

Mercy and Judgment

by Catherine Booth

God's goodness and mercy are intended to lead men to repentance and salvation, but men can frustrate God's purposes by continuing in sin and refusing to repent.

Scripture: Exodus 33:18, Proverbs 29:1, Matthew 23:37, Acts 7:51, Romans 2:4, 1 Timothy 2:4, Hebrews 10:26, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Repentance"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches about the riches of God's goodness and His purpose for leading humanity to repentance, emphasizing the importance of not despising His mercy and longsuffering. She challenges the audience to consider the consequences of neglecting God's offer of Salvation, highlighting the continuous frustration of God's loving purposes by impenitent sinners. Booth urges individuals to recognize the urgency of accepting God's mercy and turning away from sin before it's too late, sharing poignant real-life examples of those who neglected God's goodness and faced tragic consequences.

Transcript

ROMANS ii. 4, 5, 6.- `Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds.'

PAUL wrote some things which, as Peter, a fellow-Apostle, says, are `hard to be understood,' and which `many wrest' (misinterpret and misapply), `as they do also other Scriptures, to their own destruction,' and, alas! alas! to the destruction of others also. Perhaps no utterances of man have been more unfairly dealt with than those of Paul, odd paragraphs having been separated from the arguments or illustrations of which they form a part, and made to teach doctrines and dogmas which other parts of his writings show to be entirely at variance with both his spirit and design; in fact, whole systems of theology have been built on some of these isolated paragraphs, systems as repugnant to our innate perceptions of rectitude and benevolence as they are inimical to the character of God. Alas! These theories have been pressed on the minds of benevolent and thoughtful men as the true theory of Christianity, and, knowing no other, they have rejected it altogether and become infidels. Until theologians arrive at some settled consistent fundamental principle of interpretation, they can make the Bible teach anything; and while they persist that it contradicts itself, they must expect it to be held up to ridicule and contempt. We must ever bear in mind

that there can be no inconsistency or contradiction in the Divine mind: 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' Consequently, when speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, the Apostles could not contradict themselves.

When I was fourteen years old, I rejected all theories about God and religion which contradicted my innate perceptions of right and wrong. I said, 'No; I will never believe any theory which represents that a course of procedure is good and benevolent in God which in man would be despicable and contemptible. I cannot receive it.' I could not then put it into this language, but I remember distinctly the feelings of my soul. I said, 'No; all that there is in me akin to goodness and truth God has put there, and I will never believe that what God has put in me contradicts what He has put into this Book. There must be a mistake somewhere.' And, thank God. I came to the Scriptures for myself, which I recommend you to do. Don't imagine that the repugnant views of the character of God which have been forced upon you by professed theologians will form any excuse for your rejection of this Book or of the Divine authority of it in the great day of account. God will say, Had you not the light for yourself?

You do not shut your natural eyes against the light of the sun, and permit yourself to be led about the world anywhere people chose to lead you. No; you open your eyes, and look where you are going! Why don't you open the eyes of your soul, and take in the light of the spiritual sun, that you may walk and not stumble? If you refuse to do this, you will be condemned amongst those who love darkness rather than light. Don't imagine that these supposed contradictions will be an excuse for you at the judgment seat. It is not many weeks since a gentleman said to me, 'While you Christians are quarrelling, there's hope for us sinners. One teaches one thing and another another, till a poor fellow doesn't know what he is to believe.' Ah! that is a comfortable way to put it, down here; but when you get to the Bar of God, He will say to all such, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant, why didst thou not go to My Book for thyself, and be at the trouble to get to know My will?'

We ought to study this Book as a whole, especially the writings of this Apostle; and surely we should take that which is plain and unmistakable as a key to unlock and interpret that which at first sight is difficult and contradictory. Is not this the principle which prevails in all rightly constituted human courts? Are not all human documents judged and disposed of according to this rule? Is it not insisted that these shall be interpreted consistently with themselves and with the general scope and design of the writer? You say, 'Yes; and that is the only rational rule of interpretation.' If you were interested in a will which was in dispute, you would have a keen appreciation of the importance of this rule. Then, if this is necessary with respect to the writings of men of comparatively recent date, how much more is it necessary with respect to the writings of God--many of them having come down to us from ages back, and, notwithstanding all the care that has been taken in their preservation, subject to many changes of phraseology, thus requiring in difficult passages the utmost care and skill, and yet not so much skill as honesty, in order to understand their meaning?

But, after all, there is very little in the Word of God which practically affects our Salvation which is hard to be understood. The things that Paul wrote on this subject are plain enough, thank God; and this text is one of the plainest and most unmistakable in the whole Bible! Moreover, it is complete in itself, and it enunciates a great truth which underlies all God's dealings with our race. It shows most blessedly that aback of all this Apostle's reasoning about Jews and Gentiles, and the predestination of the former to special privileges, and then to special judgments for the abuse of them--that aback of all this he had deep down in his soul the belief and realization of this blessed and glorious truth, **THAT ALL GOD'S DEALINGS WITH OUR RACE ARE MERCIFUL AND RESTORATIVE**, and that in the case of the very worst of men

God is doing all He can for their Salvation--that He in no single instance consigns to wrath before He has truly and honestly tried to save. Bless the Lord, we ought to get up and sing a song of praise before we go any further. Poor sinner, don't think there is any eternal decree barring thy way back to pardon and peace--not a bit of it. Don't think there is any subtle, mysterious, influence beating thee back, while God professedly is inviting thee near. Away with such blasphemy! Thou art welcome this very hour, this moment, however far thou hast travelled on the way to ruin. God has spared thee for this very purpose to bring thee to repentance.

First, I want you to note that the Apostle assumes in this text that God is good to all men, even to those who despise His goodness and perish. `Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee (is intended to lead thee) to repentance?' Moses, early in the world's history, asked the Lord to show him His glory. Moses was one of God's favourites, because he chose to be, because he loved and sought after God before anything else.

When you forsake the riches of Egypt in all its phases, and choose rather to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness or worldliness, you will be one of His favourites. Well, this favourite of God, when he got close to Him one day, said, `I beseech Thee show me Thy glory.' What did the Divine Being do? Did he unveil the splendours of His person? Oh! no. Did He draw aside the curtain of His dwelling-place? No. Did He summon to His side countless multitudes of created intelligences who run to do His bidding? No. Perhaps Moses expected something of this kind, for he was only a man; but God said, `I will make all MY GOODNESS to pass before thee `as though thus early He were intent on fixing it in the minds and hearts of His creatures that His GOODNESS was His greatest glory! He is good to all.

And although in an especial sense the Father and Protector of His own people, He is in a very important sense the benevolent Father of all mankind. As Paul said to the philosophers of Corinth, `For we are all His offspring.' He hateth nothing that His hands hath made. He is good. And, Oh! how this goodness has flown out from the very beginning! How many orders of beings and how many myriads of beings His goodness has enriched, and will enrich, to all eternity, we cannot tell. We do know that it has peopled Heaven with glorious, happy beings, and that it is trying to save and rescue from earth those who have fitted themselves to become vessels of destruction. We know that it flowed out to man in Eden, where the Father placed him in innocence and purity, and surrounded him with all possible facilities for temporal and spiritual happiness; and we know that the Fall did not even interrupt its flow, but that immediately the Divine plan for, man's restoration and Salvation was launched, and a way made back again to the Father's heart and home!

But, sinner, do you want any proof that God is good? Granted that there is a God, and that He is infinitely powerful and holy, which your very instincts tell you He is--I say, grant me these two premises, and your appearance here this afternoon is proof enough that He is good. If He had not been good, where would you have been? His holiness forcing Him to hate every speck of iniquity that ever showed itself upon your soul, and His power great enough to damn you in a moment--WHERE WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN? But YOU LIVE. Is not this proof enough that He is good?

There is a father yonder who has a bad, rebellious, prodigal boy. He began to trample on his commandments at twelve years of age, and has despised his goodness, wasted his money, and ruined, as far as he could, his father's influence and reputation; he has gone on till he is thirty-three, and there is that father, bearing, weeping, entreating, and promising still. You say, do you want any further proof that the father is good? The very fact that that son is not finally cast off, the fact that his father will hold any

communication with him, proves of a truth that he is good. How much more in the case of the great benevolent and infinitely holy God? Sinner, you are here. That is enough proof that God is good.

Ah! good. Some of you have been living in utter neglect of Him, some of you perchance have been absolutely denying Him, others have been abusing Him, and yet here you are alive today, when, by a look, a volition, He could have sent you to the bottomless pit years ago!

Further I want you to note that the Apostle positively asserts THAT THE END OR PURPOSE OF THIS GOODNESS IS MAN'S SALVATION.

`Despisest thou' (language implying rebuke, blame) `His goodness and long-suffering, which is intended to lead thee to repentance? Repentance here covers the whole of Salvation, as it frequently does in the New Testament. That is, it is equivalent to saying, leadeth thee to Salvation. In Scriptural language, when a man truly repents, he is saved. Oh.' you say, `but that cannot always be true, because I have been repenting a long time, and I am not saved.' Then yours is not true repentance. Oh! there is nothing will be shown up at the last day more than the oceans of crocodile tears that have been shed by professed penitents! making out God to be a liar, and throwing back the blame of people's damnation on Him. Do not be deceived. Your repentance is a spurious repentance, or it would long ago have led to your Salvation. Jesus Christ says, the angels of God rejoice `over one sinner that repenteth.' Why? Because they see in repentance an assurance of Salvation. God never left a truly repentant soul in the dark. He will bring it out into the light. Therefore the Apostle puts repentance for Salvation, and he asserts that God tries to lead the WORST OF MEN to repentance. Look at the text, and see if I am mistaken. He says that the goodness of God is intended to lead--whom? Those who despise the riches of His goodness, and longsuffering, and forbearance, those, in short, who are heaping up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. Those very men God's goodness is trying to save; but they frustrate His purposes, and turn the very means He uses to save them into a means of cursing. Sinner, do you see what He has spared you for--what His long suffering mercy desires and intends?

The Apostle refers here especially to two characteristics of God's goodness--forbearance and long-suffering. Forbearance: this looks like the withholding attitude of Divine mercy--like a father who is going to chastise his child, but his forbearance pleads, and he holds back the rod. Here is Divine mercy holding back the long-deserved blow. And longsuffering seems to indicate the waiting attitude of Divine mercy. Not only holding back the blow, but holding it back a long time--waiting, waiting if perchance the sinner will repent and turn back to Him. `Behold I' (your God and Saviour) `stand at the door and knock.' Wonderful! Infinite! Incomprehensible! And how long has He been knocking at some of your hearts? Any other friend you would have got up and let in years ago, but it was ONLY JESUS! so you have kept Him out, some of you till your hair is grey! Oh, what longsuffering mercy! How long He has waited! Years ago, under that godly minister whom you can never forget, you woke up to realize it. You looked at yourself. You contemplated the dark, guilty past, and you couldn't help saying

--'Oh! depth of mercy, can there be Mercy still reserved for me?'

The flood-tide of mercy was then at its ebb-flow. The minister said Come, and the Holy Spirit said Come; your own conscience said Come; Jesus said Come. But there was another preacher.

THE DEVIL! He said, `Not now: a more convenient season.' And here you are today, with added years of guilt, added years of hardness and unbelief and rebellion, and added years of WRATH' `Despisest thou,' O man, `the riches of His goodness?' You have been despising them all this time. Mind, mind, there are

bounds even to His patience. If he bears long and endures much, the stroke comes at last; and the longer it is withheld the HEAVIER IT WILL FALL. `Wrath against the day of wrath.' Shall the past suffice thee, sinner? Wilt thou listen and flee from the wrath to come?

The Apostle asserts that this is the very end and purpose of God in sparing your life. Hence He says in another place, `those who fitted themselves to destruction as vessels of wrath, He endured with much longsuffering.' Oh! what a wonderful thought! but then, you see, God is God--that is the reason.

You would not have borne with a fellow-creature a tithe of the time, nor to anything like the degree that He has borne with you; but HE is GOD, and there is no sounding the depths of His infinite compassion.

He knows what it will be to be lost. I often think of that. Oh! it doesn't seem to me so wonderful, after all, that Jesus Christ should die, because He comprehended the depths of the unutterable desolation to which sinners were going. He realized the bitter cup they would have to drain, and so He took it and tried to save them from it. But mind, a sorer punishment awaits those who depise such love! And, Oh, it seems as though some people were making haste and trying their best to treasure up wrath, as the Apostle says, as though there would not be enough, against the day of wrath.

Sinner, remember for every sin there is so much wrath. You can label it off as surely as you do the profits of your day's business. Every day's forbearance so much more wrath. You are heaping it up, treasuring it up. It is hovering over the path you tread like some great towering black mountain. Just a puff of God's breath, or a touch of His finger, and it will come down and overwhelm you, as the waters did Pharaoh and his host. You are making it higher, denser, blacker, every day you live. You know it is true. You have had a foretaste of it already. The rumblings of its hidden fires have scathed your soul, and darkened your mind, and blighted your happiness, even now while you only catch the outer foam of its angry billows! Loving mercy is holding it off, but it has done enough already to show you what it WILL BE when it overwhelms you for ever. Will you give up despising the riches of His goodness? Will you now begin to flee from the wrath to come? The Lord help you.

Further, I want you to note that GOD'S PURPOSE IS FRUSTRATED CONTINUALLY by impenitent sinners. Paul declares this as unmistakably as that God tries to save them. This idea shocks some people's notions of the Divine sovereignty. I cannot help that. Here it is as plain as A B C: `Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance; but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath.' And not only is it here, but in a score of other texts of Paul's writing. The Apostle had a profound sense of the Divine sovereignty, which shows itself all through his epistles; but we see from such passages as these that he had no idea of it which was the least incompatible with man's entire free agency. Here, and in many other places, he shows that his idea of God's sovereignty is, that it asserts itself in legislating how man ought to act and in punishing him for disobedience, and not in divesting him of his freedom in order to prevent disobedience. Paul carefully discriminates between the physical and moral sovereignty of God, a distinction which many theologians disregard, and thus are guilty of confounding things that differ, and of traducing the Divine character.

Both Paul and all the inspired writers deplore again and again the fact that men do FRUSTRATE THE LOVING PURPOSES of God, and thus bring upon themselves destruction. Did not the Jews? What did Jesus Christ mean when He wept over Jerusalem, and said, `Oh, that thou hadst known in this thy day?' Away with a theology that makes that out to be hypocrisy! It was the heart's sincerity of the Son of God, and He meant every word He said. What more could He have done to make them or us believe that He

was sincere? He wept, and groaned, and spread His hands over the rebellious people, and said, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.' Ye hard hearted, stubborn, and rebellious, as Stephen said of them, 'as your fathers did, so do ye; ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.' That was the secret of their destruction, and, alas! They treasured up wrath both for this world and the next, such as never fell on any other people.

Alas! men do frustrate God's purposes. We see it all around us. Now God's desire is that all men should be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth--that those very men who despise Him should be saved and come to repentance. But all these are not saved. Then God's purpose is frustrated in their case, is it not? Some of you confess that you are not saved. Then, my friends, the purpose of God's goodness is not answered in your case. Whose fault is it? Dare you look Him in the face and charge Him with the murder of your soul? Whose fault, I demand, will it be if you are lost? If you never hear anything more than you have heard here this afternoon, you will have no excuse. Your conscience, I know, says 'Amen' to what I am saying. God's voice thunders 'Amen' in the ears of your guilty soul. You are not saved. Why? Because you are despising the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. Because you are throwing back the offer of His mercy in His face, and saying, 'No, no, I love my sins; I will have my ungodly pleasures; I will live on in my rebellion; I will not listen; I will be like those disobedient, rebellious Jews: I will not know the things that make for my peace.' Very well, my friend; if you will not let God make you a vessel of His mercy in which to magnify the riches of His goodness and Salvation, you will by this perverseness fit yourself to be a vessel of destruction, and, as such, God will have no alternative but, as our text says, to give you over to the 'revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds.'

You see, God will not put you out of being to oblige you, and to save you from the consequences of your wilful rebellion. You exist. You must exist. At the Judgment Day you will exist, and you will exist for ever! God will have to do something with you; and seeing that you would not let Him wash, and sanctify, and glorify you, He has no option but to leave you in your filth, to curse you, and put you in the scavenging house of His universe with the Devil and his angels!

You say, 'Stop, stop, I am not despising His goodness.' Are you not? What is it to despise anything? It means treating it with contempt, neglecting it. It does not mean saying bad words about it; it does not mean blaspheming God. I should hope none of you are bad enough for that. It does not mean throwing it absolutely back and telling Him in so many words that you will not have Him to reign over you. Oh! no; it means treating Him with contempt, and His Salvation as a light thing. You are doing this, and some of you have been doing it for long rebellious years. If you had some money in a certain bank, and you heard that it was in a shaky condition, what a hurry you would be in to secure your treasure! You would not lose a moment. You would be investigating, and inquiring, and running to the bank to secure your money. You would not treat that with contempt; you would not despise the opportunity of SECURING IT. Why? Because you deem your money an important thing. Now, if you valued the mercy and love of God for your poor soul, you would deem that an important thing, and you would not neglect it. Mind, it is written that all those who forget, or neglect God, shall be turned into Hell!

My friend, despisest thou the riches of His goodness? Will you give up despising Him? Will you come to His feet this afternoon? Will you say, 'It is enough, Lord'? Oh! if I were to stand here till tomorrow afternoon, I could occupy the time in telling you of awful cases that have come under my own observation, of people who have despised His goodness. There is a day coming when God says, 'I will say, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.' Now is the accepted time.

When I was holding services in P--, a man who kept a public-house, came to a Meeting, and was deeply affected. Some of the friends gathered round him, and tried to persuade him to stop to the Prayer Meeting. He had been convicted many a time before. He knew all about it, and he knew the soul-ruining traffic in which he was engaged. God pulled him up and arrested him once more--made him think, and feel, and tremble. Friends said, 'Stop, and give up your business, and give yourself to God'; but he shook his head, and went away. He said, 'No, not this time.' He despised! He died the next Thursday, raving mad, without a ray of hope. He despised the riches of His goodness.

I was just getting up to speak in a large theatre, when a Bible-woman at work in the town said, 'I want to tell you something. There was a woman hearing you last Sunday who was deeply affected. She wept and trembled, and we tried to persuade her to give her heart to God. She said she couldn't then, but she would come, another time. She died on Tuesday without hope, and was buried on Friday.' She despised His goodness.

At Whitechapel one day I had been speaking, and there was a woman who very much impressed me. I went to her and besought her. She said, 'Yes, I know it's all true. I have known it for years.' I said, 'How dare you risk putting it off?' She said, 'I can't speak of it tonight,' treating it as if it were a matter of no consequence; 'I will come another time.' I followed her right into the draught of the door, for I felt my heart go out after her. I showed her the danger of delay. She said, 'I will come at the close of the Meeting on Tuesday.' On the following Thursday she was buried, and died without hope. She neglected, despised the riches of His goodness.

Another case. A man in the ironworks had been at one of the services at Portsmouth. He was working one day, when a massive piece of iron fell on him, but did not kill him on the spot. As the men carried him away, he observed, 'The lady said trouble was ahead; now it has come.' I had been speaking from the text, 'He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'

One of our men at Whitechapel used to go to a particular druggist's to get prescribed for when not well, and he used always to warn the doctor about his soul, whose invariable reply was, 'Oh! never fear. I shall be in time. I shall send for you when I am dying.' One day he fell down in his surgery, and never spoke again. He neglected, he despised the riches of His goodness.

I could tell you numbers of such stories, alas! Men do fill up, in these days, the measure of their iniquity. They do put the last drop into the cup, and God says, 'It is enough.' It is not always by an outward or manifest act that the cup of rebellion is filled; it is often done in secret. Those Jews little thought they were filling it by neglecting and despising the Nazarene. You may think you are only neglecting the entreaties of a little woman, and yet before next Sunday you may be in Hell. Every time I hear of such things, I say, 'I will be clear of the blood of souls. I don't care what people say of me; I will never speak to sinners so that one man or woman in my audience can stand up and say, "You might have warned me more faithfully, told me more plainly than you did." I would rather die than that should be the case.'

Sinner, what will you do? Mind, Paul says, 'or treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath.' It is not God who treasures it up. It will be God's wrath against your sins; but you, and you alone, will be responsible for its coming on you. You need not inherit it, for another has borne it for you, if you would only accept Him as your Sacrifice and your Saviour. Will you deliberately reject His way of escape, and in spite of all His goodness make good your claim to everlasting wrath? Will no mercy, no longsuffering, no past

experience, no forebodings of conscience, no shadows of the pit, bring you to repentance?

Will you despise any longer, or Will you YIELD NOW? Will you give up? Will you go down at His feet? Will you turn away from sin and evil companions, your old associations, and come right to the foot of the cross, go down at His feet and say, `Lord Jesus, I WILL BE THY DISCIPLE?'

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