

A Class of Sinners Excluded From Mercy.

by Edward Payson

God shows no mercy to those who have no understanding and have long rejected and abused the offered mercy and grace of God.

Scripture: Psalm 81:11, Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 1:22, Romans 1:28, Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Repentance"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the warning in Isaiah 27:11, emphasizing the error of assuming God's mercy without repentance, highlighting the consequences of neglecting spiritual understanding and rejecting God's grace. He explains that those without understanding lack spiritual knowledge, fear of God, and obedience to His commands, leading to a state of being forsaken by God. Payson warns of the terribleness of God's threatening to show no mercy or favor to those who persist in sin, illustrating the justness of this decree based on their rejection of mercy, abuse of grace, and disobedience to God.

Transcript

"It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor"

Isaiah 27:11

My hearers, there is no error or mistake into which the wayward mind of man can fall, against which a warning or caution is not given us in the Bible. The passage which has just been read, is admirably adapted, if it was not expressly designed, to guard men against an error, which, though not often openly avowed, prevails, I suspect, very extensively. The error to which I allude is this: When sinners hear of the dangers to which they are exposed, and of the miseries which will be their portion hereafter, unless they repent, they often say in their hearts, we are God's creatures; he has brought us into existence without our consent; he is therefore bound in justice to take care of us, and to prevent our existence from becoming a curse.

And even if he is not bound in justice to do this, yet he is merciful; and he will surely show mercy to his own creatures; he will not forsake forever the work of his own hands. We cannot therefore believe that he will make any of us miserable forever. We cannot doubt that, in some way or other, he will secure the final salvation, if not of all men, yet of all who are not more criminal than we have been. He will either save us without conversion, or, if conversion be necessary, he will cause us to be converted before we die.

Such thoughts are, doubtless, entertained by hundreds and thousands who never avow them; and they serve to harden those by whom they are entertained in a false and fatal security, which scarcely any thing can disturb. Now it seems as if our text was uttered on purpose to sweep away all such thoughts, and to disturb the false peace which they produce. In this passage God adverts directly to the fact, that he is the Former, the Creator of those whom he, notwithstanding, threatens to destroy.

He says, respecting at least one class of sinners, He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. As if he had said, Though I am their Creator, and they are my creatures, though I am the Former of their bodies and the Father of their spirits; yet I will execute upon them all my threatenings, I will deal with them according to the rules of strict justice, and treat them as if there were no mercy in my nature. Let them not therefore hope to escape, because their Maker is their judge.

Let them expect no more favor, than if they were to be judged by a stranger. My hearers, if there are any among you who do not regard the threatenings of Jehovah as idle words, they will doubtless wish to know of what characters he speaks, what class of sinners he threatens to treat in this manner. They are clearly, though briefly described in our text. In discoursing upon it, I shall endeavor, I. To illustrate this description II. To show the terribleness of the threatening here denounced; and, III.

To prove that it is just. I. The characters here mentioned are described as persons of no understanding. But what is here meant by understanding? Certainly not what we commonly mean by that term. Certainly not reason, or intellectual abilities. No one can suppose that the persons here censured and threatened were idiots or madmen. Had this been their character, they would have been incapable of sin, and consequently undeserving of punishment. The word, understanding, is obviously used in this passage, as in very many others, to signify spiritual understanding, or knowledge of religious truth.

Thus we are told in one passage, that to depart from evil is understanding; in another, that the knowledge of God is understanding; in a third, that a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments; and in a fourth, that Christ's words are all plain to him that understandeth. Of course, to refuse to depart from evil, to be ignorant of God, and to disobey his commands, and to find Christ's words unintelligible, are proofs that, in the sense of the text, men are without understanding.

In another passage we are told, that he who followeth vain persons, that is, he who imitates sinners, and walks in their ways, is void of understanding. Our Savior intimates that, to be ignorant of the defiling power of sin, and of the sinfulness of our hearts, is also a proof that we possess this character. And in another place he intimates, with equal clearness, that unbelief; or the absence of faith in him, is a proof that men are without understanding. In fine, we are told in general terms, that wicked men understand not judgment, but they who fear the Lord understand all things; and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

It is evident, then, that a man may possess great intellectual abilities, may be wise with respect to this world, may have acquired much knowledge of subjects not immediately connected with religion, and yet be without understanding in the sense of our text. They are so. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand. And what was the result of his examination? They are all gone out of the way, there is none that understandeth, no not one.

We are also assured that madness is in the hearts of the children of men; and the prodigal son, whom all men naturally resemble, is represented as having been beside himself, till he resolved to return to his father. But some may ask, if all men are naturally without spiritual understanding, and if, as the text

asserts, God will not have mercy on such as sustain this character, will it not follow that he can have mercy on none; that all must perish? I answer, it must be recollected, that the persons referred to in the text were God's ancient people that they had been favored with religious instruction; that they had been clearly and repeatedly taught their duty, urged to perform it, and warned of the consequences of neglecting its performance.

Of course, they had enjoyed many most favorable opportunities of acquiring spiritual understanding, of becoming wise unto salvation. They had the word of God in their hands; they had religious teachers to explain it and press upon them a compliance with its contents; and they had been the subjects of many providential dispensations, both merciful and afflictive, which were designed and well adapted to lead them to reflection. It was not till all these means of instruction had been long employed in vain; it was not till after repeated calls and warnings that the awful declaration in our text was made respecting them.

It follows that, though all men are naturally without spiritual understanding, this declaration does not refer to all. It refers to those only who, like the Jews, have long enjoyed, but have abused and neglected means of grace and opportunities of acquiring religious knowledge. Of such and such only God here says, He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. Let us consider, II. The terribleness of this threatening. There is something terrible in its very sound.

To hear the eternal, omnipotent Creator say respecting sinful, guilty, dependent creatures, I will show them no mercy, no favor, is enough to make the ears of every one that heareth to tingle. But terrible as is the sound of these words, their meaning is much more so. It includes every thing dreadful, every thing which man has reason to deprecate. It implies, as has already been observed, that God will deal with them according to the rules of strict justice; that he will treat them as they deserve; and as sinners deserve nothing, he will grant them nothing.

But more particularly, this threatening implies, 1. That God will either deny them the common blessings of his providence, or grant them those blessings in anger, and send a curse with them. His language to such characters is, If ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory to my name, I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yea, I have cursed them already, because ye laid it not to heart. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked. Cursed shalt thou be in thy basket and store; cursed shalt thou be in thy children; cursed when thou goest out, and when thou comest in.

My hearers, it is a terrible thing to have the common blessings of providence given to us in anger, with a curse; for they will, in this case, be of no service to us; and we shall be called to render a strict account of them another day. Scarcely any thing can be more dreadful than to have talents, or knowledge, or wealth, or influence bestowed on us, without a heart to improve them; for they will terribly aggravate our final condemnation. A sinner, poor, ignorant, and without influence, is much less to be pitied, than one who possesses wealth, learning, or power; for he will have much less to answer for in the great day of account.

The threatening implies, 2. That God will either deprive sinners of their religious privileges, means, and opportunities, or withhold his blessing, and thus render them useless. Thus he dealt with the Jews. He still sent them messengers, and instructions, and warnings; but did not send a blessing with them. Of course, they were entirely ineffectual, and answered no other purpose than to harden them in sin, and increase their condemnation. He said to them, Hear ye, indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

And he said this, because they had long refused to perceive and understand. In a similar manner he often treats similar characters at the present day. He still permits them to have the Bible in their hands, to hear the gospel, to enjoy the day and means of grace; but he permits this, not in mercy, but in anger; he withholds his blessing from these means, and in consequence they prove a savor of death unto death to those who possess them. This also is a most terrible evil. On this side of everlasting burnings, there can scarcely be a greater.

Much less terrible would it be, to lose at once, and forever, religious privileges, means and opportunities, than to have them continued to us as a curse. This threatening implies, 3. That God will withhold from such characters the awakening, enlightening, and sanctifying influences of his Spirit. These influences are especially called his grace or favor. Of course he will withhold them from those to whom no favor is shown. And those from whom he withholds them will remain forever without understanding, without knowledge, without religion; and will, of course, perish in their sins.

This is the evil which David deprecated so earnestly. O, take not thy Holy Spirit from me. This God himself represents as a most terrible evil. Wo unto them, he says, when I forsake them. Wo, indeed! for, my hearers, a sinner had much better be in the regions of despair, than in this world, after the Spirit of God has finally forsaken him; because he will do nothing but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath; and the longer he lives, the more wrath will he accumulate. This threatening farther implies, Lastly, that at the Judgment day God will condemn such characters to depart accursed into everlasting fire, and that he will grant them no mitigation of their miseries through eternity.

There is no medium between mercy and condemnation. Those, therefore, on whom God has no mercy he must condemn. To shorten or mitigate their sufferings, would be a favor. But if he shows them no favor their sufferings can neither be shortened nor mitigated. To use the awful language of inspiration,--they must drink forever and ever of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation. And now, my hearers, put together all that has been said of the import of this threatening, and say, whether it is more than the words fairly and necessarily imply.

Say, too, whether any threatening can be more terrible; whether any combination of words can be more deeply fraught with horror and despair than these. He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor. Alas, if he who made them, has no mercy on them, who will, who can? And what can be more deplorable than the situation of a sinner against whom this threatening is gone out! But is this terrible threatening just? Can the sin of which these characters are guilty deserve such a doom as this?

This leads us to show, as was proposed, III. That it is perfectly just. It is so, 1. Because the persons against whom this threatening is denounced never ask for mercy, never seek the favor of God. This is evident from their character. Being ignorant of God, of the sinfulness of their own hearts, and of the defiling power of sin, they feel not their need of mercy to pardon them, of grace to sanctify them, of God's favor to make them happy. Of course, they never ask or seek for these blessings.

Not one among them ever said from his heart, God be merciful to me a sinner. And why should he give them what they never ask for; what they do not regard as worth seeking? We might as well say, that it is unjust for him not to give wealth to an indolent man, or learning to one who neglects study, as accuse him of injustice because he does not show mercy to those who never seek it. If he shows them no favor, he shows them as much as they ask for, as much as they deserve. He had said to them, If thou cry after

knowledge, and lift up thy voice for understanding; if thou seek for it as for silver and search for it as for hid treasures; thou shalt then understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

But they did not think the blessing worth all this trouble. They did not choose to have it on these reasonable terms. They chose rather to remain without understanding, though they were warned that, in consequence, they would lose forever the favor of God. How then can they complain, when they have what they chose? 2. The justice of this threatening will appear still more evident if we consider, that these persons have long rejected and abused the offered mercy and grace of God.

We have already seen that our text refers, not to every one who is destitute of spiritual understanding, but to those only who, like the Jews, have been long favored with the means of acquiring it; those to whom God has spoken, whom he has offered to teach, whom he has tenderly invited and entreated to accept of mercy, and not to receive his grace in vain. Now such characters must, of course, have often sinned against the mercy and grace of God. Year after year, he has followed them, saying, Turn ye at my reproof; and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words to you.

But they refused to turn. They set at nought all his counsels, they regarded none of his reproofs. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and practically said to him, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. How just is it then, that he should take them at their word; that he should never show them mercy, but give them up to walk in their own ways, and be filled with the fruit of their own devices! Mercy was offered to you, it was urged upon you; you were entreated to accept it, is a reply which will forever shut the mouth of all who perish under the threatening denounced in the passage. 3.

This threatening is just because the characters to whom it refers must be guilty of many other aggravated offences. They must have been destitute of the fear of God; for to fear him is the beginning of wisdom. They must have refused to renounce their sins; for to depart from evil is understanding. They must have loved darkness rather than light; for they rejected the latter and chose the former; and the reason was, their deeds were evil. They must have followed and imitated sinners; for this all do who are void of understanding.

Finally, they must have disobeyed God's commands; for all who obey them have a good understanding. And who will venture to say, that men who disobey God's commands, who imitate sinners, whose deeds are evil, who love darkness rather than light, who refuse to renounce their sins, and who have no fear of God before their eyes, deserve that God should have mercy upon them, or show them any favor? If such characters can deserve mercy, who do not deserve it? If it is unjust to punish such characters, on whom can punishment be justly inflicted!

Surely, if there are any on whom God ought not to have mercy, and to whom he ought to show no favor, they are such sinners as are described in our text. And now, my hearers, what use shall we make of this subject? You have heard that there is a class of sinners on whom God will not have mercy, and to whom he will show no favor. Does it not then become us to inquire, whether there are any of this class among ourselves? Painful as is the thought, I cannot but fear that there are.

I fear, greatly fear, that there are not a few in this assembly, of whom their Maker has said, I will not have mercy upon them. I have two reasons for fearing this, and I will tell you what they are. In the first place, it is but too certain that there are many among us, of whom it may be said in the sense of the text, they have no understanding. The proofs that many possess this character are too plain to be denied or overlooked. Many of you, my hearers, cannot but know that you possess it. Many of you know that you are not

influenced by the fear of God; and this is one proof that you have no understanding.

Many of you know that you do not keep his commandments; this is another proof. Many of you know that you have never forsaken your sins; this is a third proof. Many of you know that you imitate the conduct of sinners this is a fourth proof. Many of you know that the words of Christ, the doctrines of the gospel, do not, in your view, appear plain or intelligible; this is a fifth proof. Many of you know that you do not possess that spiritual knowledge of God which is described in the Scriptures; this is a sixth proof.

And many of you know that you do not see the sinfulness of your own hearts, and the defiling nature of sin; this is a seventh proof. These, taken together, compose the principal characteristics of those who, in the sense of our text, have no understanding. And all these characteristics are certainly found in many persons now before me. And while, like the Jews, you possess these characteristics, you have like them long been favored, in a high degree, with religious privileges, means, and opportunities.

I know of but few congregations, even in this highly favored land, that have enjoyed the means of grace, and of acquiring religious knowledge more amply than you have. You have had the Bible in your hands from your childhood. Its contents have been explained and urged upon you, Sabbath after Sabbath, and year after year. It has been the great aim of your minister to preach the gospel to you, in as plain and intelligible a manner as possible, and to hold up before every man his own character and situation in such a light that he could not, unless willfully blind, avoid seeing it.

He has endeavored to present the truth to your minds, and consciences, and hearts, in every way which he thought calculated to awaken, convince, alarm and melt you. You have also, in repeated instances, been addressed by some of the most able, faithful, and impressive ministers in New England. You have had opportunities of hearing the gospel not only in season, but out of season; not only on the sabbath but on other days; not only in the house of God, but in your own houses.

Meetings for religious inquiry have been established; you have been invited to attend them; and those who felt unwilling to attend them have been often requested to visit their pastor at his own house, and converse with him in private. In short, the whole apparatus of religious means has been employed to make you wise unto salvation; and it is not perhaps too much to say, that the Jews themselves who are referred to in our text, were not warned more plainly or frequently than you have been.

One thing at least is certain. They never heard of that Savior, and of that redeeming love which has been urged upon you again and again. And yet, as it respects many of you, all has proved in vain. Indeed, many of you have not diligently attended on these means. They have indeed attended public worship on the Sabbath, when no real or fancied difficulty prevented; for they had then nothing else to do. But all other opportunities of hearing the truth, have, by not a few, been entirely neglected.

And now, unless a change for the better should soon be witnessed, our meetings for religious inquiry, and our weekly lecture must be given up, because so few think it worth their while to attend them. These facts prove conclusively, that the language of the text is no less applicable to many of this assembly, than it was to the Jews. They prove that there are many who do not seek after knowledge, who do not think it worth seeking for. Of course, they furnish one reason for fearing that God has said respecting them, he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor.

A second reason which I have for fearing this is, that, with respect to many of you, God appears to be already executing this threatening. He does not indeed take away your religious privileges and means of

grace; but what is far more dreadful, he withholds his blessing from them. It is evident as facts can make it, that he does not have mercy upon you, that he does not show you favor; for he does not awaken you, he does not convince you of sin, he does not convert you, he does not pardon you.

Of course, the means of grace do you no good. The language of God's dealings with hundreds in this assembly is, and for years has been, Make the heart of this people fat, and shut their eyes, and make their ears dull of hearing; lest they should hear with their ears, and see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them. And if he should continue to withhold his grace and mercy in the same way, for a few years longer, all who have passed the meridian of life, and many who have not reached it, will be in their graves, will have died without mercy, and will perish forever without mercy.

And does not this look very much as if God had said respecting the impenitent part of this assembly, I will not have mercy on them? Does it not look as if the decree had gone forth against them? Does it not afford reason to fear that Christ has wept over them, as he did over Jerusalem, after her day of grace was ended, saying, O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace. But now they are hidden from thine eyes! My impenitent hearers, if Christ has said this of you, if God has in just displeasure determined to have no mercy upon you, your doom is as certain as if you were already shut up in the prison of despair, with an impassable gulf fixed between you and heaven.

I do not assert that this is the case. I do not say that because God has not yet shown you mercy, he never will do it. But I do say, that there is reason, great reason to fear that such is the fact. And I do say, that if he determined not to have mercy upon you, and to show you no favor, this determination is perfectly just; for remember, I have often warned you to beware of grieving God's Holy Spirit, and turning away his love and mercy from you. Of no danger have I warned you more frequently, or more loudly than of this.

I must then say, that if this danger has overtaken any of you, if the decree has gone out against you, it is most just. Were I certain that this is the case, I should scarcely think it worth while to address you again; but as it is possible that there are, at least, some among you, against whom the door of mercy is not yet shut, I would once more attempt to rouse them, hoping that it may not be too late. If any yield to the attempt, it will prove that, with respect to them, it is not too late.

O then, be persuaded to yield to me, to believe me, while I once more remind you of the terribleness of this threatening, of the dreadful situation of those, on whom God will have no mercy; and while in his name I once more say to you, Turn ye at my reproof. I will pour out my Spirit upon you. If you can think of this threatening without being alarmed; if you can hear this invitation without being moved, it will be one more convincing proof that you are indeed without understanding.

And if God does not in mercy bless this warning, it will be one more awful indication that he is determined to have no mercy upon you, to show you no favor. Tell me then, O, tell me, I beseech you, does this warning affect you? With the anguished solicitude of a parent inquiring whether the means just employed for the relief of an apparently expiring child are successful, I ask, does this warning affect you? Does the still small voice of God within you second the voice of his word?

Does he say, Sinner, sinner! why will you die? And is there any thing within you which can yet hear and feel? If there is, blessed, O, blessed be a merciful God, that he has not yet in just anger shut up his tender mercies forever from you. Blessed be his name, that your consciences are not yet seared as with a hot iron, that you are not yet past feeling, that you are not yet given up to final hardness of heart. But if you are

yet capable of feeling any thing, beware, O, beware!

It may be the last time that the Spirit of God will ever cause the truth to affect you. If you should lose your present impressions he may depart, never to return; and God may say, I will not have mercy upon you. O then, cherish these impressions, as the apple of your eye. Cherish them as you would cherish your own souls. Watch the spark of conviction within you, as you would watch the dying lamp of life. Make it immediately your great business to become wise unto salvation.

Cry after knowledge. Lift up your voice for understanding. Seek for it as for silver. Search for it as for hid treasure. Above all, depart from evil, and turn to him who giveth wisdom liberally, and upbraideth not. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him turn unto the Lord. And are there any present to whom these directions will not apply, any who feel nothing? But why do I ask? If such there are, I can say nothing to them; I can do nothing for them. They are in the hands of God, and he must, and he will do with them, as seemeth good in his sight.

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