

The Sin, Danger, and Unreasonableness of Despair.

by Edward Payson

To despair of God's mercy is sinful, dangerous, and unreasonable, and can be overcome through faith in Christ and his character.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 41:10, Jeremiah 28:12, John 6:37, Romans 8:31, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Despair And Hope", "Gods Mercy"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the dangers of falling into the traps of the great deceiver, who lulls people into false security or drives them to despair. He emphasizes the sinful, dangerous, and unreasonable nature of despairing of God's mercy, highlighting how it insults God's character, limits His power, and opposes faith, hope, and love. Payson urges those struggling with despondency to turn to God, reminding them of the countless examples of sinners who found mercy and redemption through repentance and faith.

Transcript

"And they said, there is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart"

Jeremiah 28:12

are two ways, my friends, in which the great enemy and deceiver of men endeavors, and alas! but too successfully, to effect their eternal ruin. In the first place, he labors, by a variety of artifices, to lull them asleep in false security and presumption. With this view, he leads them to pervert and abuse the gracious promises and invitations of the gospel; insinuates that God is too merciful to destroy his creatures; that his threatenings will never be executed, and that all will finally obtain salvation.

If he finds any one who cannot be persuaded to believe these falsehoods, he suggests to them that religion is indeed important, but that it is unnecessary to think of it at present; that they have yet sufficient time for repentance, that they are less guilty than many others who have obtained mercy; and that it will be easy for them to become religious hereafter, and secure a title to heaven before death arrives. This method he pursues, principally with the young and thoughtless, and with those who abstain from gross

vices, and pay some regard to the externals of religion.

By these artifices he induces them to defer repentance to a more convenient season; robs them of their most precious opportunities, and leads them farther and farther from God and happiness. In the second place, when these artifices begin to fail, he endeavors to drive men to despair. This method he pursues with the aged, with the openly vicious and abandoned, and with such also as have long enjoyed the means of grace, often experienced, but resisted, the influences of God's Spirit.

To such he whispers, that it is too late; that their sins are too great to be forgiven; that their day of grace is past; that God has given them up to a reprobate mind, and that there is no mercy for them. Hence he infers that it is in vain for them now to think of religion, or use any means to obtain it; that, since they must perish, it is better for them to plunge into sin without restraint, and enjoy all the happiness which the world can afford, Thus he tempted Judas to destroy himself.

Thus he tempted those who said, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; and thus also he tempted those whose language is recorded in our text. When the prophet, in the name of God, warned them of approaching judgment, and urged them to return from their evil ways; instead of complying, they despairingly exclaimed, There is no hope! We will, therefore, walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. This desperate resolution they executed, and destruction was the consequence.

In a similar manner, there is reason to fear, the tempter deceives and ruins some at the present day. It is probable, however, that the number thus ruined is comparatively small. So clearly does the Sun of Righteousness shine upon us; so encouraging are the precious promises of the gospel, and so numerous the instances in which even the vilest of sinners have obtained mercy, that probably very few finally perish in consequence of despondency. The opposite extreme is by far the most ruinous; for presumption and false hopes destroy, perhaps, hundreds, where despair of obtaining mercy proves fatal to one.

Still it is possible that there may be some among us, whom the tempter has entangled in this snare. It is possible, though unknown to us, that there may be at least one person in this assembly, who is saying respecting himself, There is no hope; I have sinned so long, so often, and with so many aggravations, that I cannot be forgiven; my heart is so hard, that it cannot be softened; my mind so dark, that it cannot be enlightened; my sinful habits and propensities so deep-rooted that they cannot be eradicated; my attachment to sin and the world so strong, that it cannot be overcome.

I fear that I am not one whom God intends to save; my day of grace is over; should I think of seeking religion, it would be now in vain; I will therefore think of it as little as possible, and devote myself to the pursuits and pleasures of the world, while I have opportunity to enjoy them. Now, my friends, if there is only one person present, whom the great deceiver has entangled in this snare, it is our duty to attempt to deliver him from it; and could we succeed, we should be richly repaid for preaching, not only one, but ten thousand sermons.

If there be one such person present, one who feels that what has been said describes his character, let him feel that this discourse is preached on purpose for him; that to him every word is addressed; and do you, my Christian friends, who have a hope of glory, pray that the spirit of God may single him out, and enable him to hear, to hope, and live; while we attempt to convince him, that it is at once sinful, dangerous and unreasonable, in the highest degree, to despair of God's mercy; to say that there is no hope.

I. To despair of God's mercy is sinful. The ancient divines were accustomed to call despair one of the seven deadly sins. That it well deserves this character is evident from its nature and effects. It is directly contrary to the will of God. He, we are told, taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and hope in his mercy. He must, therefore, be displeased with them that refuse to do this. It is also a great insult to the character of God. It calls in question the truth of his word; nay it gives him the lie; for he has told us that whosoever cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out.

But the language of despair is, He will cast me out, though I should come to him. It calls in question, or rather denies the greatness of his mercy. He has told us that his mercy is infinite; that it is from everlasting to everlasting; but the language of despair is, My sins are beyond the reach of God's mercy, and therefore it is not infinite. It also limits the power of God. He has said, Is any thing too hard for me? With God nothing is impossible. But despair says, There are some things which are too hard for God; some things which it is impossible for him to perform.

It is impossible that he should renew my heart, subdue my will, and make me fit for heaven. Thus despair limits or denies all God's perfections, and, of consequence, greatly insults and provokes him. Despair is also contrary to the Spirit of God. The three principal graces of the Spirit are faith, hope and love. But despair is opposed to them all. That it is opposed to faith in God's promises, we have already seen; that it is opposed to hope, is evident from its very nature; and a little reflection will convince us, that it is equally inconsistent with love.

To sum up all in one word, despair includes in itself the very essence both of impenitence and unbelief. It contains in itself the essence of impenitence; for it seals up the heart in a sullen, obstinate, unyielding frame, so that those who are under its influence cannot breathe one penitential sigh, or shed a single penitential tear. This effect it has on the devils. This effect it will produce in all the wicked at the judgment day. Hence it is directly opposed to that broken heart and contrite spirit, in which true repentance essentially consists.

It also contains in itself the very essence of unbelief; for it shuts up the heart against all the promises of the gospel; against all the invitations of Christ; against all the revelations which God has made of his mercy, and represents him as a severe, inexorable, arbitrary tyrant, whom it is vain to endeavor to please. But unbelief and impenitence are every where represented as sins exceedingly great and provoking to God. How offensive, how provoking, then must be that despair, which includes in itself the essence of both these aggravated sins!

Again; despair is not only exceedingly sinful in itself, but the cause or parent of many other sins. As hope leads all who entertain it to endeavor to purify themselves, even as Christ is pure, so despair, the opposite of hope, leads all who are under its influence to wander farther and farther from God, and plunge without restraint into every kind of wickedness. This effect it had upon Cain. Instead of repenting and imploring pardon of God for the murder of his brother, he departed front the presence of the Lord, from all the religious privileges and instruction of his father's house, into the land of Nod; there by plunging into worldly and sinful pursuits, he endeavored to mitigate the anguish of his mind, and drive from it all thoughts of God and religion.

A similar effect it had upon Saul. Despair of obtaining help from God led him to seek relief from witches and evil spirits, and finally to throw himself on his own sword. Equally awful were its effects upon Judas, whom it led to self-murder, as it probably has thousands since. The reason why despair should thus

operate is evident. Take away from men all hope of obtaining any object, and they will never pursue it, but turn their attention to something else. So take away from men all hope of heaven; let them be fully convinced that it is not for them, that their day of grace is past, that their doom is fixed, and that repentance will avail nothing to alter it; and, of course, they will never repent; for they will feel no encouragement to do it; see no reason why they should attempt it.

On the contrary, they will turn their attention to worldly and sinful pursuits, and endeavor by intemperance, or in some other equally dangerous way, to banish all thoughts of God and religion entirely from their minds. And when all their restraints are taken off; when they imagine that nothing will render their situation better, and that nothing which they may do can make it worse, the corruption of their hearts will have full room and liberty to operate, and will plunge them into every kind of wickedness.

II. Despair of God's mercy is dangerous. If it be sinful it must be so; for all sin is in its nature and tendency highly dangerous. But despair of God's mercy, is a sin which is dangerous in the highest degree. When a man gives himself up to this sin, he does, as it were, give himself up to the power and guidance of the devil; for he voluntarily throws away every thing which can protect or deliver him from the adversary. He throws away his Savior; he throws away God's mercy; he throws away the promises; he throws away the whole gospel of Christ; he throws away all hopes and thoughts of salvation, and consequently all endeavors to obtain it; for while he despairs of God's mercy, it is the same to him as if God had no mercy; while he despairs of Christ's ability or willingness to save, it is the same to him as if Christ had no power or disposition to save; and while he believes that the promises and invitations of the gospel are not for him to embrace, it is the same to him as if there were no gospel.

All these things, therefore, the despairing sinner throws away; and when they are gone, what is there left? To what guide can he commit himself? Nothing remains, but a deceitful, malignant adversary, and a desperately wicked heart, both combined to mislead and destroy him. Yet to the guidance of these two fatal enemies every despairing sinner commits himself. Need any thing more be said, to prove that to despair of God's mercy, is dangerous in the highest degree. III. Despair of God's mercy is no less groundless and unreasonable, than it is sinful and dangerous. 1.

In the first place, it is unreasonable to despair of God's mercy, because he continues to you the enjoyment of life, and the means of grace. It is true that, with respect to some, the day of grace ends before the close of life, and their lives are preserved only that they may fill up the measure of their iniquities, and treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. But such persons are given over to a reprobate mind, and left to strong delusion, that they may believe a lie. God has said, Let them alone.

His Spirit has forsaken them; conscience does not warn them; they seldom think of their danger, and are usually much more inclined to presumption than to despair. But we are now addressing those, who do think of their situation, whose consciences do warn and admonish them; and with respect to such we may generally say, that, while there is life, there is hope; for is not life a time of probation, a season of grace, an opportunity given us on purpose to make our peace with God?

How unreasonable then is it to despair of mercy; while this season, this opportunity of obtaining mercy is afforded; unless you are determined not to improve it. The precious privileges which you enjoy, while this season continues, render despair still more unreasonable. What walls are these which surround you? Are they not the walls of God's house, a place where he has recorded his name, and respecting which he says, Wherever I record my name, there will I meet with you and bless you?

What light is this which shines around you? Is it not the light of the Sabbath, of the day which the Lord has made, in which we have reason to rejoice and be glad? What volume is this before you? Is it not the word of God in which he reveals his grace and mercy to perishing sinners? What sound is this which now fills your ears? Is it not the sound of the gospel which brings life, and peace, and pardon, to all who believe and obey it? And will you then say, There is no hope, while the walls of God's house encircle you, while the light of the Sabbath shines upon you, while the word of God is before you, and while the gospel of salvation sounds in your ears?

Do they not all conspire to prove, that, though you are prisoners, you are prisoners of hope; and that there is still hope concerning you, if you will not neglect or put it from you in despair? 2. The character of God, as revealed in his word, shows that it is unreasonable for you to despair of his mercy. It is true that the description which the Scriptures give us of his character, is most perfectly suited to lead you to despair of obtaining his favor by your own works, or of tasting his mercy while you obstinately persist in sin.

But it is also true, that it is no less perfectly suited to excite hope in the breasts of all who see the impossibility of saving themselves; who feel the burden and fetters of sin, and have the smallest desire to escape from its power. This the psalmist well knew: They that know God's name, says he, that is, they who are acquainted with his character, will put their trust in him. They cannot despair or despond; they cannot but hope in his mercy. The fact is, that despondency, as well as presumption, arises from ignorance of God.

Ignorance of his justice, truth, and holiness, leads to presumption; and ignorance of his mercy, love, and grace, leads to despair. If we would be kept from both these dangerous extremes; if we would at the same time fear him, and hope in his mercy, we must contemplate the different perfections of his character together, and not view them separately, as we are prone to do. This the method pursued by the inspired writers naturally leads us to do. They very frequently set before us God's justice and mercy, his greatness and condescension, in the same passage.

When to deter us from presumption they declare, that God will by no means clear the guilty, they tell us in the same verse, that he is merciful and gracious, that we may not despair. When they tell us that God is high, they immediately subjoin, Yet hath he respect unto the lowly. When they inform us that he is a God of vengeance, they are careful to assure us in the same chapter, that he is good to them that trust in him. When they describe him as the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, they add, He dwelleth with him who is of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and the heart of the contrite ones.

While they declare that the soul that sinneth shall die, they encourage us to repent and turn from our sins by the assurance, that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. Still farther to secure us from despair, they inform us, that God is love, that nothing is too hard for him, that his mercy endureth for ever, and that he is a sovereign God who can have mercy on whom he will have mercy. Surely then, the character of God renders it in the highest degree unreasonable to despair of salvation, unless we are determined to go on in sin, or to persist in seeking salvation by the works of the law. 3.

The grand scheme of redemption revealed in the gospel, renders it still more unreasonable to indulge despair. This scheme God has devised and revealed, on purpose to glorify himself in displaying the unsearchable riches of his mercy and grace. Here he reveals himself as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the God of all grace and consolation, as a God who so loved the world as to give his only

begotten Son to die for its redemption. By the sufferings and death of his Son he is reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to the penitent their trespasses.

The mountains of guilt and transgression which interrupted the streams of his beneficence are removed, so that they can now flow and are flowing out to us in floods of enlightening, pardoning, and sanctifying grace. None of God's perfections now forbid Him to pardon penitent sinners; for in the scheme of redemption, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other; God can now be just in justifying those who believe in Jesus. Nay, more, his justice, faithfulness, and truth, which once stood in the way of our salvation, now bind him to forgive and save all who confess, and repent of their sins.

Surely then the gospel of Christ affords sufficient encouragement to animate the hopes of the most guilty, desponding sinner on earth, and render it in the highest degree unreasonable for any to despair of salvation who are not determined to reject it. 4. The person, character, and invitations of Christ, show in the most striking and conclusive manner, that despair of salvation is unreasonable. When God provided a Savior for us, he intended to provide one whose character should be a complete antidote to despair, as well as to all other evils.

Accordingly, the person and character of his Son Christ Jesus are as perfectly calculated, as any thing possibly can be, to banish despair, and excite confidence and hope. He is at once the Son of God, and the Son of Man. He is allied to heaven by his divinity, and to earth by humanity; and consequently unites in himself every thing that is amiable, admirable, or excellent, in the nature of God and in the nature of man. Though he is the Son of the Highest, he is not ashamed to be called the friend and brother of the lowest; nay, he glories in the title of the sinner's Friend.

While his infinite wisdom, knowledge, and power, render him able to save even to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, his no less infinite compassion, condescension, and love, render him as willing, as he is able to save. To all who believe, he is made of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. His blood, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel, cleanses from all sin. His Spirit can enlighten the most ignorant, subdue the most stubborn and sanctify the most polluted, and break the strongest fetter in which sin and the world ever bound the soul.

The streams of his grace flow, free and uncircumscribed, as the light of the sun or the air of heaven. His language is, Let him that heareth come; and let him that thirsteth come; and whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely; and whosoever cometh, I will in no wise cast out. In short, it is a faithful saying, a true saying, and worthy of universal acceptance and belief, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief; and for any one who believes this saying, for any one who contemplates Christ's character, and listens to his invitation, to despair of salvation, is as impossible, as for a man to walk in darkness, who, with open eyes beholds the light of the meridian sun.

One glimpse of his person and character is life to hope, and death to despondency. How unreasonable, then, is it, with such a Savior before us, for any to despair, unless they are determined to reject him. Lastly. That it is unreasonable to despair of God's mercy, is evident from the characters of many to whom it has already been extended. Look at Manasseh. He sinned against God above all that were in Jerusalem before him, so that he seemed to have sold himself to commit iniquity.

In addition to this, he was a murderer, a man stained with many murders; for we are told that he shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other. But in his affliction he

humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and besought him and prayed to him; and God was entreated of him, and heard his supplications. Look at St. Paul. He was a blasphemer, and bloody persecutor of the people of God; one who breathed nothing but threatenings and slaughter against his church, and compelled many of them to blaspheme.

Yet he repented and obtained mercy; and he intimates that mercy was showed him for a pattern and encouragement to those who should come after him, to believe in Christ. Look at the Corinthian church. Some of you, says the apostle to them, were fornicators, and idolaters, and adulterers, and thieves, and covetous, and drunkards, and revilers, and extortioners; but, he adds, ye are washed, but ye are justified, but ye are sanctified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Such, my friends, are some of the instances recorded in the Bible, in which the greatest and vilest offenders obtained mercy on repentance. Who then will say, that it is not highly unreasonable for any to despair unless they are determined not to repent? Who can reasonably say, there is no hope for me, when such characters as these, through repentance, faith, and patience, are even now inheriting the promises? Permit me now to ask, my friends, whether any of you are saying this?

Are there any present, who are deterred from seeking salvation by nothing but discouragement and despondency; any who are saying in their hearts, We would attend seriously to religion, did we not fear that it will be to no purpose? If any such there are, they are the very persons whom we now address. You have heard, my irresolute, desponding friends, how sinful, how dangerous, and how unreasonable it is to say, There is no hope. Why then will you say it? Why should you think that it will be vain for you to attend to religion?

Will you say, I fear that, though God is merciful, there is no mercy for me? You have heard that there is mercy for the vilest, if they will repent. Will you say, I fear that I am not one of those whom God means to save? If you are determined to persevere in unbelief and despondency, you have reason to fear this; but if you begin sincerely to seek after God, you will have reason to hope that he means to save you; and if you repent and believe the gospel, you may be sure that he does.

Will you say, I know not how to begin; if I study the Bible, it appears dark and difficult to understand; and when I listen to the preached word, it is the same? This is because you do not look to Christ for wisdom and instruction. He is able and willing to give us his Spirit to lead our minds into all truth. Will you say, I have often resolved and endeavored to be religious; but my resolutions have been broken; my endeavors have been vain; and I fear that, should I make another attempt, it would avail nothing.

But your resolutions and attempts were made in dependence on your own strength. It was therefore to be expected that they would fail; for Christ says, Without me ye can do nothing. But make another attempt depending on his strength, and looking to him for assistance, and it will not be unsuccessful. Will you say, My will is so stubborn, my heart is so hard, and my mind so entangled by the love of the world and the fear of man, that I dare not hope for success? But did not Christ come to deliver us from this world, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bruised?

Has he not done this for thousands already; and is he not equally able to do it for you? Will you say, I have difficulties and temptations to encounter, such as no other person ever had; and therefore I fear there is no hope? Even if this is the case, it affords no reason for despondency; for Christ is able to remove all difficulties, and overcome all temptations. Have you not heard that nothing is too hard for him? Will you say, I know Christ is able to save me; but I have so often grieved his Spirit, so long neglected his

invitations, that I fear he will now afford me no assistance?

But is he not even now bestowing upon you many blessings notwithstanding this? Is he not preserving your life, permitting you to hear the gospel, and inviting you by his ministers, to come and receive salvation? If your unworthiness does not prevent him from bestowing these favors upon you, why should you fear that he will withhold his assistance in subduing your sins? Has he not said, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out? And now, my desponding friends, what more will you say to justify your despondency?

What more indeed can you say? What can you say of yourselves more discouraging than this, that you are entirely sinful, and guilty, and poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked? True, you are so, Christ knows that you are so; and his language is, I counsel thee to buy of me gold, tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed. Will you say, I have nothing to buy with? Christ bestows them without money or price. Permit me to remind you of the value of what he thus bestows.

Let me bring down from heaven that reward which he offers to those who embrace him. In this world, it is pardon of sins, peace of conscience, peace with God, the restoration of his image, joy unspeakable, support under trials, victory over all enemies including death and the grave; in a word, all good things. In the world to come, it is perfect holiness, full enjoyment, everlasting life, an eternal weight of glory, an immovable throne, an unfading crown, a state of complete, never-ending, perpetually increasing glory and felicity.

Such, my friends, are the rewards set before you. It is yet possible; nay, there is yet reason to hope, that you may obtain them. And are they not desirable? Are they not worth pursuing? Arise, then; we call upon you in the name of God, arise, and in the strength of Christ, pursue them. Lose no time in despondency. Say not, There is no hope. We have shown that you have no reason to say this. If you will persist in saying it, it is only an excuse; an excuse for neglecting that religion, which you are unwilling to embrace.

It is not for want of encouragement, it is for want of a disposition, that you refuse to pursue the one thing needful. Let none then, after this, complain that there is nothing to encourage them. God has given them every thing necessary for their encouragement; every thing calculated to rouse them from despair. If then any persist in despair, and perish, God will be guiltless; their blood will be upon them. But while we are attempting to justify God, and leave sinners without excuse; and while we would do every thing in our power to encourage the desponding and support the weak, it is also necessary to guard against the perversions of such as would derive from it encouragement to hope for heaven while they continue in sin.

It is possible that some present may be hardened in their presumption by the very means which have been employed to keep others from despair. They may say, since there is so much reason to hope, and since it is so wrong to despair, we will hope for the best, and not despair of salvation, though we should continue a little longer in sin. If any are saying this, if any are thus poisoning themselves with the waters of life, I do most solemnly protest against this perversion, this abuse of the grace of God, and warn them of its danger.

This is what the apostle calls making Christ the minister of sin, and turning the grace of God into wantonness; and the end of those who are guilty of it will be according to their works. They can derive no excuse for doing this from what has been said; for not a syllable has been uttered which tends, if rightly understood, to afford the smallest hope or consolation to those who persist in impenitence and unbelief. If

any such still pretend, from what has been said, to hope in God's mercy, I would remind them of the words of the apostle; Whosoever hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/edward-payson/the-sin-danger-and-unreasonableness-of-despair/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net