

OMNISCIENCE

A Sermon

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at Exeter Hall, Strand.

“Thou God seest me.”—Genesis 16:13.

There are more eyes fixed on man than he wots of: he sees not as he is seen. He thinks himself obscure and unobserved, but let him remember that a cloud of witnesses hold him in full survey. Wherever he is, at every instant, there are beings whose attention is riveted by his doings, and whose gaze is constantly fixed by his actions. Within this Hall, I doubt not, there are myriads of spirits unseen to us—spirits good and spirits evil; upon us to-night the eyes of angels rest: attentively those perfect spirits regard our order; they hear our songs; they observe our prayers; it may be they fly to heaven to convey to their companions news of any sinners who are born of God, for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth, both when we wake and when we sleep; midnight is peopled with shadows unseen, and daylight hath its spirits too. The prince of the power of the air, attended by his squadron of evil spirits, flits through the ether oft; evil spirits watch our halting every instant, while good spirits, battling for the salvation of God’s elect, keep us in all our ways and watch over our feet, lest at any time we dash them against a stone. Hosts of invisible beings attend on every one of us at different periods of our lives. We must remember, also, that not only do the spirits of angels, elect or fallen, look on us, but “the spirits of the just made perfect” continually observe our conversation. We are taught by the Apostle that the noble army of martyrs, and the glorious company of confessors, are “witnesses” of our race to heaven, for he says, “seeing, then, that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” From yon blue heaven the eyes of the glorified look down on us; there the children of God are sitting on their starry thrones, observing whether we manfully uphold the banner around which they fought; they behold our valour, or they detect our cowardice; and they are intent to witness our valiant deeds of noble daring, or our ignominious retreat in the day of battle.

Remember that, ye sons of men, ye are not unregarded; ye do not pass through this world in unseen obscurity. In darkest shades of night eyes glare on you through the gloom. In the brightness of the day angels are spectators of your labours. From heaven there look down upon you spirits who see all that finite beings are capable of beholding. But if we think that thought worth treasuring up, there is one which sums up that and drowns it, even as a drop is lost in the ocean; it is the thought, “Thou God seest me.” It is nought that angels see me, it is nought that devils watch me, it is nought that the glorified spirits observe me, compared with the overwhelming truth, that thou God at all times seest me. Let us dwell on that now, and may God the Spirit make use of it to our spiritual profit!

In the first place, I shall notice *the general doctrine*, that God observes all men. In the second place, I shall notice *the particular doctrine*, “Thou God seest me.” And in the third place I shall *draw from it some practical and comforting inferences* to different orders of persons now assembled, each of whom may learn something from this short sentence.

I. In the first place, the general doctrine, that God sees us.

1. This may be easily proved, even from the nature of God. It were hard to suppose a God who could not see his own creatures; it were difficult in the extreme to imagine a divinity who could not

behold the actions of the works of his hands. The word which the Greeks applied to God implied that he was a God who could see. They called him θεός (*Theos*); and they derived that word, if I read rightly, from the root θεῖσθαι (*Theisthai*), to see, because they regarded God as being the all-seeing one, whose eye took in the whole universe at a glance, and whose knowledge extended far beyond that of mortals. God Almighty, from his very essence and nature, must be an Omniscient God. Strike out the thought that he sees me, and you extinguish Deity by a single stroke. There were no God if that God had no eyes, for a blind God were no God at all. We could not conceive such an one. Stupid as idolators may be, it were very hard to think that even they had fashioned a blind god: even they have given eyes to their gods, though they see not. Juggernaut hath eyes stained with blood; and the gods of the ancient Romans had eyes, and some of them were called far-seeing gods. Even the heathen can scarce conceive of a god that hath no eyes to see, and certainly we are not so mad as to imagine for a single second that there can be a Deity without the knowledge of everything that is done by man beneath the sun. I say it were as impossible to conceive of a God who did not observe everything, as to conceive of a round square. When we say, “*Thou God,*” we do, in fact, comprise in the word “*God*” the idea of a God who sees everything, “*Thou God seest me.*”

2. Yet, further, we are sure that God must see us, for we are taught in the Scriptures that *God is everywhere*, and if God be everywhere, what doth hinder him from seeing all that is done in every part of his universe? God is here: I do not simply live near him, but “*in him I live, and move, and have my being.*” There is not a particle of this mighty space which is not filled with God: go forth into the pure air, and there is not a particle of it where God is not. In every portion of this earth whereon I tread, and the spot whereon I move, there is God.

“Within thy circling power I stand;
On every side I find thy hand:
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
I am surrounded still with God.”

Take the wings of the morning and fly beyond the most distant star, but God is there. God is not a being confined to one place, but he is everywhere; he is there, and there, and there; in the deepest mine man ever bored; in the unfathomable caverns of the ocean; in the heights, towering and lofty; in the gulfs that are deep, which fathom can never reach; God is everywhere. I know from his own words that he is a God who filleth immensity; the heavens are not wide enough for him; he graspeth the sun with one hand and the moon with the other; he stretcheth himself through the unnavigated ether, where the wing of seraph hath never been flapped, there is God; and where the solemnity of silence has never been broken by the song of Cherub, there is God. God is everywhere. Conceive space, and God and space are equal. Well, then, if God be everywhere, how can I refrain from believing that God sees me wherever I am? He doth not look upon me from a distance: if he did, I might screen myself beneath the shades of night; but he is here, close by my side, and not *by* me only, but *in* me; within this heart; where these lungs beat; or where my blood gushes through my veins; or where this pulse is beating, like a muffled drum, my march to death; God is there: within this mouth; in this tongue; in these eyes; in each of you God dwells: he is within you, and around you; he is beside you, and behind, and before. Is not such knowledge too wonderful for you? Is it not high, and you cannot attain unto it? I say, how can you resist the doctrine, which comes upon you like a flash of lightning, that if God be everywhere he must see everything, and that therefore it is a truth, “*Thou God seest me.*”

3. But, lest any should suppose that God may be in a place, and yet slumbering, let me remind him that in every spot to which he can travel, there is, not simply God, but also *God's activity*. Wherever I go I shall find, not a slumbering God, but a God busy about the affairs of this world. Take me to the green sward, and pleasant pasture—why, every little blade of grass there has God's

hand in it, making it grow; and every tiny daisy, which a child likes to pluck, looks up with its little eye, and says, "God is in me, circulating my sap, and opening my little flower." Go where you will through this London, where vegetation is scarcely to be found; look up yonder and see those rolling stars; God is active there: it is his hand that wheels along the stars, and moves the moon in her nightly course. But if there be neither stars nor moon, there are those clouds, heavy with darkness, like the cars of night, who steers them across the sea of azure? Doth not the breath of God blowing upon them drive them along the heavens? God is everywhere, not as a slumbering God, but as an active God. I am upon the sea; and there I see God making the everlasting pulse of nature beat in constant ebbs and flows. I am in the pathless desert, but above me screams the vulture, and I see God winging the wild bird's flight. I am shut up in a hermitage; but an insect drops from its leaf, and I see in that insect, life which God preserves and sustains; yea, shut me out from the animate creation, and put me on the barren rock, where moss itself cannot find a footing; and I shall there discern my God bearing up the pillars of the universe, and sustaining that bare rock as a part of the colossal foundation whereon he hath built the world.

"Where'er we turn our gazing eyes,
Thy radiant footsteps shine;
Ten thousand pleasing wonders rise,
And speak their source divine.

The living tribes of countless forms,
In earth, and sea, and air,
The meanest flies, the smallest worms,
Almighty power declare."

Ye shall see God everywhere: if ye see him not around you, look within you and is he not there? Is not your blood now flowing through every portion of your body, to and fro your heart? And is not God there active? Do you not know that every pulse you beat needs a volition of Deity as its permit, and yet more, needs an exertion of Divine power as its cause? Do you not know that every breath you breathe needs Deity for its inspiration and expiration, and that you must die if God withdraw that power? If we could look within us, there are mighty works going on in this mortal fabric—the garment of the soul—which would astonish you, and make you see, indeed, that God is not asleep, but that he is active and busy. There is a working God everywhere, a God with his eyes open everywhere, a God with his hands at work everywhere; a God doing something, not a God slumbering, but a God labouring. Oh! sirs, does not the conviction flash upon your mind with a brightness, against which you cannot shut your eyes, that since God is everywhere, and everywhere active, it follows, as a necessary and unavoidable consequence, that he must see us, and know all our actions and our deeds?

4. I have one more proof to offer which I think to be conclusive. God, we may be sure, sees us, when we remember that *he can see a thing before it happens*. If he beholds an event before it transpires, surely reason dictates, he must see a thing that is happening now. Read those ancient prophecies, read what God said should be the end of Babylon and of Nineveh; just turn to the chapter where you read of Edom's doom, or where you are told that Tyre shall be desolate; then walk through the lands of the East, and see Nineveh and Babylon cast to the ground, the cities ruined; and then reply to this question—"Is not God a God of foreknowledge? Can he not see the things that are to come?" Ay, there is not a thing which shall transpire in the next cycle of a thousand years which is not already past to the infinite mind of God; there is not a deed which shall be transacted to-morrow, or the next day, or the next, through eternity, if days can be eternal, but God knoweth it altogether. And if he knows the future, does he not know the present. If his eyes

look through the dim haze which veils us from the things of futurity, can he not see that which is standing in the brightness of the present? If he can see a great distance, can he not see near at hand! Surely that Divine Being who discerneth the end from the beginning, must know the things which occur now; and it must be true that “Thou God seest us,” even the whole of us, the entire race of man. So much for the general and universally acknowledged doctrine.

II. Now, I come, in the second place, to the special doctrine: “Thou God seest *me*.”

Come now, there is a disadvantage in having so many hearers, as there is always in speaking to more than one at a time, because persons are apt to think, “He does not speak to me.” Jesus Christ preached a very successful sermon once when he had but one hearer, because he had the woman sitting on the well, and she could not say that Christ was preaching to her neighbour. He said to her, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” There was something there which smote her heart; she could not evade the confession of her guilt. But in regard to our congregations, the old orator might soon see his prayer answered, “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears,” for when the gospel is preached, we lend our ears to everybody; we are accustomed to hear for our neighbours, and not for ourselves. Now, I have no objection to your lending anything else you like, but I have a strong objection to you lending your ears; I shall be glad if you will keep them at home for a minute or two, for I want to make you hear for yourselves this truth “Thou God seest *me*.”

Mark, God sees *you*—selecting any one out of this congregation—he sees you, he sees you *as much as if there were nobody else in the world for him to look at*. If I have as many people as there are here to look at, of course my attention must be divided; but the infinite mind of God is able to grasp a million objects at once, and yet to set itself as much upon one, as if there were nothing else but that one; so that you, to-night, are looked at by God as much as if throughout space there were not another creature but yourself. Can you conceive that? Suppose the stars blotted out in darkness, suppose the angels dead; imagine the glorified spirits above are all gone, and you are left alone, the last man, and there is God looking at you. What an idea it would be for you to think of—that there was only you to be looked at! how steadily he could observe you! how well he would discern you! But mark you, God does really look at you this night as much, as entirely, as absolutely without division of sight, as if you were the only being his hands had ever made. Can you grasp that? God sees you with all his eyes, with the whole of his sight—you—you—you—you are the particular object of his attention at this very moment. God’s eyes are looking down upon you; remember that!

In the next place God sees you *entirely*. He does not merely note your actions; he does not simply notice what is the appearance of your countenance; he does not merely take into his eyesight what your posture maybe; but remember, God sees what you are thinking of; he looks within. God has a window in every man’s heart, through which he looks; he does not want you to tell him what you are thinking about—he can see that, he can read right through you. Do you not know that God can read what is written on the rocks at the bottom of the ocean, even though ten thousand fathoms of dark water roll above? And I tell you he can read every word that is in your breasts; he knows every thought, every imagination, every conception, yea every unformed imagination, the thought scarce shot from the bow, reserved in the quiver of the mind; he sees it all, every particle, every atom of it.

“My thoughts, scarce struggling into birth,
Great God! are known to thee:
Abroad, at home, still I’m enclosed
With thine immensity.

“Behind I glance, and thou art there:
Before me, shines thy name;
And ’tis thy strong almighty hand

Sustains my tender frame.”

Can you appropriate that thought? From the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, God is examining you now; his scalpel is in your heart, his lancet in your breast, he is searching your heart and trying your reins; he knows you behind and before. “Thou God seest me;” thou seest me entirely.

Note again, God sees you *constantly*. You are sometimes watched by man, and then your conversation is tolerably correct; at other times you seek retirement, and you indulge yourselves in things which you would not dare to do before the gaze of your fellow creatures. But recollect, wherever you are, God sees you; you may lay yourselves down by the side of the hidden brook where the willows shelter you, where all is still, without a sound—God is there looking at you! You may retire to your chamber, and draw the curtains of your couch, and throw yourself down for repose in midnight’s gloomiest shade—God sees you there! I remember going into a castle sometime ago, down many a winding stair, round and round, and round, and round, where light never penetrated; at last I came to a space, very narrow, about the length of a man. “There,” said the keeper, “such-and-such-a-one was shut up for so many years, a ray of light never having penetrated: sometimes they tortured him, but his shrieks never reached through the thickness of these walls, and never ascended that winding staircase: here he died, and there, sir, he was buried,” pointing to the ground. But though that man had none on earth to see him, God saw him. Yea, you may shut me up for ever, where ear shall never hear my prayer, where eye shall never see my misery; but one eye shall look upon me, and one countenance smile on me, if I suffer for righteousness’ sake. If for Christ’s sake I am in prison, one hand shall be upon me, and one voice shall say, “Fear not; I will help thee”—at all times, in all places, in all your thoughts, in all your acts, in all your privacy, in all your public doings, at every season, this is true, “Thou God seest me.”

Yet once more, “Thou God seest me,” *supremely*. I can see myself, but not as well as either my friends or foes. Men can see me better than I can see myself, but man cannot see me as God sees me. A man skilled in the human heart might interpret my deeds and translate their motives, but he could not read my heart as God can read it. None can tell another as God can tell us all: we do not know ourselves as God knows us: with all your self knowledge, with all you have been told by others, God knows you more fully than you know yourself: no eye can see you as God sees you—you may act in daylight; you may not be ashamed of your actions, you may stand up before men and say, “I am a public man, I wish to be observed and noticed:” you may have all your deeds chronicled, and all men may hear of them, but I wot men will never know you as God will know you; and if you could be chained, as Paul was, with a soldier at your arm; if he were with you night and day, sleeping with you, rising with you; if he could hear all your thoughts, he could not know you as God knows you, for God sees you superlatively and supremely.

Let me now apply that to you: “Thou God seest *me*.” This is true of each of you; try and think of it for a moment. Even as my eye rests on *you*, so, in a far, far greater sense does God’s eye rest on *you*; standing, sitting, wherever you are, this is true, “Thou God seest *me*.” It is said that when you heard Rowland Hill, if you were stuck in a window, or farther away at the door, you always had the conviction that he was preaching at you. Oh! I wish I could preach like that; if I could make you feel that I was preaching at you in particular; that I singled you out, and shot every word at you, then I should hope for some effect. Try and think, then, “Thou God seest me.”

III. Now I come to different inferences for different persons, to serve different purposes.

First, to the *prayerful*. Prayerful man, prayerful woman, here is a consolation—God sees you: and if he can see you, surely he can hear you. Why, we can often hear people, when we cannot see them. If God is so near to us, and if his voice is like the thunder, sure his ears are as good as his eyes, and he will be sure to answer us. Perhaps you cannot say a word when you pray. Never mind; God does not want to hear; he can tell what you mean even by seeing you. “There,” says the Lord,

“is a child of mine in prayer. He says not a word; but do you see that tear rolling down his cheek? do you hear that sigh?” Oh! mighty God, thou canst see both tear and sigh; thou canst read desire when desire hath not clothed itself in words. The naked wish God can interpret; he needs us not to light the candle of our desires with language; he can see the candle ere it is lit.

“He knows the words we mean to speak,
When from our lips they cannot break,”

by reason of the anguish of our spirit. He knows the desire, when words stagger under the weight of it; he knows the wish when language fails to express it. “Thou God seest me.” Ah, God, when I cannot pray with words, I will throw myself flat on my face, and I will groan my prayer; and if I cannot groan it I will sigh it; and if I cannot sigh it I will wish it: and when these eye-strings break, and when death has sealed these lips, I will enter heaven with a prayer, which thou wilt not hear but which thou wilt see—the prayer of my inmost spirit, when my heart and my flesh fail me, that God may be the strength of my life and portion for ever. There is comfort for you, you praying ones, that God sees you. That is enough; if you cannot speak he can see you.

I have given a word for the prayerful; now a word for the *careful*, Some here are very full of care, and doubts, and anxieties, and fears. “Oh! sir,” you say, “if you could come to my poor house, you would not wonder that I should feel anxious. I have had to part with much of my little furniture to provide myself with living; I am brought very low; I have not a friend in London; I am alone, alone in the wide world.” Stop, stop, sir! you are not alone in the world; there is at least one eye regarding you; there is one hand that is ready to relieve you. Don’t give up in despair. If your case be ever so bad, God can see your care, your troubles, and your anxieties. To a good man it is enough to *see* destitution to relieve it; and for God it is enough to see the distresses of his family at once to supply their wants. If you were lying wounded on the battle-field, if you could not speak, you know right well your comrades who are coming by with an ambulance will pick you up, if they do but see you; and that is enough for you. So if you are lying on the battle-field of life, God sees you; let that cheer you: he will relieve you; for he only needs to look at the woes of his children at once to relieve them. Go on then; hope yet; in night’s darkest hour, hope for a brighter morrow. God sees thee, whatever thou art doing;

“He knows thy cares, thy tears, thy sighs;
He shall lift up thy head.”

And now a word to the *slandered*. There are some of us who come in for a very large share of slander. It is very seldom that the slander market is much below par; it usually runs up at a very mighty rate; and there are persons who will take shares to any amount. If men could dispose of railway stock as they can of slander, those who happen to have any scrip here would be rich enough by to-morrow at twelve o’clock. There are some who have a superabundance of that matter; they are continually hearing rumours of this, that, and the other; and there is one fool or another who has not brains enough to write sense, nor honesty sufficient to keep him to the truth, who, therefore, writes the most infamous libels upon some of God’s servants, compared with whom he himself is nothing, and whom for very envy he chooses to depreciate. Well, what matters it? Suppose you are slandered; here is a comfort: “Thou *God* seest me.” They say that such-and-such is your motive, but you need not answer them; you can say, “God knows that matter.” You are charged with such-and-such a thing of which you are innocent; your heart is right concerning the deed, you have never done it: well, you have no need to battle for your reputation; you need only point your finger to the sky, and say, “There is a witness there who will right me at last—there is a Judge of all the earth, whose decision I am content to wait; his answer will be a complete exoneration of me, and I shall come out of the furnace, like gold seven times purified.” Young men, are you striving to do good,

and do others impute wrong motives to you? Do not be particular about answering them, just go straight on, and your life will be the best refutation of the calumny. David's brethren said that in his pride and the naughtiness of his heart he had come to see the battle. "Ah!" thought David, "I will answer you by-and-bye." Off he went across the plain to fight Goliath; he cut off his head, and then came back to his brethren with a glorious answer in his conquering hand. If any man desires to reply to the false assertions of his enemies, let him go and do good, and he needs not say a word—that will be his answer. I am the subject of detraction, but I can point to hundreds of souls that have been saved on earth by my feeble instrumentality, and my reply to all my enemies is this, "You may say what you like; but seeing these lame men are healed, can you say anything against them? You may find fault with the style or manner, but God saves souls, and we will hold up that fact, like giant Goliath's head, to show you that although it was nothing but a sling or stone, so much the better, for God has gotten the victory." Go straight on and you will live down your slanderers; and remember when you are most distressed, "Thou God seest me."

Now, *a sentence or two to some of you who are ungodly* and know not Christ. What shall I say to you but this,—how heinous are your sins when they are put in the light of this doctrine! Remember, sinner, whenever thou sinnest, thou sinnest in the teeth of God. It is bad enough to steal in darkness, but he is a very thief who steals in daylight. It is vile, it is fearfully vile to commit a sin which I desire to cover, but to do my sin when man is looking at me shows much hardness of heart. Ah! sinner, remember, thou sinnest with God's eyes looking on thee. How black must be thy heart! how awful thy sin! for thou sinnest in the very face of justice when God's eye is fixed on thee. I was looking the other day at a glass bee-hive, and it was very singular to observe the motions of the creatures inside. Well, now, this world is nothing but a huge glass bee-hive. God looks down on you, and he sees you all. You go into your little cells in the streets of this huge city; you go to your business, your pleasure, your devotions, and your sins; but remember, where-ever you go, you are like the bees under a great glass shade, you can never get away from God's observation. When children disobey before the eyes of their parents it shows that they are hardened. If they do it behind their parents' back, it proves that there is some shame left. But you, sirs, sin when God is present with you; you sin while God's eyes are searching you through and through. Even now you are thinking hard thoughts of God while God is hearing all those silent utterances of your evil hearts. Does not that render your sin extremely heinous? Therefore. I beseech you, think of it, and repent of your wickedness, that your sins may be blotted out through Jesus Christ.

And one more thought. If God sees thee, O sinner, *how easy it will be to condemn thee*. In the late horrible case of Palmer, witnesses were required, and a jury was empanelled to try the accused. But if the judge could have mounted the bench and have said, "I saw the man, myself, mix the poison; I stood by and saw him administer it; I read his thoughts; I knew for what purpose he did it; I read his heart; I was with him when he first conceived the black design, and I have tracked him in all his evasions, in all those acts by which he sought to blindfold justice; and I can read in his heart that he knows himself to be guilty now;" the case then would have been over; the trial would have been little more than a form. What wilt thou think, O sinner, when thou art brought before God, and God shall say, "Thou didst so-and-so," and will mention what you did in the darkness of the night when no eye was there? You will start back amazed, and say, "Oh, heavens! how shall God know? is there knowledge in the Most High?" He will say, "Stop, sinner; I have more to startle thee yet;" and he will begin to unfold the records of the past: leaf after leaf he will read of the diary he has kept of your existence. Oh! I can see you as he reads page after page, your knees are knocking together, your hair is standing on end, your blood is frozen in your veins, congealed for fright, and you stand like a second Niobe, a rock bedewed with tears. You are thunder struck to find your thoughts read out before the sun, while men and angels hear. You are amazed beyond degree to hear your imaginations read, to see your deeds photographed on the great white throne, and to hear a

voice saying, "Rebellion at such a time; uncleanness at such a time; evil thoughts at such an hour; Sabbath breaking on such a day; blasphemy at such a time; theft at such an hour; hard thoughts of God at such a period; rejection of his grace on such a day; stiflings of conscience at another time;" and so on to the end of the chapter, and then the awful final doom. "Sinner, depart accursed! I saw thee sin; it needs no witnesses; I heard thy oath; I heard thy blasphemy; I saw thy theft; I read thy thought. Depart! depart! I am clear when I judge thee; I am justified when I condemn thee: for thou hast done this evil in my sight."

Lastly, you ask me what you must do to be saved; and I will never let a congregation go, I hope, till I have told them that. Hear, then, in a few words, the way of salvation. It is this. Christ said to the Apostles, "Preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and his baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." Or, to give you Paul's version, when he spoke to the jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Thou askest what thou art to believe. Why, this: that Christ died and rose again; that by his death he did bear the punishment of all believers; and that by his resurrection he did wipe out the faults of all his children. And if God give thee faith, thou wilt believe that Christ died for thee; and wilt be washed in his blood, and thou wilt trust his mercy and his love to be thine everlasting redemption when the world shall end.