

The classic series on Shepherd's stream a collection of sermons in the public domain by great theologians assembled here for your edification. Selected sermons of Jonathan Edwards section one sinners in the hands of an angry God, part one recording by Derek McLaughlin Enfield, Connecticut, July 8, 1741. Their foot shall slide in due time. Deuteronomy, chapter 32, verse 35. In this verse is threatened the vengeance of God on the wicked, unbelieving Israelites, who were God's visible people and who lived under the means of grace, but who, notwithstanding all God's wonderful works towards them, remained as verse 28, void of counsel, having no understanding in them.

Under all the cultivations of heaven they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit, as in the two verses next preceding the text. The expression I have chosen for my text, their foot shall slide in due time, seems to imply the following things relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed. One, that they were always exposed to destruction as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to fall. This is implied in the manner of their destruction coming upon them, being represented by their foot sliding. The same is expressed.

Psalm 73, verse 18 surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castest them down into destruction. Two, it implies that they were always exposed to sudden, unexpected destruction, as he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall. He cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning, which is also expressed in psalm 73, verses 18 and 19 surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment? Three another thing implied is that they are liable to fall of themselves without being thrown down by the hand of another, as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.

Four that the reason why they are not fallen already and do not fall now, is only that God's appointed time is not come. For it is said that when that due time or appointed time comes, their foot shall slide then they shall be left to fall as they are inclined by their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go, and then at that very instant they shall fall into destruction. As he that stands on such slippery, declining ground on the edge of a pit, he cannot stand alone. When he has let go, he immediately falls and is lost.

The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this there is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God. By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than, if nothing else but God's mere will, had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men. One moment. The truth of this observation may appear by the following considerations. One, there is no want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment.

Men's hands cannot be strong when God rises up. The strongest have no power to resist him, nor can any deliver out of his hands. He is not only able to cast wicked men into hell, but he can most easily do it. Sometimes an earthly prince meets with a great deal of difficulty to subdue a rebel who has found means to fortify himself, and has made himself strong by the numbers of his followers. But it is not so with God.

There is no fortress that is any defense from the power of God. Though hand join in hand, and vast multitudes of God's enemies combine and associate themselves, they are easily broken in pieces. They are as great heaps of light chaff before the whirlwind, or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames. We find it easy to tread on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth, so it is easy for us to cut or singe a slender thread that anything hangs by. Thus easy is it for God, when he pleases, to cast his enemies down to hell.

What are we that we should think to stand before him, at whose rebuke the earth trembles, and before whom the rocks are thrown down? Two, they deserve to be cast into hell, so that divine justice never stands in the way. It makes no objection against gods using his power at any moment to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary. Justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins.

Divine justice says, of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom, cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground. Luke, chapter 13, verse seven. The sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over their heads, and it is nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God's mere will that holds it back. Three, they are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them, so that they are bound over already to hell.

John chapter three, verse 18. He that believeth not is condemned already, so that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell. That is his place. From thence he is John, chapter eight, verse 23. Ye are from beneath, and thither he is bound.

It is the place that justice and God's word, and the sentence of his unchangeable law assign to him. Four. They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they do not go down into hell at each moment is not because God, in whose power they are, is not then very angry with them, as he is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, who there feel and bear the fierceness of his wrath. Yea, God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth, yea, doubtless with many that are now in this congregation, who, it may be, are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell.

So that it is not because God is unmindful of their wickedness, and does not resent it, that he does not let loose his hand and cut them off. God is not altogether such and one as themselves, though they might imagine him to be so. The wrath of God burns against them their damnation does not slumber. The pit is prepared, the fire is made ready. The furnace is now hot, ready to receive them.

The flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is wet and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them. Five. The devil stands ready to fall upon them, and sees them as his own. At what moment God shall permit him, they belong to him.

He has their souls in his possession, and under his dominion. The scripture represents them as his goods. Luke, chapter eleven, verse twelve. The devils watch them. They are ever by them at their right hand they stand waiting for them, like greedy, hungry lions that see their prey and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back.

If God should withdraw his hand by which they are restrained, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls. The old serpent is gaping for them. Hell opens its mouth wide to receive them, and if God should permit it, they would be hastily swallowed up and lost. Six. There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish principles reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into hellfire, if it were not for God's restraints.

There is laid in the very nature of carnal men a foundation for the torments of hell. There are those corrupt principles in reigning power in them, and in full possession of them that are seeds of hellfire. These principles are active and powerful, exceeding violent in their nature. And if it were not for the restraining hand of God upon them, they would soon break out. They would flame out after the same manner as the same corruptions.

The same enmity does in the hearts of damned souls, and would beget the same torments as they do in them. The souls of the wicked are in scripture compared to the troubled sea. Isaiah, chapter 57, verse 20. For the present God restrains their wickedness by his mighty power, as he does the raging waves of the troubled sea, saying, hitherto shalt thou come but no further. But if God should withdraw that restraining power, it would soon carry all before it.

Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul. It is destructive in its nature. And if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly miserable. The corruption of the heart of man is immoderate and boundless in its fury. And while wicked men live here, it is like fire, pent up by God's restraints.

Whereas if it were let loose, it would set on fire the course of nature. And as the heart is now a sink of sin, so if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into fiery oven or a furnace of fire and brimstone. Seven. It is no security to wicked men for one moment. That there are no visible means of death at hand.

It is no security to a natural man that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages shows this is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen unthought of ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering. And there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight.

And these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noonday. The sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of his providence to destroy any wicked man at any moment. All the means that there are of sinners going out of the world are so in God's hands, and so universally and absolutely subject to his power and determination, that it does not depend at all the less on the mere will of God whether sinners shall at any moment go to hell, than if means were never made use of, or at all concerned in the case.

Eight. Natural men's prudence and care to preserve their own lives, or the care of others to preserve them, do not secure them a moment. To this divine providence and universal experience do also bear testimony. There is this clear evidence that men's own wisdom is no security to them from death, that if it were otherwise, we should see some difference between the wise and politic men of the world, and others with regard to their liableness to early and unexpected death. But how is it in fact, ecclesiastes, chapter two, verse 16.

How dieth the wise man even as the fool?

Nine. All wicked men's pains and contrivance, which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men do not secure them from hell. One moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell flatters himself that he shall escape it. He depends upon himself for his own security.

He flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do. Every one lays out matters in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself, and that his schemes will not fail. They hear indeed that there are but few saved, and that the greater part of men that have died heretofore are gone to hell. But each one imagines that he lays out matters better for his own escape than others have done. He

does not intend to come to that place of torment.

He says within himself that he intends to take effectual care, and to order matters so for himself as not to fail. But the foolish children of men miserably delude themselves in their own schemes, and in confidence in their own strength and wisdom. They trust to nothing but a shadow. The greater part of those who heretofore have lived under the same means of grace, and are now dead, are undoubtedly gone to hell. And it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive it was not because they did not lay out matters as well for themselves to secure their own escape.

If we could speak with them and inquire of them one by one, whether they expected, when alive, and when they used to hear about hell, ever to be the subjects of misery, we doubtless should hear one and another reply. No, I never intended to come here. I had laid out matters otherwise in my mind. I thought I should contrive well for myself. I thought my scheme good.

I intended to take effectual care. But it came upon me unexpected. I did not look for it at that time, and in that manner it came as a thief. Death outwitted me. God's wrath was too quick for me.

O my cursed foolishness. I was flattering myself and pleasing myself with vain dreams of what I would do hereafter. And when I was saying peace and safety, then sudden destruction came upon me. Ten God has laid himself under no obligation by any promise to keep any natural man out of hell. One moment.

God certainly has made no promises either of eternal life or of any deliverance or preservation from eternal death. But what are contained in the covenant of grace? The promises that are given in Christ, in whom all the promises are, yea, and amen. But surely they have no interest in the promises of the covenant of grace, who are not the children of the covenant, who do not believe in any of the promises, and have no interest in the mediator of the covenant. So that whatever some have imagined and pretended about promises made to natural men's earnest seeking and knocking, it is plain and manifest that whatever pains a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes, till he believes in Christ, God is under no manner of obligation to keep him a moment from eternal destruction.

So that thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell. They have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it. And God is dreadfully provoked. His anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell. And they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger.

Neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up. One moment. The devil is waiting for them. Hell is gaping for them. The flames gather and flash about them, and would feign, lay hold on them and swallow them up.

The fire, pent up in their own hearts, is struggling to break out, and they have no interest in any mediator. There are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God. End of section one. This is a librivox recording.

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