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“TRUST IN THE LORD”

by CARL S. MEYER

DR. MEYER, Professor of Historical Theology in Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, who gave us a meditation on Thomas Cranmer two and a half years ago, delivered the following paper as a morning meditation over Station KFUE, “The Gospel Voice”, on November 23, 1957. We are glad to reproduce it as an Easter message.

“**T**RUST in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine understanding”, is a word of Scripture of which we have great need. We may quickly doubt God’s wisdom when the way He asks us to go is a strange one, one which we would scarcely choose for ourselves. Our sinful heart finds it difficult to lean on God. Our pride bids us rely on our own understanding. Would that we knew with certainty, that God’s ways are always good. The paths that seem crooked to us are straight in His wise designs. The plans that go wrong, as we see it, are plans that are made better by Him. *Trust in the Lord* is a thought which I would ask you to make your own.

The exhortation from the book of Proverbs to trust completely in God, looking away from self, is the basis of a religious poem written by Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), the church historian. This poem was translated into English by Catherine Winkworth,¹ the well-known translator of hymns from the German into the English. This is how the poet exhorts us to trust in God and not in ourselves:

How blest to all Thy followers, Lord, the road
By which Thou lead’st them on, yet oft how strange!
But Thou dost ever seek our highest good,
For truth were truth no longer, couldst Thou change.
Though crooked seem the paths, yet are they straight,
By which Thou draw’st Thy children up to Thee.
And passing wonders by the way they see,
And learn at last to own Thee wise and great.

¹ Catherine Winkworth, *Songs for the Household* (New York: R. Worthington, 1882), pp. 175-179.

But there's the difficulty. We do not want to own God wise and great. We want to be wiser than God and direct Him ; yet—we must admit :

No human laws can bind Thy Spirit, Lord,
 That reason or opinion frame for us ;
 The knot of doubt is sever'd by Thy sword,
 Or falls unravell'd if Thou willest thus.
 The strongest bonds are weak to Thee, O God,,
 All sinks and fails that would Thy course oppose ;
 Thy slightest word can quell Thy stoutest foes,
 And desert paths are by Thy footsteps trod.

Can we rely on human wisdom and understanding ? So many believe that they can, either on their own or on somebody else's. When this wisdom or understanding is opposed to God, it is of no avail. God, after all, controls destinies for it is He who rules the present and shapes the future. He scatters or He raises from the dust. He breaks or He builds ; He it is who gives life. Therefore, trust in the Lord.

What human prudence fondly strives to bind,
 Thy wisdom sunders far as east from west ;
 We long beneath the yoke of man have pined,
 Thy hand exalteth high above the rest.
 The world would scatter, Thou doest union give ;
 She breaks, Thou buildest ; what she builds is made
 A ruin'd heap ; her light is nought but shade ;
 Her dead Thy Spirit calls to rise and live.

And so it must always be. Man's understanding is too limited to be a valid guide. Why should anyone rely on his own wisdom or trust in his own abilities ? In humbleness let us learn to trust in the Lord and to make that trust in Him a complete trust and reliance, a total leaning on God and not on our own understanding. There is no act of our reason that we have cause to applaud. Well may we say:

Who can search out Thy purposes, or look
 Into the abyss of wisdom whence they flow ?

God's wisdom is so deep that we cannot comprehend it ; we cannot search out His purposes. "Our all, O God, is nothing in Thine eyes." So we must learn to trust in the Lord and pray:

O Ruler! We would bless Thee and adore,
 At whose command we live or turn to dust ;
 When Thou dost give us of Thy wisdom's store,
 We see how true Thy care, and learn to trust.
 Thy wisdom plays with us as with a child,
 Who playing learns his Father loves him well ;
 'Tis love that brings Thee down with man to dwell,
 Love guides our faltering footsteps through the wild.

Love bids us trust in Him, a love that is certified to us by the gift of His Son who died for us. That love which gave His Son and with that Son the pardon of our sins and the forgiveness of our guilt, is a love that leads us and guides us. Because we have that love, we love. Because we love, we trust. We love God, because He first loved us. So we trust God, because He loved us.

This trust became a firm trust in the school of adversity. God schools us ; He disciplines us. Sometimes we believe Him to be a harsh taskmaster and not a loving guide. God deals with us as we have need to be dealt with although we do not understand His ways with us.

Now seems to us o'er harsh and strict Thy school,
 Now dost Thou greet us mild and tenderly,
 Now when our wilder passions break Thy rule,
 Thy judgments fright us back again to Thee.
 With downcast eyes we seek Thy face again,
 Thou kissest us, we promise fair amends,
 Once more Thy Spirit rest and pardon sends,
 And curbs our passions with a stronger rein.

Thou know'st, O Father, all our weakness well,
 Our impotence, our foolishness of mind ;
 Almost a passing glance may serve to tell
 How weak we are, how ignorant, how blind.
 Wherefore Thou comest with Thy help and stay,
 A father's rule, a mother's love are Thine ;
 The lamb, on whom none else discern Thy sign,
 Thou carriest in Thy bosom day by day.

That's it. God loves us with a father's love, with the love of a mother, with the love of a shepherd whose tenderest regards are for the crippled lamb of the flock. Great as His wisdom is, so great is His love. Both His love and His wisdom invite us to trust in Him and not to lean on our own understanding. Although His ways may be hidden to us, we would trust in Him ; His judgments are good, good because He is good as He is wise and loving.

The common ways are trodden not of Thee,
 Seldom Thy steps are traced by mortal eyes,
 Yet art Thou near us, and unseen, dost see
 All hopes and wishes that within us rise.
 The bright reflection of Thy inner thought
 Is day by day before our eyes outspread ;
 Who thinks he quickest has Thy meaning read,
 Is oft another deeper lesson taught.

Trusting in God, therefore, means that we make our own understanding subject to God's understanding and our own reason we place under God's wisdom.

O Eye, whose glance no falsehood can endure,
 Grant me to wisely judge, and well discern,
 Nature from grace—Thy light serene and pure
 From grosser fires that in and round me burn.
 Let no strange fire be kindled on the shrine
 Within my heart lest I should madly bring
 The hated offering unto Thee, O King.
 Ah, blest the soul whose light is born of Thine!
 When reason contradicts Thy law, or climbs
 So high, she weeneth to know more than Thou,
 Break down her confidence, great God, betimes,
 And teach her lowly at Thy feet to bow.
 Nor let my proud heart dictate, Lord, to Thee,
 But tame the wayward will that seeks its own,
 And wake the love that clings to Thee alone,
 And takes Thy judgments in humility.

How completely that trust must be in God we learn only in part. Hence, the prayer of the poet is a good one for us. God must teach us to be humble before Him and trust in Him. We pray, too, that our complete being, our total selves, be made to trust in God so that our entire behaviour is a behaviour that relies in Him. Trust in the Lord with *all* thine heart! So we pray :

Absorb my will in Thine ; support and bear
 Onward in loving arms Thy timid child,
 Thy Spirit's voice dispels all doubt, all fear,
 And quells the passions erst so fierce and wild.
 Thou art mine All, since that Thy Son is mine ;
 Oh let Thy Spirit work with power in me,
 With strong desire I thirst, I pant for Thee,
 Oh joy whene'er Thy glories round me shine!
 So shall the creature ever serve me here,
 Nor angels blush to bear me company ;
 The perfect spirits to Thy throne most near,
 They are my brethren, waiting there for me ;
 And oft my spirit joys to meet a heart,
 That loveth Thee and me and every saint.
 Is aught then left can make me sad and faint ?
 Come, Fount of Joy! vain sorrows, all depart!

So perfect trust ends in perfect joy. Trusting in God with all our heart, means that our hearts have been cleansed and purified by Him. God has given His Spirit into our hearts, so that we can rely completely in Him. Then we will not rely on our own wisdom or our own understanding or our own ideas of what God ought to do. With all our heart we will lean on Him who gives His Spirit from His Son in whom there is perfect wisdom and perfect love.

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