

The Sinners Mistakes Exposed and Reproved.

by Edward Payson

God keeps silence in this life to test men's hearts, but will reprove them at the judgment day and show them the consequences of their sins.

Scripture: Psalm 50:3, Psalm 50:21, Proverbs 24:12, Matthew 12:36, Romans 2:5, Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 4:13, Jude 1:14

Topics: "Judgment Day", "Repentance"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the ancient doctrine of a judgment to come, emphasizing that God, though silent in the present life, carefully records the sins of impenitent sinners for the judgment day. He highlights how sinners often mistakenly believe God's moral character aligns with their own, leading to a false sense of security. Payson describes the measures God will take at the judgment day to convict sinners of their sins, setting them in order before their eyes to reveal the full extent of their guilt and the consequences of neglecting repentance.

Transcript

"These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

Psalm 50:21, 22

doctrine of a judgment to come is no new doctrine. It is almost, if not quite, as old as creation. Though it is revealed with the greatest clearness in the New Testament, yet there are many intimations, and not a few explicit predictions of it in the Old. Indeed, it appears highly probable, that, under the ancient dispensation, mankind were favored with some predictions of this day, which are not recorded in the Scriptures; for St. Jude informs us, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who was afterwards taken alive into heaven, prophesied, saying.

Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly of their ungodly deeds. To the same great day Moses seems to refer, when he represents God as saying, A fire is kindled in mine anger, which shall burn to the lowest hell, and consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. Another clear, and very explicit prediction of a future judgment, we have in the Psalm before its.

Our God, says the Psalmist, shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heaven from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people; and the heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is judge himself. Having inspired his servant thus to foretell an approaching day of judgment, God himself takes up the subject, and after a most solemn address to his professing people, turns to sinners, charges them with various crimes, and concludes with the words of our text, These things thou hast done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. In this passage we have, I. A description of the manner in which God treats impenitent sinners, during the present life. While they are going on in a course of sin, he sits as a watchful spectator of their conduct, but keeps silence: These things thou hast done, and I kept silence. There is, indeed, one sense in which he is not silent. He is continually speaking to them in his Word, inviting, counseling and warning them to repent and flee from the wrath to come; nor does he fail often to speak to them in the same manner, by the voice of conscience.

But, as a Judge, he usually observes the most profound silence. Scarcely ever does he openly manifest his displeasure against sinful individuals, or visibly punish them for their sins in the present life though he frequently sends his judgments on guilty nations. We are indeed told by the inspired writers, that his bow is bent to pierce, and his sword sharpened to cut off impenitent sinners, as soon as the day of grace shall have expired, and they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities; but till that period arrives, the tokens of his anger are restrained, and nothing is done to show that he is more displeased with the wicked than with the good.

The sun shines brightly over their heads, as it did upon Sodom an hour before its destruction; the rain of heaven descends upon them, and they are permitted to enjoy all the blessings of providence and all the means of grace. Young sinners are suffered to rejoice in their youth, and to walk in the way of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes; and those that are farther advanced in life are suffered to pursue the world, and to glory in their wisdom, their riches and their strength; so that, in this life, there seems to be but one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

Thus while sinners are sinning and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, God as a righteous Judge keeps silence; but though silent, he is not an indifferent or inactive witness of their conduct. All their sins, all their abused mercies, all the warnings they receive in vain, are carefully recorded by him in that book of remembrance which will be opened at the judgment day. If it be asked, why God thus keeps silence; I answer, because this life is a season of trial and probation.

Men are placed in this world, that they may show what is in their hearts, and thus discover their true characters. In order to this, it is necessary that they should be left in some manner to themselves; left at liberty to act as they please. It is evident that if the good were always openly rewarded, and the wicked visibly punished here; if the thunder always rolled, and the lightnings always flashed to blast the sinner at the very moment in which he sinned, this life would not be a state of trial.

Men would be so much under the influence of a slavish fear, that they would not act as they pleased; and, consequently, would not make a discovery of their true character. It is evidently no time to discover whether a servant is faithful or unfaithful, while he feels that his master's eye is upon him. If we would

know his true character, let his master withdraw for awhile, and leave him to himself, and it will then be seen whether he is an eye- servant or not. Precisely in this manner God deals with mankind.

He sets before them in the works of creation, sufficient evidence of his existence and perfections; he lays them under obligations to love and thank him by the blessings of his providence; he clearly prescribes their duty, and gives them directions for its performance, in his word; he places conscience in their breasts, as an overseer, and monitor; and then, wrapped up in his own invisibility, sits silent and unseen, to notice and record, their conduct. His eyes run through the earth, beholding the evil and the good; he is present in all the scenes of business and amusement; he comes with sinners to his temple on the Sabbath; goes with them to their habitations when they return; is with them when they lie down; and when they rise up; and follows their steps through the day; but however they may provoke him, still keeps silence.

Thus he is prepared to bring every secret thing into judgment, as he has told us he will do at the last day. Even now, this invisible witness is present. Even now he hears my words, and reads your thoughts; his adamant pen is even now in motion to record them; and it will be found when he judges the secrets of men hereafter, that not one thought or feeling has escaped his notice. II. We have in this passage the opinions which sinners form of God, in consequence of his thus keeping silence: Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.

We are not to understand the passage as asserting, that sinners suppose God in all respects to resemble themselves. They know that he is not like them, clothed with a body; that he is not mortal; that he far surpasses them in power, wisdom, and other natural perfections. But it is their opinions of his moral character, of his views and feelings with respect to themselves and their conduct, to which the assertion refers. In this respect every unawakened sinner supposes, or at least acts as if he supposed, that God is altogether such an one as himself.

Feeling no immediate tokens of God's displeasure, he flatters himself that God is not displeased. Satisfied with his own character and conduct, he imagines that God is equally satisfied. Feeling little or no abhorrence of sin, he takes it for granted that it is not hateful in the sight of God, and that of course he will not punish it. Finding it easy to justify himself, and satisfy his own conscience, he fancies that it will be equally easy to satisfy God, and justify his conduct at his bar.

But what most evidently shows that he thinks God to be such an one as himself, is the fact, that from what he should do, he infers what God will do. He says in his heart, I could not destroy so many millions as there are in the world, destitute of religion, and therefore God will not destroy them. I could not find it in my heart to punish any man with everlasting misery, and therefore God will punish none in that manner. I should save all men, were it in my power, and therefore God will save all, and me among the rest.

Sometime or other, I shall be converted, if conversion be necessary, and if it be not, I am safe. That such are the thoughts and feelings of sinners is well known to all who converse much with them respecting religion; and in defiance of all God's declarations to the contrary, they will persist in supposing that He will do as they should do in like circumstances. When hard pressed, their hearts, if not their lips avow: --I can never believe that God will make any of his creatures miserable forever.

Now in reasoning in this manner they evidently take it for granted, that God is altogether such an one as themselves that his views and feelings correspond with theirs, and that he will do nothing which they would not do, were they in his place. They forget that God has said, My ways are not yours: as high as the

heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts. They forget that God is the moral Governor of the universe, and, as such, is no less sacredly bound to punish the wicked, than to reward the good.

They forget that he has most solemnly declared that, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished, and that he cannot break his word. They forget, that God is not man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent; that what he has said is as certain as if it were already done; and fancy that it is as easy for God as it is for themselves to say and unsay, to do and undo, and to modify and change his purposes. III. We have in this passage an account of the measures which God will employ to convince sinners that he is not such an one as themselves: I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

This he will do as is evident from the context, at the judgment day. He intends, as an apostle informs us, that every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world made to stand guilty before him. To produce this effect, nothing more will be necessary than to bring into view the sins which men have committed, and the duties which they have neglected: or in the language of the text, set them in order. This, God here declares that he will do; and that he is perfectly able to do it, is evident from what has already been said respecting the silent, but particular notice which he takes of human conduct.

But what, it may be asked, is implied by setting the sinner's offences in order before his eyes? I answer, it implies, In the first place, giving the sinner a clear and full view of all the sins of his life, in thought, word and deed, in the order in which they were committed. Such a view no sinner has of himself in the present life. He is guilty of ten thousand, thousand sins, which he does not even suspect to be sins. Of his sins of omission, which are by far the most numerous, he scarcely thinks at all.

Blinded by self-love, and the deceitfulness of his own heart, he views his character in a favorable light, and calls many things virtues, which God will convince him were sins. Ignorant of the spirituality and extent of the divine law, he has no conception how frequently, how continually, he violates its precepts. Of the sins of his heart, he is almost entirely unconscious; though they are not only the most numerous, but perhaps the worst of which he is guilty. He does not consider that a wanton look is adultery, that covetousness is idolatry, and that hatred of his brother is murder in the sight of God.

He does not consider that every waking moment, in which he does not love God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself, he is breaking the two great commands on which hang all the law and the prophets. He does not consider that as often as he eats or drinks, merely to gratify himself, and not to glorify God, he is violating a most important gospel precept. He does not consider, that, during every day spent in unbelief, he has treated God as a liar, crucified Christ afresh, and grieved the Spirit of grace.

He does not consider that to him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. Nor does he think anything of the innumerable evil consequences which result from his conduct during his life, and which will continue to flow from it perhaps after his death; though he is accountable for them all. And as every sinner is thus guilty of innumerable sins of which he is scarcely conscious, so he very quickly forgets those sins which he knew to be such. The sins of each successive day efface the remembrance of the sins of the preceding day; the youth forgets the sins of his childhood; the man forgets the sins of his youth, and the gray-haired sinner forgets the sins of his manhood; hence the sinner never has any full view of his sins; and though he is every day increasing in guilt, and treasuring up wrath, he is not aware that he is more guilty now than he was formerly.

But at the day of judgment he will have a clear view of the whole; then all his sins will find him out, and God will set them in order before him, to overwhelm him with amazement, shame and despair. All the duties he has neglected, all the sins he has committed, all his vain, foolish thoughts, feelings and desires, all his idle words, all his hidden works of darkness, all his wandering imaginations in the house of God, all the mischief which resulted from his example, all the unbelief, pride; wickedness and rottenness of his heart, will then be brought to his view at once, and he will, however reluctantly, be forced to behold them.

In the next place, setting the sinner's offences in order before him, implies giving him a view of all their aggravations. All the mercies he received, all the afflictions which were sent to rouse him, all the opportunities, privileges, warnings and means of grace with which he was favored; all the sermons which he heard, and all the secret checks which he experienced from his own conscience, and from the strivings of God's Spirit, will then be set before him, to shew that he sinned willfully and knowingly, against light and against love, and that he is, therefore, without excuse.

Thus it will appear that God would often have reclaimed him, but that he would not be reclaimed, and that he is consequently the author of his own ruin. In the third place, setting his sins in order before him, implies giving him a full view of their dreadful malignity and criminality. Of this sinners see nothing in this world. They do not see what an infinitely great and glorious Being that God is against whom sin is committed. They do not see what an infinitely precious, lovely, and all-sufficient Saviour they are rejecting.

They do not see the holiness, justice and goodness of the law. They do not see what a heaven they are forfeiting, nor into what a hell they are plunging themselves by sin. They do not realize how short is time in comparison with eternity, nor how worthless the body when compared with the soul. But at the judgment-day they will be made to see all these things. Then they will behold every object in its true light. They will then see what a being God is, and the sight will convince them that the least sin committed against him is an infinite evil and deserving of everlasting punishment.

Then, too, they will see what a Saviour Christ is. He will then come, not in his own glory only, but in that of his Father and all his servants the holy angels; and the folly, the madness and wickedness of rejecting such a Saviour, will, therefore, appear to be infinitely great. Then, too, time with its engagements will seem exceedingly short and insignificant, for they will all be past; and eternity will appear long indeed, for it will be all to come. In a word, then, the nature and tendency of sin will be clearly seen.

It will be seen that as one spark of fire, if placed in a favorable situation, and supplied with proper fuel, is sufficient to produce an universal conflagration, and destroy every thing that is destructible in the universe, so the tendency of the least sin is to produce universal disorder and misery, and destroy the whole created universe or turn it into hell. How terrible, how appalling, how overwhelming, then, must be the sight which will be presented to the sinner, when all his sins are set in order before him, with all their aggravations, all their malignity, and all their dreadful consequences!

Suffice it to say, that the sight will blast him like lightning; he will feel utterly unable to support it, or to endure the abhorrent gaze of his offended God, and of holy beings, and will be eager to hide himself from it, and bury his shame, if possible, by plunging into the darkness of the bottomless pit. IV. We learn from this passage what improvement careless sinners ought to make of these awfully alarming truths. They should be led by them to consideration: Now consider this, ye that forget God.

It is owing to forgetfulness of God, and to the neglect of considering these important truths, that sinners live as they do. They consider not in their hearts, says Jehovah, that I remember all their wickedness. My

friends, is not this the case with respect to some of you? Do not some of you forget God; forget his laws, and forget your obligations to obey them; forget that you have a Master and a Judge in heaven, who, while he keeps silence, notices and remembers all your sins; who will hereafter bring every secret thing into judgment, and set all your sins in order before you?

If any such there be, you are the very persons whom God here addresses. He speaks to you as directly as if he called you by name. Thus saith the Lord God, consider your ways. Consider that I am a constant though invisible spectator of your conduct. Consider that for all these things I will bring thee into judgment. Consider how thou wilt feel, what shame, confusion and despair will overwhelm thee, when I shall set all thy sins in order before thy face, in presence of the assembled universe, and doom thee to depart accursed into everlasting fire.

Such, O forgetful, careless and impenitent sinner, is the language in which the Creator, thy Judge now addresses thee, and he also tells thee, Lastly, what will be the consequences of neglecting this warning: Consider this, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. Lest the terrible threatening should be unnoticed or forgotten, if only once uttered, God, in different parts of his word, frequently repeats it. Speaking of sinners, he says, I will be to them as a lion and as a young lion; I, even I, will tear, and none shall rescue them.

And again, I will be to them as a lion, as a leopard who watcheth for the prey will I observe them. I will meet them as a bear bereaved of her young, and will rend the caul of their hearts, and will devour them as a lion. My friends, what a terrible emphasis is there in these words. It is God, it is Jehovah, it is that very Being whom you fondly fancy to be altogether such an one as yourselves, who says this. I, he says, even I will do it; I who am omnipotent, and therefore can do it; I who am true to my word, and therefore will do it; I who am just, and therefore must do it.

And if it is Jehovah the strong God, the mighty One, who threatens to do this, well may he add, that none shall rescue, that there will be none to deliver them. My friends, it is, indeed it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; of that God who is a consuming fire. Can thy heart, he says, endure; can thy hand be strong, in the day when I shall deal with thee? I, the Lord have spoken, and will do it. Yes, if you do not consider and repent, God will tear you in pieces as a lion.

He will send death to tear your souls from your bodies; he will tear your hearts with unutterable anguish, he will give you up to be devoured forever by the gnawing tooth of that worm which never dies, and by the merciless jaws of the great tormentor who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; and there will be none to deliver, no Saviour to save, to interpose, to plead for you. Even the wrath of the Lamb, who is now willing to save, will be hurled against you.

Even the rock of salvation, on which you now refuse to build, will then fall upon you and grind you to powder. Will you not then consider these things, ye who now forget God? Will you still think him altogether such an one as yourselves, and believe your own fancies, rather than his declarations? O do not, I beseech you, do not, be so mad. Do not my sheep, my flock, do not refuse to listen to the voice of your Shepherd, do not follow the dangerous path, where the bear waits to tear you in pieces. Rather flee to the great Shepherd. He who will then tear, now offers to save you, and place you where you will be safe and happy forever.

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