

## Hymns 101 – Immortal, Invisible

*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

**Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.**

**Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;  
thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.**

**To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;  
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.**

**Thou reignest in glory; thou dwellest in light;  
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;  
all laud we would render: O help us to see  
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.**

**Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,  
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;  
But of all Thy rich graces this grace, Lord, impart  
Take the veil from our faces, the vile from our heart.**

**All laud we would render; O help us to see  
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee,  
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,  
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart.**



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Of this hymn, musicologist Erik Routley has written: "[Immortal Invisible] should give the reader a moment's pause. Most readers will think they know this hymn, the work of another Free Kirk [evangelical Free Church of Scotland movement of the mid to late 1800s] minister. But it never now appears as its author wrote it, and a closer look at it in its fuller form shows that it was by no means designed to be one of those general hymns of praise that the parson slams into the praise-list when he is in too much of a hurry to think of anything else but a hymn about the reading of scripture. Just occasionally editorial tinkering changes the whole personality of a hymn; it has certainly done so here."

### A Few Notes for the Modern Worshipper

It is impossible to express in words the power, might and majesty of God in human terms, but Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908) here does his best to use every adjective and gerund at his command to both give praise to His splendor and appeal for Him to open our hearts and allow us to experience more of Him.

The central metaphor of this hymn is of the light of God's glory veiling him from our unworthy sight, while at the same time burning through those veils to allow Christ to enter our hearts, imparting grace to those who accept it.

