

God Gave Them Up

The Book of Romans

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Bible Text: Romans 1:24-27
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Let's turn together in God's holy word to the book of Romans where we continue this morning in our exposition of this inspired epistle written by the Apostle Paul, and we come this morning to verses 24 to 27. Considering together Romans 1:24-27.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

Considering together with the Lord's help these words. The natural man when left to himself or herself turns everything upside down and inside out. So they will take the most important things and dismiss them as the least important things. They will take the creature and supplant the place that belongs to the Creator. They will even take that which is natural and the natural will be displaced by what God deems unnatural. And we could go on and on, this is the nature of sin and this is the natural course left unchecked within the depravity of mankind lost. It is a grim description that we have in the passage before us. These are sober words, difficult words, really, for us to read and to think about, but inspired words and words that are exceedingly important, as with all the Bible, and equally relevant in every generation.

So let me remind you before we enter into the exposition itself, let me remind you of our context. This helps us to gather our bearings so that we are being carried forward in the flow of the text itself. We saw last time this description of the depravity of man, and we saw that that depravity progresses, it progresses to the point of gross idolatry, as you see in the previous verse in verse 23 where it speaks of changing "the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." So we've seen the introduction of the wrath of God which is revealed from heaven, and we've seen something of the object of that

wrath, the depraved creatures of this world, and now in the section that's before us, now the Apostle Paul turns to God's response, God's response to all of this, God's response of divine retribution which is manifested against this wickedness, the price tag, the cost that is to be paid for such evil and such wickedness.

So we'll notice three things in dependence upon the Lord, we'll highlight three things. First of all, we see God's order. So first of all, God's order, and let me draw to your attention two important things the beginning of verse 24 and the beginning of verse 26. Notice that the beginning of our text, verse 24, starts with the word "Wherefore," and then if you go down to verse 26, you'll also note by way of parallel the words "For this cause." So there are connections that are being drawn and those connections set before us something very important, something fundamental theologically, something fundamental for our understanding in life about God's order.

He's speaking, we could say, first of all, about going from idolatry to immorality, or we could say going from spiritual whoredom to physical whoredom, and that would be true, one thing leads to retribution in what follows, but there's something underneath all of that that we especially need to highlight, and that is that there is a connection being drawn between the first table of God's law and the second table of God's law. You'll notice that in the words prior to verse 24, the reference is primarily to sins in the first table, right, sins that are associated with false worship and idolatry and defaming God's holy name. And he says in verse 24, "Wherefore," as a result of these first table violations, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness," and what follows are descriptions of the kinds of sins that are outlined in the second table. So just as a review especially for the children, when we're speaking of the 10 Commandments and we make reference to the first table, we're referring to the first four commandments, whereas when we speak of the second table, we're referring to the second six. So commandments 1 to 4 refer primarily to our obligations to God directly, to God himself, and they all pertain, in one way or another, to worship, who it is we worship, what it is that we do in worship, how it is that we come to him in worship, when we worship and so on. The second table refers, of course, to our duties primarily to our fellow men.

So the first table is obligations to God, second table primarily obligations to one another, to our fellows among mankind. Jesus, of course, is referring to this in Matthew 22, as you'll know, in verse 39 when the scribe is pestering him about what the greatest commandment is, you'll remember the backdrop here, the theological disputes among the Jews, taking 613 laws and trying to categorize and rate them in terms of importance. Jesus answers his question in verse 39, he answers directly the question, "This is the first and great commandment," and he says we're to love God and we're to love God with our whole being, right? That love for God is a summary of the first table and likewise we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, which is a summary of the second table.

So this is primarily review for you but the point underlying all of this is, of course, that the first table is our first priority and that is because God is chiefly interested in the promotion and preservation of his own glory, and so there's a primacy that is given to that first table. We as creatures and we as Christians, are to be first and foremost interested in

God's sovereign rights, God's own prerogatives, what our Scottish Presbyterian forefathers referred to as the crown rights of King Jesus; God comes first, man comes second. And this is, of course, borne out throughout the whole history of the Bible. In the Old Testament, God destroys nations primarily for their first table violations. God sends his own people into exile or afflicts them with punishments primarily for their first table violations. And on the flipside, the biblical reformations that are seen in the Bible are characterized primarily by a return to our obligations to God's rights as summarized in that first table of the law. So whether it be under Asa, Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah or Josiah, even latterly in the end of the reign of Manasseh, what do they put first? They put first the things that pertain to God and the obligations that are outlined in the first commandment. We could say the same thing at the end of the Old Testament in the book of Nehemiah and so on.

So there's a primacy here and this is important for us in our biblical understanding of the Bible as well as a biblical understanding of our life and of our practice, right? In our families, in our church, as well as among nations as nations, God's interests are to be given first place, and when false worship is introduced, it inevitably leads to other forms of worldly wickedness and we see this everywhere in the scriptures. Very different, of course, than what the churches in our day and the nation as a whole, of course, are thinking. The big concerns today even among the professing people of God are primarily what? Oh, we might say abortion, sixth commandment. We might say, you know, sexual perversion, seventh commandment. We might say unlawful taxes, eighth commandment. Crass materialism, ninth commandment. Or, you know, illegal forms of theft, in the eighth commandment lies, covetousness, and so on. But are we thinking rightly? And as you know because you've been taught along these lines previously, the answer is clearly and unequivocally, no, we are not thinking rightly, we're not thinking God's thoughts after him, or walking in the path of scripture.

So there's an order that is found within this text. When we lose love for God, it leads to licentious lewdness and so he says here, "Wherefore," and he says, "Wherefore," because of these, it's causal his conclusion, he gives them over to these second table forms of wickedness. Then he goes on in verse 25 and he, again refers to first table things with regards to worship and idolatry and he says reinforcing the point in verse 26, "For this cause," right, it's clearly causal, "God gave them up unto vile affections." And so there's an order that we observe in this passage, in these words, especially in verses 24 and 26 as they're connected to the surrounding verses. The point of departure, the point of departure was what? Right, the point of departure was their turning away from the truth of God and the appropriate worship of God, and it leads to the end and what we're going to be considering, what's described in the rest of this passage. So we need to be clear with regards to God's order. Most of you have read my booklet on "First Things First" which spells out this in far greater detail; it's addressing a blind spot and a needed paradigm shift in our own day.

So there's, first of all, God's order but then looking more carefully at what is here, we see, second of all, that they are given over. So secondly, given over. So go back to the text that says, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their

own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves." Then in verse 26, "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature." So the second point that we need to have fixed clearly in our minds is what God is teaching us about giving these people up to these forms of debased sin. What's described here is a judicial act. This is a judicial act of God. It is, we could say, judicial blindness. You have the Lord who teaches us in his word that sin, of course, always breeds more sin, it's the nature of sin itself. Sin wants to expand. Sin wants to grow. Sin, you know, those who think to themselves, "Well, if I cave to this temptation and satisfy this sinful longing, well, then it will appease the power of the feelings that I have within me." It may be nursing bitterness or expressing anger or pursuing lust or any given number of sins, and it's folly, it's the opposite of reality. The truth is that the more that we give ourselves over to sin, the more that actually grows. It explodes. It intensifies. Right, it aggravates itself, if you will.

So that's important to see but we also recognize that God punishes sin with sin, the punishment of sin includes being given up to even worse sins, and so that is also essential for our understanding. God can and does at times remove restraints. He removes restraints leaving men to the tragic consequences that inevitably follow from that. So God is abandoning people, if you will, to the intensified cultivation of their own lusts. Now God is not sinning himself, God is not putting sin in them, but God is abandoning them to the intensified cultivation of that lust thereby reaping for themselves greater degrees of retributive vengeance from God. These are sober things. It's an example, a further example of the wrath that is revealed and it should, if we are coming to this passage with sobriety and with faith and with meekness, it ought to have the impact of creating a measure of terror, of unease, discomfort. There should be something woefully fearful about what is being described in this doctrine.

It is terrifying. Children, young people, as well as those who are adults, it is terrifying to even think of being given over to these things by God. But there are those who are stubborn under the call to repent, stubborn under the revelation of who God is, and their stubbornness is described in a few ways, a couple of ways. We're told that they exchange the truth of God which has been revealed in order to embrace a lie, in order to embrace falsehood. Right, this is what it says, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie." Now that is to say, they took light and sought to eliminate it, right, they sought to turn from that light into the inky darkness. They're looking into the face of the truth of God which is pure and right and righteous, indeed it is full of blessing, it is full of goodness, it is full of life, and they have changed that for a lie and they have believed the antithesis, they have believed the opposite, they have embraced what is diametrically opposed to what is true. They've received it, they've eaten it, right, they're digesting the lie and they are darkening thereby their minds believing what is false.

Well, you see furthermore the way in which this comes to expression. What does it say? It says, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." So the way that it comes to expression is through concrete acts of worship and religious devotion, and that can be manifested in a whole host of ways, right, not merely prostrating one's self before a stone statue or even the near equivalent of it. It

can be manifested in a whole host of ways in which false religion and false ideology and false ideas and false concepts are entertained, embraced, eventually people devote themselves with worship to these things. He's saying here is worship of created things in place of the Creator himself. The worship of created things in the place of the Creator.

So God is giving them over to more debasing, more demoralizing sins as a consequence. In other words, they're being sentenced to greater degeneracy. Sadly, most of the time they do not perceive it. Choosing to walk in the dark leaves you in the dark. Choosing to believe a lie means that you live under the power of that lie. It means that you are unable to see. It means that in this degrading process, you're oblivious to it, you're not alert to it, you're not conscious of it, you don't perceive it. There are growing degrees of darkness and all of this is spine-tingling to us. My friends, beware of how you handle the light of God's truth. This is no trivial matter. When you come to the truth that has been revealed by God from God, you can never ever adopt a cavalier disposition. We can never put ourselves in a position of saying, "Well, I'll take this up for consideration." We can never put ourselves in a situation where it's a take or leave it mentality. You can't have a choice of saying, "I'm going to take some of this and perhaps abandon a little of that." The claims of truth are brought to bear on our souls and we are brought under the divine authority of God and the only appropriate response is full-hearted submission to the will of God, to the truth of God, and to the word of God, and there is no other sane alternative that is given to us.

So for those who may be tempted to think to themselves, "Well, you know, some of these things sound very compelling that we hear about in the scriptures and in sermons and some doctrines seem to be fairly persuasive, but I'm not so sure myself and I may keep a distance between myself and these things." You are playing with fire. You are taking fire into your lap. You are being spiritually reckless when it comes to the things that matter most in the whole world. Beware of tolerating any sin. Beware of striking peace with any sin, with saying, "Well, there are some things I'll avoid and I'll jettison that, and there are other things, well, yeah, I may be able to be open to these things or I can skirt about them and play with them a little bit." There's a warning here about tolerating any known sin because you are at risk of opening the floodgates which will sweep your soul far from where you are now ultimately into the depths of hell itself. Let us be sober. Let us fear the Lord. Let us love the truth and embrace its claims upon us.

Notice this phrase that we have at the end of verse 25, it would be wrong for us to pass over it. It says, "and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." The Holy Spirit doesn't give anything extraneous to us in the holy scriptures, I mean, these words as well as their placement are not incidental to us. We should not overlook them. Here we have in the midst of all of this, all that's being described, we have a declaration of doxology, we have a declaration of adoration and of praise to the living and the true God. Paul is working his way through what we might consider sordid circumstances and sins that people find themselves in, and Paul's response to all of this is the spontaneous affirmation of God's adoration. Right, he's thinking about the dishonor that is being brought to the living and true God, the God of heaven, the Creator of heaven and earth, the one whom Paul has come to love and who

has been brought to a saving knowledge of. He is speaking about the only God and Savior. He is speaking about Jehovah, of the Triune God. And as he thinks about the dishonor and the disgrace and the disrepute and the refusal to glorify God, he has to stop in the midst of it all and say, "who is blessed forever. Amen. Let it be so," he says.

He is blessed for ever. Affirm it as truth. Truly this is the case. Let it be so. And I think there's help for us here, there's significant help for us here because we live, as every generation does to one degree or another, we live surrounded by the wickedness of the world and its encroachments on the house of God and on Zion, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are to have the spirit, for example, of Lot who while in Sodom vexed his righteous soul from day to day. There was an appropriate response within him and ours, in referring here to verse 25, the end of verse 25, our personal response to evil however near it is to us or however far it is from us, ought to be the expression of devotion and love and worship and honor to our great God. When we see the dishonor that is being brought to his name, we ought to be and I'm saying even audibly we ought to be expressing and reaffirming from full souls and full hearts with our whole being and employing our mouth, affirming that blessedness and honor and glory is to be due to the one that the world has rejected.

It's also helpful for us, I think, in terms of our internal experience because facing these realities in our own life or past, as well as in those that are near or dear to us, can have an effective of pouring serious remorse and rightly, and a feeling of defilement and things that are associated with that. And it is good in terms of our Christian experience to be able to stand in the midst of that and to turn our eyes from all of the disregard or dishonor that is given to God by others and to turn our own eyes and our affections and our hearts and fix them on the God of heaven, to think and meditate and reflect affectionately upon who God really is, and to be led in that meditation to worship him, to praise him with his inspired songs, to common prayer and to pour out our hearts, extolling him for the glory and the beauty of his holiness. This is the response of Paul, "who is blessed for ever. Amen."

So we see God's order, we also see those who are given up or given over, thirdly, we see gross obscenity. Thirdly, we see gross obscenity. They are given over to what? They are given over to sexual aberration. And so he's describing this downward spiral that we've been referring to and what we need to realize is that the path away from God, whenever we set our backs and feet to move in a direction that is away from God, the path away from God is always a flight into darkness, it's always a flight into irrationality and into perversity.

The path from God leads in this direction so it's described in verse 24 as uncleanness through lusts, the lusts of the heart, dishonor of the body, and it's referred to as vile, verse 26, vile affections. So now what he refers to as uncleanness in verse 24, we're told more explicitly is vile affections. In verse 27 he says in referring to these things, "working that which is unseemly." We could say working that which is shameful. Now we live in an age, as I've said on previous occasions, where our world is no longer able to blush, right, so calcified and hardened is the conscience of many that they are unable to blush. But the

Lord says that he deems these things to be of such a nature and of such a character that it should lead to inconsolable shame that would cause men to hide their faces and be unable to even speak of them.

He says specifically in referring to the sexual aberrations, he describes it as turning from the natural use to the unnatural, from the natural to that which is against nature, and so referring specifically, of course, to homosexuality whether it be in men or in women. So homosexuality is not only a transgression of the law of God, which it is, the revealed will of God and his moral law, that is abundantly clear as we saw in our Old Testament reading and many other places, but furthermore it is also against nature itself. So it flies in the face of the way in which God has created things, created the very world.

So what is said here about turning from the natural use to that which is against nature, flies in the face of the lie, right, of those who have turned from the truth of God to the lie. It flies in the face of the contemporary rhetoric that those who are homosexual are defined as being that way, that's who they are, that's their person, that's the way they were made, that's the way they were born, and there's all sorts of rhetoric that accompanies that idea. That is the lie, right, that is part of what is being rejected here. The Lord says, "No. I mean, this is wickedness, this is transgression of my law, but it is also against nature itself." You can't destroy basic biology, the way that God has created things. And all of the pontificating, to the contrary, is of no avail whatsoever. It's clear that it is even against nature itself.

It is remarkable, isn't it, to think of how much change can take place in a single generation. It's breathtaking. When I think back, I mean, I would be considered by most, I think, middle-aged. I think back to my youth and in junior high and most of high school, I went to a public school and in my public school, pretty big high school, 3,000 kids maybe, very few Evangelical, professing Evangelical Christians among them. Very few professing Evangelicals among them and yet it was universal in my school at that day for homosexuality to be completely rejected, right, I knew no one in my school that would acknowledge that they were committed to sodomy and the like. I mean, if someone was, they kept it very secret so that even among the pagan unbelieving people, it was something that was viewed as terrible, as disgusting, as something that would result in all sorts of ridicule, if not physical abuse etc., and there would be, there was an aversion to all of these things. And here we are, I'm only middle-aged, and how things have changed in that short space. I mean, you can picture the vortex here, can't you, whether it's a whirlwind or a whirlpool, you can picture the vortex as it's going down, what happens? It becomes narrower and the speed increases, and so in the case of a tornado, for example, at the very bottom the force is overwhelmingly destructive wherever it touches down. That's what we're facing.

There's been tremendous change. Now it is completely acceptable to be a sodomite. It is completely acceptable, not only acceptable, it is extolled, it is praised, it is something that is esteemed. I mean, there is the strutting about, if you will, on the public stage with pride over these sorts of things, and indeed anyone who thinks to the contrary is now facing increasing pressure. Well, that's one thing but it's worse than that, far worse than that,

because the problem is that the churches begin to acclimate, right, the church itself has begun to acclimate to these things, and you see it in a variety of ways. You see it, first of all, by the church adopting the world's vocabulary. This is very disconcerting. The church has begun to adopt the world's vocabulary. So in Christian writing including Reformed periodicals, you'll see reference to language like sexual orientation or language like this person has adopted a homosexual lifestyle. Well, what in the world? Where did these words come from? I mean, these are the words that are employed day-in and day-out within society as a whole, and there is a shift that begins with the vocabulary and the mind that then leads to further things, but we need to go back to the book. God says clearly and unequivocally that homosexuality is abomination and that it was characteristic of the abominations of Sodom and Gomorrah, and that God rained down fire from heaven to destroy them because his vengeance was provoked against such acts.

We need to, instead, recognize that the practice of homosexuality is horrific abuse, and it should therefore invoke the kind of thought and emotion that people would have with regards to murder, rape and child abuse because a person who is a homosexual is actually engaging in horrific abuse of the other person, right? They are actually using and abusing them in abominable ways. I mean, this is terrible. Not only is it defying to God, it is abusive to the other individuals. Of course, in the Old Testament it was a capital crime and in contrast we have the pendulum swung to the idea of equal rights, equal rights to be married, equal rights to adopt, equal rights for this, that and the other thing. It's kind of like, you know, what's next, equal rights for those with genocidal inclinations and, you know, preserving that? You say, "Well, pastor, we need to deal with dignity. We need to deal with these people according to dignity," and you're absolutely right, we need to deal with them with dignity because they're made in the image of God and they have eternal and mortal souls and they're people and they should be dealt with in a dignified way, we're 100% for that but my point is this: it is not dignity, it is rather cruelty to accept their false assumptions.

So when the church says, "We will acclimate or we will tolerate the lies and acquiesce to their false assumptions," you are not dealing in dignity, you are dealing cruelly because here is dignity, it is telling people with kindness but telling them the truth. It is bringing the light into their world of darkness. It is saying, "You have to acknowledge and come to see that this is wickedness and sin." And in coming to see it for what it is, also coming to see that the only solution is found in the gospel and the Savior that is proclaimed in that gospel. That is true freedom and that is imparting real dignity to people, dealing with them in ways that are appropriate.

So it is essential that we get this right in our own heads because, quite frankly, the church looks, appears as if it is losing its mind and biblical moorings. Now if there are those under the sound of my voice who are actually struggling with this or struggling with temptations with regards to these sorts of sins, sins of homosexuality, then you need help and there is no one on the planet that is more prepared to offer you genuine help than your elders and other God-fearing mature Christians who will come alongside and with kindness lead you to the truth. Go to your elders if this is an issue. But we cannot, must not adopt the contemporary narrative. To do so, you're faced with a choice, the church is

faced with a choice at this point: either you can adopt the narrative that the world is spewing at present or you can have your Bible. But I have news for you, you can't have both. You can't have both. That's where we're at.

There are those in the church who are saying, "Well, you know, you can be a homosexual in your heart as long as you don't act it out," and this is missing the point entirely, to adopt this sort of mentality. There are others who are saying, "Okay, okay, we can't get around the Bible, we'll have to acknowledge that it's wrong, that it's sinful, but, but, pastor, you know, we're all sinners. And so they're sinners and we're sinners and we're all in this together and therefore what's the big deal? I mean, your child steals a cookie out of the cookie jar or perhaps even worse, there are those who lust after those of the opposite sex that are not their spouse, you know, and then there are those who are engaging in homosexuality but we're all sinners." My friends, this is the fruit of false doctrine and it needs to be rooted out of the minds of true Christians. It is the fruit of false doctrine. We are not talking about the sinfulness of sin, we are talking about the fact that some sins are more heinous than others. Well, sinful, you know, the sinfulness of sin is one thing, the heinousness of sin is another and the Bible is making abundantly clear that homosexuality is to be classified as an exceedingly heinous, heinous sin, an abomination in God's sight.

Children, you'll remember this doctrine, you've been taught it, right? It's different, it's one thing to have, it's sinful to have angry thoughts, it's even more heinous to speak angry words, and even more heinous to strike out physically and hurt someone in that anger, and even more heinous, still sinful, but more heinous to kill them than to think angry thoughts of them, right? You can see there are degrees of heinousness. The point is that by accommodating the world and shifting, we are removing hope, folks. We are robbing people of hope by adopting the world's ideas and tolerating the world's lies about these things. You're stealing their hope away because the only hope is to be found in the scriptures and in the truth as it is in Jesus, and that means there is hope in coming to see our sin and to be broken for it and to come by faith to the Savior to deliver us from that sin. So if you want to tinker with that message, you're going to strip people of their hope.

Now given all that is being said in this passage about individuals with regards to gross obscenity, given all that's said in this passage about individuals, then what of whole nations? Then what of whole nations? Well, we don't have to speculate and we can go back, right? Jude tells us to go back. We can go back and see what it was like at the flood, and we can see what happens when collectively a people like Sodom and Gomorrah engage in one thing, or the nations in Canaan whom God said the land would spew out and whom he would destroy because of these very same sins and so on. So we don't have to speculate, we know. If it's true of the individual, how much more of a whole nation? Nations are brought under divine judgment and at risk of any hope of recovery from such moral degradation without sincere and sound repentance. But my friends, do not miss the point of the text here. The point of departure was long before we got to the point of homosexuality. The point of the departure goes all the way back to the first table. The point of departure for any nation begins with the toleration of idolatry, false religion, and the corruption of God's worship.

That's the story, the same story for every nation that finds itself in circumstances similar to our own, but that truth, the truth of this text also shows us the door to recovery and repentance and reformation, following in the footsteps of the Old Testament. There has to be a recovery of first things first. There has to be a recovery of the primacy that is given to the pure worship of God, and to the hallowing of his name, and to the promotion of the true religion, and to the sanctifying of the sabbath day, and so on. These things must be first and foremost in our hearts and minds, and in turning to the Lord, we must be turning to him in repentance over these areas.

I said at the beginning that this section is describing for us God's response to the depravity that was first spoken of in the previous words, and it's a sober reminder that God is never mocked. God has never been mocked. There's never an instance in the history of mankind and never will be. What we sow, we will reap. It is how God has ordered things and there is no end-run, no shortcut, no escape hatch for anyone. It means that we need the fear of God, we need an overwhelming recovery of biblical fear of Almighty God, and we need the recovery of the true source of hope that is found in the gospel of God's free grace. That's where we stand in need. It's true for the church, it's true for the nation, and it's true from generation to generation.

So though these words are sober and difficult for us, they are full of life and light which we must embrace and love and believe and order our lives by. May the Lord enable us to bow down before his majesty and do so.

Let's stand for prayer.

O gracious God, eternal God in heaven, you are a God who is to be feared. O Lord, you are of pure eyes than to look upon or behold iniquity. You are a God who is full of righteousness and holiness and justice. Grant, O God, that we would with faith believe, and that we would with our hearts cause them to redound with worship and adoration. Blessed, blessed be your holy name for ever. O God, we acknowledge that in the face of dishonor, that it is our heart's desire to give the honor and glory and praise that is due to your name. Deliver us, O Lord, from turning from the light and embracing the lie. Enable us to live in your truth and out of your truth and to be molded by your truth, and grant that it would be to your praise both now and forever. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

