

An Early Interest in Gods Mercy Essential to a Happy Life.

by Edward Payson

Seeking God's mercy early in life is essential for happiness, freedom from fears, guilt, care, and anxiety, and the mastery of appetites and passions.

Scripture: Psalm 25:7, Psalm 90:14, Proverbs 22:6, Ecclesiastes 12:1, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philipians 4:11, 1 Timothy 4:12, Hebrews 3:15

Topics: "Early Conversion", "Gods Mercy"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the importance of seeking and obtaining God's mercy early in life to experience true happiness, freedom from fears of death, guilt, and anxiety, and contentment in all circumstances. He emphasizes that starting a religious life in youth leads to a life of joy and gladness, while delaying conversion may result in missed opportunities, regrets, and struggles. Payson highlights the benefits of early conversion in avoiding sinful habits, temptations, and the bitter consequences of a life spent in sin. He encourages the youth to prioritize seeking God's mercy now rather than later to secure a life of peace, contentment, and spiritual growth.

Transcript

"O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

Psalm 90:14

hearers, should all the youth in this assembly express sincerely their secret wishes and inclinations, it can scarcely be doubted, that many of them would say something like this; I should wish to live a long life, to be allowed to spend it in worldly pleasures and pursuits, and then, just before its termination, to be converted, and prepared for death. Such, indeed, it is evident, must be the wishes of every person, who, while he is convinced that religion is necessary, does not love it; for while he does not love religion, while he regards a religious life as a life of unhappiness, he will, of course, wish to defer the commencement of such a life, as long as he can, consistently with his own safety.

My youthful hearers, am I wrong in supposing that such are your wishes? Am I wrong in supposing, that if it were submitted to your choice, whether your conversion should take place now, or at the close of life, many, if not most of you, would choose the latter? If such would be your choice, your feelings evidently

differ widely from those by which the pious writer of our text was actuated. He exclaims, O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

By the mercy of God is here evidently intended, his pardoning mercy. But God's pardoning mercy is extended, as the psalmist well knew, to none but the penitent, but those who have really commenced a religious life. And he knew that none can obtain such manifestations of this mercy as will satisfy them, except those who pursue a religious course with zeal and diligence. When he said, O satisfy us early with thy mercy, he did, therefore, in effect say, Incline us early to enter on a religious course of life, and to pursue it with such zeal and diligence, as shall afford us satisfactory evidence, that we are indeed the children of God, partakers of his mercy, and heirs of his salvation.

The psalmist then, it appears, thought it highly desirable, that men should seek and obtain God's mercy; or, in other words, commence a religious course, in early life, --as early as possible. The reason which he assigns for the opinion is particularly worthy of remark. O satisfy us early with thy mercy; why? that we may be happy hereafter? No; but that we may live happily here; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. This language evidently and forcibly intimates, that if the young early seek and obtain God's pardoning mercy, the way will be prepared for them to rejoice and be glad till their days.

And it intimates with equal clearness, that, if they do not early seek and obtain mercy, joy and gladness cannot attend them. Or, to express the same sentiments in different language, he who in early youth commences and diligently pursues, a religious course, will be happy through life; but he who does not, at that period, commence a religious life, will not live happily, even though he should subsequently become religious. That these intimations are perfectly accordant with truth; that every man who wishes to rejoice and be glad all his days, must early seek and obtain God's pardoning mercy, it is my present design to show.

With this view I remark, 1. That a man may live, happily, that he may rejoice and be glad all his days, it is necessary that he should be early freed from all fears of death. That a man who is subject to such fears, who regards with dread an event which is constantly approaching, to which he is every moment exposed, and from which it is impossible to escape, cannot be happy, it is needless to prove. But every man who has not sought and obtained God's pardoning mercy is, in a greater or less degree, subject to such fears.

Nor is this any proof of weakness. It is perfectly reasonable that he should entertain such fears, that he should regard death as an evil greatly to be dreaded; for, to such a man, it must be the greatest of all evils, since it will separate him forever from everything which he values or loves. And the more prosperous he is, the more his honors, friends and possessions increase, the more reason he has to fear an event which will strip him of them all. O death, exclaims an apocryphal writer, how terrible are the thoughts of thee to a man who is at ease in his possessions.

Indeed, could we look into the hearts of men, we should probably find that nothing so much embitters life to them, as apprehensions of death. And how is a sinner, who has no interest in God's mercy, to free himself from such apprehensions? Will it be said, he may refuse to think of death? I answer, he cannot always banish this subject from his thoughts in a world like this, where so many things occur which are suited to remind him of it. Scarcely a day passes in which he does not meet with something which forces upon him a conviction, that he is mortal; that he is constantly approaching the grave, and liable every moment to fall into it.

But from this cause of unhappiness, the man who early obtains satisfactory evidence that he is a subject of God's pardoning mercy, is entirely free. The Saviour on whom he relies came on purpose to deliver those, who, through fear of death, were all their life time subject to bondage. This deliverance he grants to all who have obtained mercy of the Lord, and enables them triumphantly to exclaim, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through Jesus Christ my Redeemer.

And O, what a cause of unhappiness, what all oppressive load is removed from a man's mind, when he can adopt this language, when he ceases to regard death as an evil to be dreaded! 2. That a man may rejoice and be glad all his days, it is necessary that he should be freed in early life from a guilty conscience, and from apprehensions of God's displeasure. That a man whose conscience troubles him cannot be happy, no one who has a conscience needs be informed. And that apprehensions of God's displeasure and of its terrible consequences, must render men unhappy, is equally obvious.

The man who cannot be happy when alone, whose own thoughts are unpleasant companions, who cannot look into his own breast without uneasiness, nor up to heaven without terror, nor toward the eternal world without apprehension, must surely be very far from deserving to be regarded as a happy man. If he ever enjoys anything like happiness, it can be then only when he forgets that he is an immortal being, and that there is a God to whom he is accountable. But these things no unpardoned sinner can always forget.

The recollection of them will return at intervals to disturb his peace; and if he has received much religious instruction, it will return often. The understanding and conscience of such a man cannot but be at war with the temper which he indulges, and with the course which he pursues. And even when they are not actually reproaching him, and when no distinct apprehensions of an offended God, of judgment and eternity press upon his mind, he often feels that indescribable uneasiness, restlessness and dissatisfaction, which are the almost inseparable attendants of all who are not at peace with God.

Agreeably, we read that the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; that they travail with pain all their days; that a dreadful sound is in their ears, that they believe not that they shall return out of darkness. But from these causes of unhappiness the man who is early satisfied with God's pardoning mercy, is free. He knows the blessedness of the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered. He enjoys peace of conscience and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He knows that heaven regards with an approving eye the course which he pursues; that God is his friend, heaven his destined home, and everlasting glory and felicity his reward. Hence he can be happy in solitude; nay, in solitude his happiest hours are spent. He is not obliged to rush into company for the sake of escaping from his own thoughts. He is not obliged to walk with his face bent downward to the earth, lest he should catch a glimpse of that glorious sun which shines in heaven, and its brightness should pain his eye.

No; he can look up to that sun, not only without pain, but with delight; for he rejoices with joy unspeakable, while contemplating its unsullied and unfading glories. Nor is he obliged carefully to confine his thoughts within the narrow circle around him, lest they should wander into the eternal world, and bring back cause of alarm. On the contrary, he sends them forward with pleasure to visit that world; he fixes on it the eye of delighted contemplation, and anticipates the hour when he shall be permitted to enter it, for he regards it as the place where the objects of his supreme affections reside, and where his happiness is to be

rendered perfect and complete.

In a word, all those invisible and eternal realities, every thought which gives pain to the guilty, unpardoned sinner, are to him sources of happiness. And at the same time, he derives more pleasure from temporal blessings than they ever afford the sinner, because he tastes the goodness of God in them, and because his enjoyment of them is less embittered by fears that they will be taken away. Surely then the man who wishes to enjoy life, to rejoice and be glad all his days, should seek to be satisfied early with God's mercy.

3.

To render a man happy during the whole progress of life, it is necessary that he should be early freed from care and anxiety, and especially from apprehensions of losing what he most loves. A feeling of safety, of security, is indispensably necessary to our happiness. But it is impossible that an unpardoned sinner should feel perfectly safe, or that he should be free from care, anxiety, and apprehension. He has no almighty friend, no father in heaven, on whom he can cast the burden of his cares.

He cannot conceal from himself the fact, that he is every moment liable to lose all the objects which he values and loves, and he knows, that at death, if not before, he must be separated from them all. In fine, his treasure is laid up on earth, his habitation is built upon the ice, his friends are like himself, all frail, dying creatures; and he has nothing which he can with propriety call his own; nothing on which he can lay his hand and say, this object at least is safe. How then can he be free from anxiety and apprehension, and how while subject to these can he be happy?

But from this cause of unhappiness the man who early obtains satisfactory evidence that he is interested in God's pardoning mercy is free. His treasure, his portion, his chief good, is laid up, not on earth but in heaven, and he knows that it is safe, that it cannot be lost. Nor has he any reason to be anxious respecting his temporal concerns, or his lot in life; for he knows that his portion is allotted, and all his concerns managed by unerring wisdom and goodness; that all things shall work together for his good, and that it is his privilege and his duty to be careful for nothing, but to cast all his cares on that heavenly Father who careth for him.

Hence he can say, The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Although the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be in the vine; the labor of the olive should fail and the fields should yield no meat; the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall; yet I will joy in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Nay, though the earth should be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waves thereof should roar and be troubled, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet the Lord of hosts is with me, the God of Jacob is my refuge.

4.

That a man may rejoice and be glad all his days, he must early learn, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content. A discontented man is, of course, an unhappy man. But it is impossible that an unconverted sinner should be otherwise than discontented. To exhort him to be contented is the most idle thing imaginable. As well might we exhort a thirsty man not to feel thirst, while nothing is given him to satisfy it. The reason is obvious. While the soul is empty it cannot but feel uneasy, dissatisfied, discontented.

But so long as it is without God, the only fountain of living waters, the only being who can fill the soul, it must be empty. It will crave something, and pine after something, which it cannot find. The situation of a man without God, as it respects happiness, is like that of a man without the sun, as it respects light. The latter may surround himself with lamps, and thus provide a supply of artificial light; but his lamps will often

burn dimly, and will sometimes be extinguished; and even while they burn most brightly, their pale, sickly light will afford but a poor substitute for the pure, reviving, all-disclosing radiance of the sun; a substitute with which the eye could not long be satisfied.

Just so a man, who is without God in the world, may surround himself with friends and earthly possessions, and make the comfort which they afford a substitute for the consolation of God, and the enjoyment of his presence. But it is, at best, a miserable substitute, a substitute with which the soul cannot be contented. But far different is the situation of one who is satisfied early with God's mercy. What the sinner seeks in vain, he has found. The light which sheds its radiance on his path, is furnished, not by lamps, but by the sun, a sun which never sets.

The water which quenches his spirit flows, not from broken cisterns, but from the inexhaustible fountain of living waters. Of this water, our Saviour says, he that drinketh of it shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life. Such a man has then the sources of contentment in his own bosom. He carries them with him wherever he goes; and when we recollect that, in addition to this, he has been favored by the mercy of God with a submissive temper, we need not be surprised to hear that he soon learns in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content.

Finally. That a man may rejoice and be glad all his days, it is absolutely necessary that he should early obtain the mastery of his appetites and passions, and be secured against the evils into which they would lead him. What these evils are, it is scarcely necessary to say, since they prevail but too extensively among us. Look around, and you will see on every side young men, whom appetites and passions are plunging into intemperance, sensuality, and every species of vicious excess, and thus ruining them not only for the future, but for the present world.

You see them forming habits, whose chains it will be exceedingly difficult for them to break, and which, unless broken, will drag them away to destruction. And no young man can have any security that he shall not be left to form such habits, unless he obtains that security which is afforded by God's sanctifying grace and pardoning mercy; unless he early commits himself to that great and good Shepherd, who has engaged to preserve all his sheep. Until this is done, he is at the mercy of every gust of temptation, every sudden sally of appetite and passion.

It is in vain that, in his sober moments, he resolves not to yield to temptation. How little such resolutions, how little any human restraints avail to secure him, melancholy observation but too clearly shows. How many promising young men have we seen who, while they remained under the parental roof, were moral, correct, and apparently fortified against temptation; but when they were removed from it, fell an easy prey to temptation, and sunk into the arms of vicious indulgence!

And how many have we seen who, after passing safely through the dangerous period of youth, became the wretched victims of intemperance in manhood. Presume not then, young man, upon thine own strength. Where so many others have fallen, thou mayest fall. Against such a fall thou canst have no security, until thou obtainest the protection of God. Let him hold thee up, and then, and then only, wilt thou be safe. This safety is enjoyed by all who are satisfied early with his mercy.

They are taught and assisted by his grace to crucify their affections and lusts, to keep under appetite and passion and bring them into subjection. They have a powerful Saviour, a prevalent intercessor to pray for them, that their faith may not fail; they are within the protection of his encircling arm, and have often reason to say to him, When my foot slipped, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In a word, though they may

possibly be left occasionally to fall into some particular sins, for their humiliation and chastisement, they are infallibly secured against the formation of any vicious habits, for the power and truth of God are pledged, that no sin shall have dominion over them.

On their perseverance in a virtuous course, their friends may, therefore, safely rely; and it may be confidently expected that, in domestic and social life, they will be happy, and rejoice and be glad all their days. Here we might conclude our remarks; but there is one more view, and to Christians a very interesting view, of the subject which it is necessary to take. It is necessary to inquire, how far the happiness of the Christian, after his conversion, may be affected by the period when his conversion took place.

In other words, will a man; who is satisfied early with God's mercy, probably enjoy more uninterrupted religious happiness after his conversion, than a man who does not obtain mercy until a later period of life. It can scarcely, I conceive, be doubted that he will. A man who does not become religious, till the season of youth is passed away, must of course, spend all the early part of life in sin. And what will be the consequence? He will commit many sins, the recollection of which must be painful to him as long as he lives; he will lose much time and many precious opportunities of improvement, and of doing good, which he will afterwards regret; he will afford his sinful propensities an opportunity to become strong; and it will, of course, be more difficult to subdue them, and his future conflicts will be more severe.

His imagination will be polluted, and the consequences will trouble him as long as he lives. He will, probably, in some degree, at least, be a tempter of others, and the recollection of this will be bitter as wormwood and gall. He can never leave the satisfaction of reflecting, that he gave God his first and earliest and best affections; that when the world was all fresh and gay and smiling around him, he cheerfully forsook all to follow Christ. On the contrary, it must pain him to reflect, that he did not forsake the world, till he had proved its emptiness; that he did not follow Christ, until experience taught him that there was nothing else worth following.

We may add, that the man who is not converted until a late period, will more than probably, indulge in vices, or form habits, which will cause him much unhappiness through life. Nay more, it will not be at all strange, should he injure his health and undermine his constitution, and have nothing left to offer to God, but a diseased body, and an enfeebled mind. We find Job exclaiming, Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth, that is, to feel their bitter consequences.

David also prays, that God would not remember against him the sins of his youth; an intimation that he either suffered, or feared, some evil on account of them. But all the evils which have now been enumerated are avoided by the man who commences a religious life in early youth. He is guilty of no vicious indulgences, he forms no bad habits, his affections are less entangled, and his imagination less polluted, and his future life will not be embittered by the recollection that he has tempted others to sin; that he has irrecoverably lost his best opportunities for improvement; or that he has injured his health or his reputation by the practice of vice.

As he enters the narrow path early, he will probably make great progress in holiness, lay up much treasure in heaven, and be rich in good works. And he, and he alone, can say in his old age, O Lord, thou hast been my hope from my youth; now, when I am old and gray-headed, forsake me not. Is it not then, most evident, that he who enters on a religious course in early life, will enjoy more happiness than one who commences such a course at a later period? And is it not equally evident that, if a man would be glad and

rejoice all his days, he should become religious in early youth?

An application of the subject to several different classes in this assembly, will conclude the discourse. 1. Let me apply it to those among the young, who are deferring the commencement of a religious life, because they suppose a late conversion to be more favorable to happiness. From the remarks which have been made, you may learn, my young friends, that you are laboring under a great mistake; that by delaying to seek and obtain mercy of the Lord, you are not only losing much present happiness, but exposing yourselves to many evils, and taking the most effectual way to render your whole future lives less happy.

If you wish to rejoice and be glad all your days, you must, believe me, you must, commence a religious life without delay. If a man intended to cultivate a field, would it not be unwise to defer the commencement of his labors until the proper seed-time had passed away? If a man intended to become a scholar, would it not be unwise to spend his childhood and youth in idleness? Equally unwise is it for you to defer the commencement of a religious life till the season of youth is passed.

It would be thus unwise, even could you be sure of being converted at any future period. But you cannot be sure of this. On the contrary, experience and observation combine with the Scriptures to teach us, that those who do not become religious in early life, will very probably never become religious at all. O, then, if you mean ever to hear God's voice, hear it today, and do not by delay harden your hearts. 2. Are there any in this assembly who were converted and satisfied with God's mercy in early life?

If so, they may learn from this subject what cause they have for gratitude and joy. They who obtain mercy at any period of life have unspeakable cause for thankfulness. But none have so much reason for thankfulness as they who obtain it early. They can scarcely conceive how many evils and dangers and sufferings they have escaped by an early conversion. Let them then show their gratitude by improving diligently the long space which is afforded them to become rich in good works and make more than ordinary advances in religion.

And let them consider how disgraceful it will be, if after spending a long life in the school of Christ, they should at last be found babes in knowledge and happiness. 3. From this subject those Christians who did not seek and obtain mercy in early life, may learn that they will have no reason to wonder or complain if they should continue to feel, as long as they live, some of the evil consequences of their early neglect of religion, and of their youthful follies and sins. There are some evils of this kind which religion does not remove, and which it cannot be expected she should remove.

Should a young man, while engaged in some vicious pursuit, lose a limb or an eye, and afterwards become religious, could it be expected that religion would restore the limb or the eye which he had lost? or would it be reasonable for him to complain on this account? And if a man wastes his childhood and youth in sin, and afterwards becomes a Christian, can he justly complain, though he should still suffer for his folly, though his sinful propensities and habits should give him more than ordinary trouble; or though he should make less progress and enjoy less happiness than he otherwise would?

Certainly not. Let him ascribe all his sufferings to their true cause, let him trace them up to his early sins, and let him submissively say, The Lord exacts of me less than my iniquities deserve. I will bear the indignation of the Lord; because I have sinned against him.

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