

The Stubborn Sinner Submitting to God.

by Edward Payson

The sermon explores the stubborn sinner's journey from obstinacy to submission, highlighting the transformative power of divine grace and the importance of repentance and conversion.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 55:7, Jeremiah 31:18, Ezekiel 18:30, Luke 15:7, 2 Corinthians 5:17, James 4:8, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Repentance And Reconciliation", "Gods Mercy"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the story of Ephraim in the book of Jeremiah, highlighting the journey from obstinate impenitence to repentance and reconciliation with God. The sermon delves into the natural rebelliousness of mankind, the need for afflictions to lead to repentance, and the profound change that occurs when a sinner humbly turns to God. Through the example of Ephraim, the preacher emphasizes the importance of confessing, repenting, and seeking God's mercy for true reconciliation and forgiveness.

Transcript

"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely, after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord"

Jeremiah 31:18, 19, 20

verses, my friends, may be considered as an epitome or abridgment of the book from which they are taken. The obstinate wickedness of the Israelites, the dreadful calamities which it brought upon them, and the happy effect of those calamities in leading some of them to repentance, and thus preparing them for pardon, are here briefly, but clearly and most affectingly described. In this description, my friends, we are deeply interested; for since the human heart, the nature and effects of repentance, the character of God and the methods of his proceedings, are ever essentially the same, it is evident that every thing which is recorded in Scripture respecting these subjects must be in a greater or less degree applicable to us.

In our text each of these subjects is more or less distinctly brought into view. It describes three things, with which it is necessary that we should be acquainted, and which we propose particularly to consider in the

following discourse. I. We have here a description of the feelings and conduct of an obstinate impenitent sinner, while smarting under the rod of affliction. In this situation he is like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; wild, unmanageable, and perverse. Such, by his own confession, was Ephraim, when God began to correct him.

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. Such were the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thy sons, says the prophet to her, have fainted; they lie at the head of the streets, like a wild bull in a net, --that exhausts his strength in fruitless struggle to free himself. Such too was Paul, when first arrested by conviction. From the language in which Christ addressed him, it appears that he felt disposed to struggle and resist, like a stubborn bullock that kicks at the goad, and thus wounds himself, and not his master.

And such, my friends, by nature are all mankind. Man, says an inspired writer, is born like a wild ass's colt. His proud, wayward temper, fond of liberty and unwilling to yield, renders it hard for him to submit, and exceedingly difficult to subdue him. Hence his heart is frequently represented by the inspired writers, as being froward and perverse. To describe him in one word, he is stout hearted. He not only possesses this temper, but glories in it as a proof of courage, independence, and nobleness of mind; while to confess a fault, solicit pardon, submit to correction, or yield to the will of another, are viewed by him as marks of disgraceful weakness and pusillanimity.

That such is the natural temper of man, must be evident to parents and all others, who are concerned in the education of children. How soon do they begin to discover a perverse and stubborn temper, a fondness for independence, and a desire to gratify their own will in every thing! And what severe punishments will they often bear, rather than submit to the authority of their parents and instructors ! This disposition, so strong in us by nature, grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength; and to subdue it, is the principal design of all the calamities with which we are in this world afflicted by our heavenly Father.

As the disease is constitutional, inveterate, and, unless removed, fatal, the afflictions which he makes use of as remedies are various, complicated and severe. Sometimes he afflicts sinners by taking away their property and sending poverty, as an armed man, to attack them. With this, among other punishments, he threatens the Israelites who in our text are spoken of as an individual: I will hedge up thy way, says he, with thorns, and make a wall that thou shalt not find thy paths; and I will take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will destroy her vines and fig-trees, and cause her mirth to cease.

At other times he corrects us by depriving us of our relatives, who rendered life pleasant, by sharing with us its joys, or helping to bear its sorrows. To use the language of Scripture, he removes our friends into darkness, kills our children with death, or takes away the desire of our eyes with a stroke. If these afflictions do not avail, he brings the rod yet nearer, and touches our bone and our flesh. Then the sinner is chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones are filled with strong pain; so that his life abhorreth bread and his soul dainty meat.

His flesh is consumed away, and his bones, that were not seen, stick out; yea, his soul draweth near to the grave, and his life unto the destroyer. All these outward afflictions are also frequently accompanied with inward trials and sorrows, still more severe. Conscience is awakened to perform its office, and fills the soul with terror, anxiety, and remorse. A load of guilt, a sense of God's anger, fears of death and judgment, and

the tumultuous workings of passion, pride, enmity, and unbelief, torture and distract the mind and render it like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

These are the arrows of the Almighty mentioned by Job, which enter the soul, the poison of which drinks up the spirits, as a fiery dart thrust through the body dries up the blood. To these terrible afflictions Solomon alludes, when he says, The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear? Now when God visits impenitent sinners with these afflictions, they usually murmur, struggle, and reluctate, like a stubborn bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull entangled in a net.

This indeed is not always the case. Sometimes they continue stupid, careless, and unconcerned, because they do not realize that it is God who afflicts them; but like the Philistines, when punished for detaining the ark, suppose that it is only a chance that has happened to them, with which God has nothing to do. At other times, they flatter themselves that God is correcting them for their good, as he does his children, not in anger but in mercy; and this groundless opinion, combined with a fear of provoking him to punish them still more severely, often produces a kind of selfish, slavish resignation to his afflictive dispensations.

In addition to this, it may be observed, that, after a long series of very severe, and overwhelming calamities, sinners sometimes become so dejected and depressed, and their spirits are so much worn down by constant suffering, that they have no longer any strength to struggle or resist; but sink into a desponding, melancholy frame, and appear to submit to affliction because they cannot help it. But though their stony hearts are thus seemingly broken, yet they are not turned to flesh, but like the fragments of a broken stone remain hard and stony still.

They feel something like sorrow for the sins which drew down afflictions upon them; but it is that worldly sorrow, mentioned by the apostle, which worketh death. But if we except these instances, which are rare, whenever an impenitent sinner realizes that it is God who afflicts him; that he does it in anger, and that he will perhaps never pardon him, he will invariably, like Ephraim, repine and struggle, and rebel, under afflictions, and will not infrequently, like the persons mentioned in the Revelation, blaspheme God because of his plagues.

This perverse and rebellious temper manifests itself in a great variety of ways, as persons' circumstances, situation, and dispositions vary. Sometimes it displays itself merely in a refusal to submit, and a sullen, obstinate perseverance in those sins which caused the affliction. Thus it was with those of whom it is said, They cry not when God bindeth them; that is, they were like sullen, obstinate children, who scorn to reform, or weep, or cry for pardon, when their parents correct them.

Of such too the prophet speaks, O Lord, says he, thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a flint, they have refused to return. At other times, impenitent sinners manifest their rebellious dispositions under the rod by flying to the world for comfort, and plunging with increased eagerness into its pleasures and pursuits, instead of calling upon God agreeably to his command, and repenting of their sins.

Thus it was with those who when once they were corrected, said, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. With others this disposition displays itself in a settled formal endeavor to frustrate the will of God by sinning against him with a high hand, in open contempt of all his inflictions and threatenings. Of such the prophet Isaiah speaks: Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria say in the pride and stoutness of their hearts, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stone; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars; as if they had said, God has taken away one idol, but we will set up another

in its stead; he has punished us for one sin, and instead of renouncing it we will practice many.

But the perverse unreconciled disposition of impenitent sinners most frequently appears in the increase of hard thoughts of God, and proud angry feelings towards him, as if he were severe, unmerciful, or unjust. What have I done? The unhumbled, corrected sinner often says in his heart, what have I done to deserve all these afflictions? Why must God needs punish me so much more than he does many others, who are as bad or worse than myself? Why did he take away that property which I had honestly acquired by so much care and labor, and which was necessary for the support of my family?

What advantage can result from the death of the friend, the child, the wife, whom I have lost? Why can he not suffer me to enjoy at least a little peace, and not follow me with one affliction after another, as if he delighted in tormenting me? Or if I must be afflicted, why does he not sanctify my afflictions, and afford me those religious comforts and supports which I see many others enjoy? How can it be that he is either just or good, when his conduct appears so partial, and he suffers the world to be so full of misery!

And, as if all this were not sufficient, I am told that, if I do not repent and believe, if I do not do something which I cannot do, I must not only be wretched here, but lie down in sorrow and be miserable forever. If this is true I will have nothing to do with such a being. Why did he create me? I did not wish him to do it, and all I ask of him now, is that he would take away my existence, and let me sink into nothing again, that I may at length find an end of suffering and sorrow.

If this cannot be, if he must needs create me and keep me in being, why did he give me such a heart as I have? And if he dislikes it, why does he not take it away and give me a better? Thus, my friends, does the proud, self-justifying heart of the afflicted, impenitent sinner, often rise against God, and quarrel with and condemn the Almighty; and when conscience is awakened to convince him of his guilt, alarm his fears, and lead him to think that there may possibly be a future state of endless punishment, and that he must submit and be reconciled to God, if he would avoid it, he endeavors in every conceivable way, to banish this salutary conviction from his mind, labors to persuade himself that there is no danger, that all will be saved; or that, if some perish, he shall not be among the number.

If he cannot persuade himself to believe this, and his fears still follow him, he begins to look round for some other way of escape; one moment he wishes there was no God, that he was not such a God as he is, or that he could deceive, escape from, or get above him. But the next moment he sees that all these wishes are vain. Now he hopes that the Bible may not be true; but something whispers that it is, and his fears return. Thus perplexed, and distressed, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, he struggles, wearies, and torments himself, and tries in every possible way to throw off his burden, escape from the heavy hand of God, and regain liberty and peace.

A dreadful state of mind indeed; for woe to him that striveth with his Maker. My friends, do any of you know any thing of this state by experience? If so, you may perhaps listen with some interest to some observations on the second part of our text, in which we have a description of a penitent, humbled, broken-hearted sinner, confessing and lamenting his sins. What Ephraim was, when God began to correct him, we have already seen. II. Let us contemplate the new views and feelings which, through divine grace, his afflictions were instrumental in producing.

The person is the same; the character only is changed. 1. We here find the once stubborn and rebellious, but now awakened sinner deeply convinced of his guilt and sinfulness, and deploring his unhappy situation. It is good for man, says an inspired writer, to be afflicted, and to bear the yoke in his youth. He

sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him; he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope. This happy effect affliction seems to have produced upon Ephraim.

We no longer see him in the seat of the scorner, and setting his mouth against the heavens. No; he sits alone, and puts his mouth in the dust. His murmuring, repining tongue is silent, or is employed only in confessing and bewailing his sins, he still complains indeed, but it is of himself and not of God. He acknowledges the goodness, condescension, and justice of God in correcting him. Thou, O Lord, says he, hast chastised me. The word here rendered chastise, signifies to correct as a father.

He next reflects with shame, grief, and self-aborrence on the manner in which he had treated his fatherly correction. Thou hast chastised me, and I was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. His obstinate perverseness and impiety in rebelling and murmuring against the correcting hand of God, seems to have been the first sin of which he was convinced. This is very frequently the case with other penitents. Perhaps more are convinced of sin, and brought to repentance, by reflecting on their impious unreconciled feelings under affliction than by reflecting on any other part of their sinful exercises.

Such feelings have indeed a powerful tendency to show the sinner, what he is naturally very unwilling to believe, that his heart is enmity against God, and that reconciliation is indispensably necessary. Nothing can convince us of this truth, but our own experience of the enmity and opposition of our hearts. Let a man but be left to feel this for one hour, and he will never doubt again whether he is by nature an enemy to God. But though conviction of sin often begins, it never ends with this; but from this fountain the convinced sinner traces back the streams of depravity flowing through his whole life.

Thus it was with Ephraim. From contemplating the enmity of his heart, while under the rod, he proceeds to look back to the sins of early life. Once he probably justified himself and gloried in them. But now he justly considers them as his shame and reproach. I was ashamed, says he, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. All the follies of his childhood, youth, and riper years, which had drawn down the judgments of God upon him, rush at once upon his mind, and overwhelm him with shame, confusion, and grief.

Wretch that I am, we may consider him as exclaiming, what have I done? To what a wretched situation has my inexcusable folly and wickedness reduced me! How early did I begin to rebel against my Creator and Preserver; how soon begin to consider the Sabbath as a weariness, to neglect the word of God, to cast off fear and restrain prayer before him? How did I waste the season of childhood in vanity and folly! With what infatuated eagerness did I plunge into sinful pleasures and pursuits instead of remembering my Creator in the days of my youth!

With what stupid idolatry have I worshipped creatures and the world, and feared their frowns and desired their smiles more than the anger or the favor of God. How have I wasted my time, abused my talents, misimproved opportunities, slighted divine calls and invitations and thus rendered the precious gift of existence a burden almost too heavy to bear. And when my indulgent heavenly Father, instead of cutting me off as I deserved, condescended to correct me for my good, how did my proud and stubborn heart rise and murmur against his dispensations.

He has indeed nourished and brought me up and corrected me as a child, but, alas, in return I have only rebelled against him. What then do I not deserve? What punishment may I not expect? In all my afflictions he has punished me less than my iniquities deserve; and should he cut me off, and render me miserable forever, I must acknowledge the justice of his dispensations; for I have sinned; what shall I do, O thou

Preserver of men? Such, my friends, were probably the reflections of Ephraim, and such will be the reflections of every afflicted sinner, when he is brought to contemplate his own character and conduct in their proper light. 2.

In the second place, we find this awakened afflicted sinner praying. Convinced of his wretched situation and feeling his need of divine aid, he humbly seeks it from his offended God. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. This prayer nearly resembles those which we hear from the lips of other penitents in different parts of Scripture. O Lord, says the psalmist, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.

Draw us, and we will run after thee. Enlarge our hearts, that we may run the way of thy commandments. These petitions plainly intimate that those who utter them feel entangled, fettered, or imprisoned, and unable to get free. Like the apostle, they are brought into captivity by the law of sin, so that they cannot do the things that they would. Thus it was with penitent Ephraim. He felt the need of a thorough conversion; he longed to turn from sin and self and idols, to God with his whole heart; but guilty fears, unbelief, and remaining sin kept him back.

He knew not that the great work was already performed; he considered himself as still a guilty, unconverted sinner; a body of death pressed him down, and filled him with desponding fears from which he could not escape. He felt that without divine assistance he could do nothing; and therefore, like a helpless captive, breathes a short, but fervent prayer for help. Turn thou me, says he, and I shall be turned. Observe, for what he prays; not that his afflictions may be removed, but that they might be sanctified; not that he might be delivered from punishment, but turned from sin to God.

Observe also how he prays. He pleads nothing of his own as a reason why he should be heard. He does not, like the proud Pharisee, thank God that he is not like other men. He mentions no good works, no worthiness, no resolution of amendment, in order to obtain the divine favor. His only plea is drawn from the character of the being whom he addressed, Turn thou me, for thou art the Lord my God. As if he had said, Thou art Jehovah, infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, and art able to turn me; thou art also my God, my Creator, to whom I ought to turn.

To thee I surrender myself; I would be in thy hands as clay in the hands of the potter. O thoroughly subdue my stubborn heart, and fashion me according to thy will. In a similar manner and for similar blessings will every penitent sinner pray. Whatever his character may have been, as soon as he repents it will be said of him, Behold he prayeth. Though he once perhaps proudly fancied that he could help himself, and felt not the need of prayer, he now feels the truth of God's declaration, O sinner, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help.

He will also, like Ephraim, pray to be delivered from sin, rather than from punishment; and since the only way of access to God is through Christ, he will present all his petitions in his name, crying, Not for my sake, O Lord, but for thy Son's sake, pardon thou my iniquity, for it is great. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; draw me, and I shall run after thee; Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. 3. In the third place, we find this corrected, mourning, praying sinner reflecting upon the effects of divine grace in his conversion.

Surely, says he, after I was turned I repented, and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. It is worthy of remark, my friends, how soon the answer followed the prayer. In one verse, we find Ephraim calling God to turn or

convert him. In the very next, we find him reflecting upon his conversion and rejoicing in it. And what were the effects of this change, thus suddenly produced by divine grace?

The first was repentance. After I was turned, I repented. No man, my friends, truly repents, till he is converted or turned from sin to God; and every one who is really converted, will thus repent. He then begins to hate the sins which he formerly loved, and mourns over them with godly sorrow and brokenness of heart. And as no man can practice that which he hates, and for which he mourns, the real penitent will bring forth fruits meet for repentance, by confessing and renouncing his sins; making all the reparation in his power to those whom he may have injured, and diligently practicing every good work.

The second effect of conversion in this case was, self-loathing and abhorrence. He hated and abhorred, not only his sins, but himself for committing them. After I was instructed, says he, I smote upon my thigh. I was ashamed, yea, even confounded. The gesture, by which penitent Ephraim is here represented as expressing his self-abhorrence, is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures as indicating the strongest emotions of grief and holy indignation. Son of man, says Jehovah to the prophet Ezekiel, smite with thy hand, and stamp with thy foot, and cry, alas!

For all the evil abominations of the house of Israel. In a similar manner penitent Ephraim expresses his abhorrence of his own former sins; and thus in the New Testament we find the humble publican smiting upon his breast in token of indignation against himself, while he cries, God be merciful to me a sinner. Still farther to express his grief and shame, the penitent adds to the most significant actions the most expressive words. I was ashamed, says he, yea, even confounded because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

My friends, should a man make use of such gestures, and employ such language at the present day to express his self-abhorrence for sin, he would by many be thought insane; and I doubt not that there are some present, who do not believe that any person, unless he has been guilty of the blackest crimes, can sincerely adopt such language, or entertain such feelings respecting himself. But every real penitent does entertain such feelings respecting himself--his past conduct, and can with the utmost sincerity adopt the strongest expressions of self-abhorrence which language affords.

Not only so, but he finds all language far too weak to describe what he feels on account of his sins. Whatever men may think of him, and however exemplary his conduct toward them may have been, he does in fact consider himself as guilty of the blackest crimes; for in his view no crimes committed against a fellow creature can equal the rebellion, ingratitude and impiety which he has in his heart committed against God. Hence, like penitent Ephraim, he is ashamed and confounded when he reflects on his past conduct; and, like the repenting Jews, loathes himself for his iniquities and abominations.

And now, my friends, consider a moment what a change is here. He who was once like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, wild, sullen, unmanageable, and perverse, his mouth filled with murmuring complaints, and his heart with pride, unbelief, and opposition to God, now quiet, docile, and submissive, sits like a little child at the feet of his heavenly Father, which he bathes with penitential tears, while with a broken heart and a filial spirit he looks up and cries, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God.

Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? My friends, is not this indeed a new creature? May not such a change be called being born again? What blessings are afflictions, when they are the means of producing it? III. We proceed now to consider the third object here described, viz., a correcting, but

compassionate and pardoning God, watching the result of his corrections and noticing the first symptoms of repentance, and expressing his gracious purposes of mercy respecting the chastened penitent sinner.

In this description God represents himself, First, as a tender father solicitously mindful of his penitent afflicted child. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? That is, according to a common mode of expression, is he not so? for since I spoke against him I do earnestly remember him. My friends, when God speaks against us, and seems to afflict us as an enemy, he does not forget us. On the contrary, he is then more mindful of us than at any other time. As a kind earthly father, after he has corrected a child for any fault carefully watches him to see what effect the correction produces; so our heavenly Father remembers and watches over us in seasons of adversity and affliction, to see if we show any disposition to return to him.

He not only remembers, but earnestly and affectionately remembers us. How powerfully should this urge us constantly and affectionately to remember him at such seasons. In the second place, God represents himself as listening to his complaints, confessions and petitions. I have surely, says he, heard Ephraim bemoaning himself. So he does still. As an affectionate parent, after confining a stubborn child to a solitary apartment, sometimes stands at the door without, secretly listening to his complaints, that he may release him on the first symptom of submission, so when God puts us into the prison of affliction, he invisibly, but attentively listens to catch the first penitential sigh, and hear the first breathings of prayer which escape us; and no music, not even the halleluiahs of angels, is more pleasing to his ears, than these cries and complaints of a broken heart; nor can any thing more quickly or more powerfully excite his compassion.

Agreeably, he represents himself, as strongly affected by the complaints of Ephraim: My bowels, says he, are troubled for him. My friends, what astonishing compassion and love is this, that the infinite Eternal Jehovah should represent himself as troubled and grieved for the sufferings of penitent sinners under those afflictions which their sins had brought upon them! Certainly nothing in heaven or earth is so wonderful as this; and if this language does not affect us and break our hearts, nothing can do it.

Lastly. God declares his determination to pardon him: I will surely have mercy upon him. He calls me the Lord, his God, and I will be his God and Father, and freely forgive all his sins. In the same manner, my friends, will he deal with us, if we like Ephraim confess, repent of, and forsake our sins; for, says the apostle, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; and then though our sins are of a crimson color and a scarlet dye, they shall be as wool.

Thus, my friends, have we seen a contest between God and an obstinate, impenitent, afflicted sinner, issuing, through the submission and repentance of the latter, in a perfect, happy, and lasting reconciliation. In a similar manner must we all be reconciled to God, if we would not remain his enemies forever, and perish eternally as such. Permit me then to improve the subject by asking, are there not some present whose feelings and character resemble those of Ephraim, while he was struggling under the rod, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke?

You have all, at some period of your lives, been called to drink more or less deeply of the cup of affliction. What then were your feelings, when it was put to your lips? What are they now, when God corrects you? When your earthly prospects are blasted, your desires crossed, your hopes disappointed, your friends or property taken away, your health impaired, and every thing seems to go wrong with you, how do you feel? Above all, how do you feel, when your fears are excited respecting death, and judgment, and you see no way of escape?

Are your minds never like the troubled sea, which cannot rest? Do your hearts never feel disposed to rise against God, as a hard master? Do you not at times feel much of a murmuring, repining, discontented temper, and wish that it were in your power to order events differently? In a word, when afflictions or fears of future misery press hard upon you, do you sometimes feel like a wild beast entangled in a net, or a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke? If not, have you not continued hard and impenitent under your afflictions, instead of endeavoring that they might be sanctified?

If so, you are certainly striving with your Maker, and your character resembles that of Ephraim before his conversion; and unless like him you become reconciled to God, you must perish; for wo to him that striveth with his Maker. If you ask, How are we to be reconciled? You may learn from his example. If like him you bemoan your wretched, lost condition, hate, and renounce, and mourn over your sins; feel ashamed and confounded before God, and sincerely pray for sanctifying, pardoning grace, you will most certainly like him be pardoned and accepted, In no other way can a reconciliation be effected.

In no other way can you possibly escape from the wrath to come. You must be reconciled to God's holiness and justice; for never, never can he be reconciled to your sins. Sin is the only ground of contention. Do but renounce sin, and all will be well. To induce you to do this and be reconciled to God, consider the representation which he gives of himself in our text. Notwithstanding all your sins, he earnestly and affectionately remembers you still. He is now, as it were, listening and waiting to hear your complaints, petitions, and confessions; and if he can but hear from you one truly penitential sigh, or see one really penitential tear from your eyes, he will be grieved and troubled for your sorrows, and hasten to answer, comfort, adopt, and pardon you.

O, then, let him not wait and listen in vain. If you feel desirous, but unable to return, cry unto him, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; and when you retire from this house to your closets, let him have reason to say respecting each one of you by name, I have surely heard him bemoaning himself; therefore my bowels are troubled, and I will surely have mercy upon him. Thus there will be joy over you in heaven, as repenting sinners; you will feel in your own hearts those pure, refreshing joys, which result from reconciliation with God.

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