

Anguish of Parents at the Perverseness of Children

by Edward Payson

The sermon emphasizes the anguish of parents at the perverseness of their children and the consequences of neglecting parental duties.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 18:33, Psalm 9:17, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 7:13, Mark 9:24, Luke 15:20, Ephesians 6:4, 1 Timothy 5:8, Hebrews 12:6, James 4:17

Topics: "Parental Responsibility", "Eternal Consequences"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the grief of King David upon hearing of his son Absalom's death, emphasizing the anguish of a parent fearing for the eternal fate of their unprepared child. He highlights the distress pious parents feel over their children's spiritual well-being, urging sinners with pious parents to consider the pain they cause by neglecting to prepare for death. Payson also warns negligent parents of the consequences of failing to fulfill their duty in guiding their children towards a life of faith and righteousness.

Transcript

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and Wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

2 Samuel 18:33

the character of Absalom, his unnatural rebellion, and his untimely, but merited fate, you are all I presume acquainted. You doubtless recollect, that, being defeated in a battle which he fought, with a view to dethrone his father David, he was entangled in his flight among the boughs of an oak, and there, suspended between the heavens and the earth, was slain by his pursuers. In our text, we have an account of the manner in which his father was affected, by the tidings of his death.

He was much moved, and retired to his chamber weeping, and exclaiming as he went, O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom I would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! It cannot I think be doubted, at least no pious parent will doubt, that the grief which David felt on this occasion, was caused principally, though not solely, by an apprehension that his son was unprepared for death, and that of

course his soul was lost forever. He knew what had been his character and conduct; he knew that he was suddenly cut off in the midst of his sins, with little or no opportunity for repentance; and he knew, for he tells us in one of his psalms, that all the wicked, and all that forget God, shall be turned into hell.

He could not, therefore, but greatly fear, or rather feel almost certain, that this was the portion of his son. It is probable, also, that the anguish occasioned by this heartrending thought, was aggravated by the reflection, that in consequence of having neglected to restrain and correct his son, in early life, he had been indirectly the occasion of his ruin. Hence his bitter cries; hence especially his wish that he had died in his son's stead. He was himself prepared for death; and, therefore, it would have been to him a comparatively trifling evil, and he hoped, that, had Absalom lived, he might have repented of his sins, and become prepared for death.

Now, all such hopes were blasted at once, and forever. My hearers, there are two classes of persons in this assembly, to whom some reflections on the subject before its may be profitable. They may be so to the irreligious children of pious parents; and to pious parents themselves. I. I would call to this subject the attention of every sinner present, who has a pious parent, or parents, still living. I wish to show such persons how much anguish they occasion their parents, by neglecting to prepare for death.

Of this anguish such persons think, because they know, very little. It is desirable that they should know more of it because this knowledge may lead them to serious reflection, and perhaps to repentance. Permit me then to remind those of you whom I am addressing, that the hearts, or feelings of all truly pious persons are very much alike. Every Christian parent in David's situation, would feel, in some measure, as David felt. Every Christian parent feels a similar concern for the souls, the eternal interests of his children.

Your parents feel this concern for you. Consequently, your remaining in an irreligious state occasions them much unhappiness; for it is not only over a dead child that such parents weep. No, they are distressed for you now, while you are in the full enjoyment of health. In the first place, they are distressed by apprehensions that you may be led astray by vicious companions, or become the slaves of some vicious habit, or embrace false and destructive sentiments respecting religion.

They have cause to entertain such apprehensions. They have often seen the children of even pious parents fall a prey to these evils; they have seen those who in their youth were amiable, correct, and full of respect for religion, afterwards become enslaved by dissipation, intemperance, and infidelity; they know that your hearts resemble theirs, and that you are exposed to similar temptations. How can they then but be distressed for you? It will be in vain to attempt to relieve their distress by assuring them that you will never forsake the path of rectitude.

They know too well, how little human resolutions and promises are worth. They have witnessed the failure of the strongest resolutions, and they have reason to fear that yours will be broken in a similar manner. They know that there is but one being who can hold you up; but one Shepherd who can keep you from wandering, and to this Shepherd they cannot persuade you to come. They have, therefore, no security that you will not become the vilest of the vile. This being the case, their anxiety must be as great as the affection which they feel for you, and as their desire to see you happy.

Were these however the only dangers to which you are exposed; were you not immortal, accountable creatures, the distress which your parents feel for you would be comparatively small. But, in the second place, they are much more distressed by fears that you will perish forever. They believe what God has said respecting the future state of those who die in their sins. They know the terrors of the Lord. They

know that unless you repent, you will perish. They know that unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.

They know that God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; and that he will thus destroy you, should death come and find you unprepared. Knowing these things, and loving you as they do, how great must be their anguish! How must they feel when such reflections as these crowd into their minds: Perhaps this child, whom I have so often caressed and nourished, over whom I have so often wept, and for whom I have cared and labored so much, will continue an enemy of the God who made him; will live only to fill up the measure of his iniquities, and to treasure up wrath; then die unprepared, and be miserable forever.

Hence they often think of you, and weep and pray for you, when you are quietly sleeping. Hence, the more careless and thoughtless you appear, the greater is their anxiety. Hence they earnestly look and wait for some appearances of religious sensibility, notice all such appearances with delight, and feel the most painful disappointment when they vanish. In short, could you know all the sorrows which your parents have suffered since your birth, you would find that a great part of them have been occasioned by anxiety for you, for your immortal interests; and that to the same cause is to be ascribed, a great part of their daily sorrows.

You can in some measure conceive what would have been the feelings of Noah, when he saw the flood approaching, had one of his sons, in defiance of all warnings and entreaties, refused to believe its approach, and enter the ark. You can conceive how greatly it would have diminished the happiness which his own safety occasioned, to look from the windows of the ark, and see a child exposed to be swept away with an ungodly world. What then must be the feelings of your parents, how greatly must it diminish the joy which their own safety occasions, to see you out of Christ, of whom the ark was a type, and hourly exposed to the wrath, which, as a deluge, will come upon the world of the ungodly; to see that all their warnings and entreaties cannot persuade you to fly from this wrath.

The distress which you thus occasion them is further aggravated by the reflection, that if you perish, your doom will be peculiarly terrible. You have enjoyed peculiar privileges. You have been dedicated to God, you were early taught to know his will, you have often been entreated, admonished, and warned, you have enjoyed the benefits of religious example, and have been preserved from many temptations to which the children of irreligious parents are exposed. Now if notwithstanding all these privileges, you live and die without religion, how aggravated will be your guilt! --how terrible your condemnation!

Yours will be the doom of one who knew his Lord's will and did it not, and who is therefore deservedly beaten with many stripes; and it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for you. All this, your parents well know, and they are sometimes almost afraid to address you on religious subjects, lest all their attempts to effect your salvation, should only serve, in consequence of your neglecting them, to aggravate your guilt and wretchedness.

In the third place, if you persist in neglecting religion, the distress which your parents now feel, may be raised to the highest pitch, by seeing you die without hope. Then they will feel as David felt, and wish like him that they could have died for you. Conceive if you can, what his feelings were. He probably recollected the joy which was occasioned by his son's birth; the delight with which the fond parents contemplated his uncommon beauty; the pleasure which they felt, when, with tottering steps he first ventured to pass from one to the other, and which was renewed when he began to lisp their names; the deep interest with which

they had watched his progress from infancy up to manhood, and the hopes which they had often indulged that he would prove a comfort to them, in their old age.

And now what was the end of all these pleasures and hopes? That son, the son of his affections, his joys, his hopes, endeared to him by all these tender recollections, was dead; and, what was ten thousand times worse, had died in his sins. His mangled body lay buried under a heap of stones, and his soul--O where was his immortal soul? --what was it even then suffering ! But this reflection was too terrible. As often as the agonized father's thoughts attempted to follow his son into the world of spirits, they were met and driven back by horrors of which he shuddered to think, but which he could not banish from his mind.

He felt that he should never meet his son again, never--never. They were not only separated, but separated forever. And O how did the father's heart sicken with anguish, while these thoughts swiftly passed and repassed through his mind! And can any of you think, with calmness, of wringing your parents' hearts with such anguish? Yet such anguish they would feel, should they see you die unprepared. To see you die would be a sore trial to them, even though you should die the death of the righteous.

It would be a trial under which they would need strong consolation. But this would be nothing, I may say rather, it would be transport, compared with the misery of seeing you die the death of the wicked; of seeing you, like him, driven away in your wickedness. Will you then by continuing to neglect religion, prepare for that hour, the most painful hour which a parent's heart can know, this additional pang? Will you infuse new bitterness into that cup, which is of itself sufficiently bitter?

Do you reply, perhaps my parents will escape this trial by dying before me. True; but should it be so, your neglect of religion will give additional sharpness to their dying pangs. Could they leave you safe in the love of a Heavenly Father, they might leave you without a tear. But to leave you in such a world as this without a protector, to leave you in the broad road to destruction, in that road which leads directly away from the heaven to which they are going; to leave you uncertain whether you will ever follow them to glory, --O this will be painful indeed.

Some present have already occasioned this pain to a dying parent. Yes, the last moments of that father, that mother, whom you still perhaps remember, at times with a sigh or a tear, were embittered by the thought that they left you without God in the world, and of course without hope. And O how much more would their last moments have been embittered, could they have foreseen that their dying counsels, prayers, and tears would produce no more effect upon you, and be so soon forgotten.

Will you not from this time begin to cry, God of my parents, forgive me that I have neglected thee so long; forgive me that I have paid no more regard to the parting advice of those whom thou hast taken to thyself. But to return to those whose parents are still living. You have heard a little, and words can tell but little, of the distress which you occasion your parents by neglecting religion. And now permit me to ask, will you continue to occasion them this distress? Will you expose them to the additional anguish of seeing you die, or of dying and leaving you without hope?

Is this the only return which they deserve from you for all that they have done and suffered for your good? Will you compel them, after they have spent the day in laboring for your support, to retire at night, sorrowful, and almost broken-hearted, and water their pillow with tears? Are any so hardened as to reply, we do not wish our parents thus to distress themselves on our account; we see no occasion for all this anxiety. True, you do not see it, and for this very reason they are the more anxious.

And as long as they love you, they cannot cease to be anxious. To wish them not to feel distressed on your account, is to wish them not to love you. Or will any reply, we see nothing in our parents' conduct which leads us to believe that we occasion them so much unhappiness. Alas, they dare not tell you all their feelings, nor dare they speak to you on religious subjects as often as they wish, lest it should disgust and harden you. They are aware that you do not love such subjects, and that if they are pressed upon you too frequently, the effect may be hurtful, rather than salutary.

Let me then beseech you to lay these things seriously to heart, and to rejoice your parents, to excite joy in heaven, and to save your own souls, by commencing immediately and sincerely a religious life. In pressing you to do this, I seem to myself to come armed with all the efficacy of a parent's numberless prayers. And O that the God at whose feet those prayers have been poured out, may render these considerations efficacious to your salvation, and save your parents from the anguish of seeing you die in despair, and from pouring forth fruitless wishes over your remains, that they had been permitted to die in your stead.

II. I proceed now, as was proposed, to press the subject upon the attention of pious parents; for such parents may learn from it many important truths. In the first place, you may learn from it that no parent, whose children are not all pious, can be certain that they will ever become so, or certain that he shall not be called to weep over some of them, wishing that he had died in their stead. Perhaps most religious parents, when distressed with apprehensions respecting the fate of their children, endeavor to quiet these apprehensions, by hoping that, sooner or later, they will become the subjects of conversion.

And sometimes they seem to take it for granted that this will actually be the case. They know that many will perish, but none of their children are to be of that number. We readily allow that if parents are conscious of doing everything in their power to promote the salvation of their children; if they educate them, watch over them, pray for them, as they ought, they may, with propriety hope, though they cannot be certain, that they will be converted. But perhaps those parents are most ready to indulge such hopes, who have the least right to entertain them; those I mean, who are most negligent of the souls of their children, and whose religion is in a declining state.

The hopes which such parents entertain respecting the future conversion of their children, are of precisely the same nature, with the hope that every impenitent sinner entertains respecting himself. He hopes, though he has no reason for such a hope, that if conversion be necessary, he shall, sometime or other, be converted. And so these parents hope that their children will be converted, though like the sinner, they neglect their duty. But let such parents look at David, and learn that not only good men, but men eminently good, may be called to weep in anguish over a child who has died impenitent.

And if this is not sufficient to convince them, let them look at the children of Eli, who were wicked to a proverb; at the sons of Samuel who walked not in his ways, and at the many other instances, mentioned in Scripture, of eminently pious parents whose children proved most abandoned characters. Surely, these instances, as well as daily observation, must convince all, that no parent can be certain that he shall not be called on to weep as David wept. From this subject, Christian parents may learn, in the second place, the fatal consequences of neglecting their duty to their children.

David, though a great man, was guilty of this neglect. It is said of Adonijah, another of his sons, that his father had not at any time displeased him, saying, why hast thou done so? and there seems to be abundant reason to believe that he indulged his other children in the same injudicious and sinful manner.

Doubtless he prayed for them, and gave them religious instruction, but he did not restrain and reprove them as he ought to have done. Hence the foul sins which stained his family.

Hence the conduct and fate of Absalom. While he indulged, he ruined him, and prepared bitterness for himself. See pious Eli, scourged in an equally terrible manner for the same fault. His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not; and therefore God says, I will judge his house forever, nor shall the iniquity of his house be purged by sacrifice or burnt-offering. Christian parents, think often of these instances; for they stand as a pillar of salt, to warn you not to neglect the duty which you owe to your children.

Yet as it respects many, they seem to stand and warn almost in vain. A neglect of parental duties, or an injudicious manner of performing them, are among the most prevalent and threatening evils which are to be found among us. There is perhaps no evil which threatens more danger to the cause of religion, or to the church of God, and I may add, to the prosperity of our country. Unless the hearts of children shall be soon turned to their parents, and the hearts of parents to their children, God will certainly come and smite the land with a curse.

Do you ask, what is to be done? I answer, the root of the evil, I conceive, lies here. Christian parents do not pray sufficiently for wisdom and grace, to enable them to perform their duty. They pray indeed for these blessings, but they do not pray sufficiently. They feel that ministers ought to be men of prayer; but they do not consider that to educate a family is little if any less difficult, than to perform the duty of a minister. Nay, in some respects, it is more so; for many men have been useful ministers, and yet failed greatly as parents.

Even David, though he has for centuries instructed the whole church of God by his writings, failed, you perceive, in this respect. Parents, then, who would avoid this failure, must not only pray, but pray frequently and fervently, for wisdom and grace from on high, as well as for a blessing on their endeavors. If this is neglected, all the anxiety and distress which you may feel for your children will be vain, and you may see them perish. Can you bear the thought? Look at those of them who are yet infants or in the early part of childhood.

See how they depend on you, how they cling to you, in how many engaging, endearing ways, they twine themselves around your hearts. And can you bear to think of their growing up to be vicious or abandoned, to fall a prey to dissipation, debauchery, and intemperance, to live without God, and die without hope, and to become fiends hereafter? In a word, can you bear to think of being in David's situation, when he heard of Absalom's death? If not, O awake seasonably, and exert yourselves diligently.

Be assured that you will find it much less difficult and painful to perform your duty, than to bear the consequences of neglecting it. But perhaps religion is in a declining state in your own hearts, and therefore you have little faith or disposition to pray. And is it so? So you remember, it once was with David. He declined, at length he fell openly, and his fall was chastised by a declaration from Jehovah, that the sword should never depart from his house. In a similar manner, your religious declensions may be punished.

You may be made to suffer in the persons of your children, and to feel that remorse which David felt, when in the ruin of his son, he saw the consequence of his own folly. Believe me, believe me, Christians, or rather, believe God, you cannot become negligent in religion, without suffering for it; and if the thoughts of your own sufferings are not sufficient to rouse you, O think of your children, and be roused. I shall

conclude with a word to those parents who feel no concern for the conversion or for the souls of their children.

Permit me to ask such parents, why they are thus unconcerned? Our Saviour was distressed for the Jews and wept over them. Paul felt great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart, for his unconverted countrymen. The Psalmist could say, I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; rivers of waters ran down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law. Yet you do not feel for your own children, as they felt even for strangers. And does not this prove conclusively that you do not resemble the Saviour and his disciples, that you have no particle of the Spirit which glowed in their breasts?

Yes, if anything can prove this, if anything can prove that you do not believe the Scriptures, it is your indifference respecting the spiritual, eternal interests of your children. While you feel thus unconcerned respecting their souls, it is evident that you cannot have learned the worth of your own, nor have taken any measures to secure its salvation. But surely, if children at anytime, or in any place, need the counsels, example and prayers of pious parents, they need them at such a time, and in such a town, as this.

You see what multitudes of children are here growing up. You see what courses many of our youth pursue, what a pitch of wickedness many of them have already reached. Yet you cannot even pray that your children may be preserved from such courses, and the reason is, you have never learned to pray for yourselves. O, then, if you love your own souls, or the souls of your children, learn to pray, that you may go before them in the path to heaven, and perhaps they will follow.

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