infinitely gracious and that in His grace He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

He knows that God is compassionate and that in His compassion he has provided perfect salvation through simple trust in the sacrifice of Calvary. He knows that God is all-forgiving and that in His forgiveness He has prepared a blessed eternity for all who will accept salvation in childlike fashion which is foolishness in the eyes of the world.

Mr. C. J. Pietsch, a Federal Housing Commissioner in Honolulu, distributed thousands upon thousands of copies of the New Testament among American sailors who were stationed in that city. On the day after Pearl Harbor was attacked, he received a request to visit one of the battleships. Arriving and going below, he found about four hundred men waiting for him, sitting on their bunks in rows five high. One of them spoke up as he entered:

“Mr. Pietsch, we sent for you because many of us have been heartsick, homesick, and seasick; and after what happened last night, we were all concerned. Our country has provided for us, giving us food, clothing, a place to sleep; but no one has told us how to die. We would like you tell us. Many of us may never come back.”

Ah, yes, when it comes to death, the insufficiency of this world’s wisdom is starkly revealed, and then it is that every man longs for a faith which will enable him to say:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

Do not wait until that dark hour overtakes you. Turn in faith to Jesus Christ now, accept Him as your Saviour, and by His grace live victoriously and die triumphantly.

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