

**THE HIGHEST CIVILIZATION A RESULT  
OF CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIAN  
LEARNING: A DISCOURSE DELIVERED  
AT NORWITCH, CONN., NOV. 14,  
1865, PP. 1-41**

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**RAY PALMER**

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THE  
HIGHEST CIVILIZATION

A RESULT OF

*Christianity and Christian Learning;*

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

AT NORWICH, CONN., NOV. 14, 1865,

ON BEHALF OF

THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING COLLEGIATE AND THEOLOGICAL  
EDUCATION AT THE WEST, IN CONNECTION WITH THE  
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

BY

RAY PALMER,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, ALBANY.

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ALBANY, N. Y.:  
J. MUNSELL, 78 STATE STREET.  
1866.

NOTE.

The thanks of the Board were presented to the Rev. Dr. Palmer for his discourse delivered last evening, and a copy requested for publication.--*Extract from the Minutes.*

J. SPAULDING, Rec. Secretary.

## DISCOURSE.

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PROVERBS, viii, 11.

*For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.*

Wisdom is intelligence as related to ends and the best means of attaining them. It is not a special faculty, but a result of the combined and felicitous working of several faculties. It is more than acuteness and force of intellect. It is more than mere knowledge. It is these in the particular combination and condition requisite in order to the doing of the best things in the best manner.

The wisdom of God is that in him which qualified him intellectually to be the Creator and Governor of the world. The wisdom of man is that in him which enables him to discern and choose what it behooves him to purpose and pursue, and how to direct his efforts in order to success. Without this, in the case of each individual, there can be no security against fatal errors in the ordering of life, and no sure ground of hope as regards ultimate well-being. It is this that gives true wisdom its inestimable value—that makes it more precious than rubies—that it is the

primary condition of all right and good activity. It is, among men, the mother of order, of society, of education, of science, of arts and inventions, of manufactures and commerce, of laws and institutions; the producing cause of all that is involved in well-directed and successful human life. The sacred writer asserts this in the context, in illustration of the general statement of the text. "By me kings reign and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. I lead in the way of righteousness—or in the right way—in the midst of the paths of judgment—or in judicious paths—that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures."\* It is only in so far as states are founded, and institutions established, and laws enacted, and governments administered, and social and civil life directed, by a true and divine wisdom, that humanity rises to the fulfilment of its earthly destiny. Nothing without wisdom can make a really great and happy people.

I take this general statement, that only a wise people can reach and permanently maintain the highest and best social condition which in the nature of things is possible, as a postulate and starting point as regards what I now propose to say. I place it distinctly before my own mind and yours as indicating the scope and spirit of the present discourse; not as a

\* Proverbs, viii, 15, 16, 18, 20 and 21.



thesis to be formally maintained. I desire to develop, illustrate and impress this thought, rather than to spend words in urging proofs of what all will probably be ready, without argument, to concede.

The theme is forcibly suggested by the circumstances under which we are assembled. No annual meeting has ever before brought us face to face with such facts as now confront us. The mighty struggle, the greatest beyond a doubt, if measured by the vastness of the contending forces, that has ever occurred in human history, has, since we last met, been ended. Our national life is saved. Our national unity is vindicated, not only as theoretically a right, but as a great, beneficent and forever settled fact. The future that now opens on us is, of necessity, therefore, new in many of its aspects. It is more solemn, if the responsibilities it imposes be seriously considered; more inspiring, if the possibilities of good which it reveals be clearly comprehended; more appalling, if the liabilities to evil be well weighed; in short, it is more grand and impressive altogether, than any dream of destiny that had ever been suggested to our thought before this war. We cannot shut our eyes on the momentousness of the present crisis.

What then is the pending issue — the thing to be decided as regards our future as a people? Is it not definitely this: — Shall an exalted and permanent civilization be here attained, or shall the degree of civilization already reached decline, and ultimately

perish, in the vices which wealth, luxury and popular ignorance tend always to produce? The one thing, or the other, it may be assumed, is sure to happen. The contest of material forces through which we have lately passed, gigantic as it was, did but inaugurate and typify a contest of intellectual and moral forces, more vast, more complicated, more certainly decisive of our fate, which we are now to wage with such strength and courage as we can. As the result of this contest, a civilization such as no people has as yet achieved is here to be wrought out; or such a social wreck is to be made as shall make us justly a hissing and a by-word to the nations, and plunge humanity itself into despair. We hope that it may be the purpose of God to give us the happy destiny which seems placed within our reach; but our hopes, however sanguine, will not fulfil themselves. Nor may we look to see miracles performed on our behalf. If a splendid and enduring civilization is here to be produced, it is indispensable that we distinctly understand by what means this must be accomplished, and set ourselves at once and faithfully to do the things, on the doing of which, under God, it is conditioned.

The first question that meets us, when we set about a careful examination of the subject is — What is the true idea of civilization? The word is a very familiar one. It may hardly seem necessary to inquire about its meaning. In fact, however, it is popularly used in a very loose and indeterminate manner. Even the

best writers who have discussed the subject have seemed to find it difficult to define the word with any considerable precision; and have commonly been content to employ it in a vague and general sense. Mr. Guizot is a good example. He expressly declines to offer an accurate definition. He prefers to endeavor to specify the particular elements of the *popular conception* of civilization.\* This he does sufficiently well perhaps, with the great defect, however, that he fails to bring out with distinctness and discrimination, the highest and most essential element of all—the moral.† His most concise statement is as follows:

“Two elements seem to be comprised in the great fact which we call civilization. It reveals itself by two symptoms; the progress of society, and the progress of individuals; the amelioration of the social system, and the expansion of the mind and faculties of man. Wherever the exterior condition of man becomes enlarged, quickened and improved; wherever the intellectual nature of man distinguishes itself by its energy, brilliancy and grandeur; wherever these two signs concur, and they often do so, notwithstanding the gravest imperfections in the social system, there man proclaims and applauds civilization.” ‡

\* *Gen. Hist. Civ.*, sec. 1, p. 19; 1st Am. Ed.

† Pres. Woolsey has noticed this among other defects of Mr. Guizot, in an able critique on his *Gen. Hist. Civ.*, in the *New Englander* for 1861.

‡ *Gen. Hist. Civ.*, p. 25.