

# Divine Retribution (Reading)

by Jonathan Edwards

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*Jonathan Edwards' sermon on Divine Retribution explores the eternal nature of punishment for the wicked, emphasizing its alignment with God's justice and mercy.*

**Duration:** 1:06:54

**Topics:** "Audio Books"

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## Description

In this sermon by Jonathan Edwards, he focuses on the concept of divine retribution and the day of judgment as described in Matthew Chapter 25, Verse 46. Edwards explains that during the judgment, the righteous and the wicked will be separated and judged according to their works. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the eternal consequences of one's actions and the foolishness of being indifferent towards them. Edwards urges his listeners to prioritize their salvation and warns of the impending torment and destruction that awaits those who continue in sin.

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## Transcript

Divine Retribution, a sermon by Jonathan Edwards. Matthew chapter 25 verse 46. These shall go away into everlasting punishment.

In this chapter we have the most particular description of the Day of Judgment of any kind that we have in the whole Bible. Christ here declares that when he shall hereafter sit on the throne of his glory, the righteous and the wicked shall be set before him, separated one from the other, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. Then we have an account of how both will be judged according to their works, how the good works of the one and the evil works of the other will be rehearsed, and how the sentence shall be pronounced accordingly.

We are told what the sentence will be on each, and then, in the verse of the text, we have an account of the execution of the sentence on both the righteous and the wicked. In the words of the text is the account of the execution of the sentence on the wicked or the ungodly, concerning which it is my purpose to observe two things. The duration of the punishment on which they are here said to enter, it is called everlasting punishment.

The time of their entrance on this everlasting punishment, that is, after the Day of Judgment, at the end of the world, when all these things that are of a temporary continuance shall have come to an end, and even those of them that are most lasting, the frame of the world itself, the earth which is said to abide forever,

the ancient mountains and everlasting hills, the sun, moon, and stars, when the heavens shall have waxed old like a garment, and as a vesture shall be changed, then shall be the time when the wicked shall enter on their punishment. The doctrine is this, the misery of the wicked in hell will be absolutely eternal. There are two diverse opinions that I mean to oppose in this doctrine.

One is that the eternal death that wicked men are threatened with, in the scripture, signifies no more than eternal annihilation, that men will be the subjects of eternal death, as they will be slain and their life finally and forever extinguished by God's anger, that God will punish their wickedness by eternally abolishing their being, and so that they shall suffer eternal death, in the sense that they shall be eternally dead and never more come to life. The other opinion which I mean to oppose is that though the punishment of the wicked shall consist in a sensible misery, yet it shall not be absolutely eternal, but only of a very long continuance. Therefore, to establish the doctrine, in opposition to these different opinions, I shall undertake to show, first, that it is not contrary to the divine perfections to inflict on wicked men a punishment that is absolutely eternal.

Second, that the eternal death which God threatens is not annihilation, but an abiding sensible punishment or misery. Third, that the misery will not only continue for a very long time, but will be absolutely without end. And fourth, that various good ends will be obtained by the eternal punishment of the wicked.

One, I am to show that it is not contrary to the divine perfections to inflict on wicked men a punishment that is absolutely eternal. This is the sum of the objections usually made against this doctrine, that it is inconsistent with the justice and especially with the mercy of God. And some say, if it be strictly just, how can we suppose that a merciful God can bear to eternally torment his creatures? I shall briefly show that it is not inconsistent with the justice of God to inflict an eternal punishment.

To invent this, I shall use only one argument, that it is that sin is heinous enough to deserve such a punishment, and such a punishment is no more than proportional to the evil or demerit of sin. If the evil of sin be infinite, as the punishment is, then it is manifest that the punishment is no more than proportional to the sin punished, and is no more than sin deserves. And if the obligation to love, honor, and obey God be infinite, then sin, which is the violation of this obligation, is a violation of infinite obligation, and so is infinite evil.

Again, if God be infinitely worthy of love, honor, and obedience, then our obligation to love, honor, and obey Him is infinitely great. So then, God being infinitely glorious, or infinitely worthy of our love, honor, and obedience, our obligation to love, honor, and obey Him, and so avoid all sin, is infinitely great. Sin is the violation of infinite obligation, and so is an infinite evil.

Once more, sin, being an infinite evil, deserves an infinite punishment, and infinite punishment is no more than it deserves. Therefore, such punishment is just, which was the thing to be proved. There is no evading the force of this reasoning, but by denying that God, the Sovereign of the universe, is infinitely glorious, which I presume none of my hearers will venture to do.

Two, I am to show that it is not inconsistent with the mercy of God to inflict an eternal punishment on wicked men. It is an unreasonable and unscriptural notion of the mercy of God that He is merciful in such a sense that He cannot bear that penal justice should be executed. This is to conceive of the mercy of God as a passion to which His nature is so subject that God is liable to be moved, affected, and overcome by seeing a creature in misery, so that He cannot bear to see justice executed.

This is a most unworthy and absurd notion of the mercy of God, and would, if true, argue great weakness. It would be a great defect, and not a perfection in the Sovereign and Supreme Judge of the world, to be merciful in such a sense that He could not bear to have penal justice executed. It is a very unscriptural notion of the mercy of God.

The scriptures everywhere represent the mercy of God as free and sovereign, not that the exercises of it are necessary so that God cannot bear that justice should take place. The scriptures abundantly speak of it as a glory of the divine attribute of mercy, that it is free and sovereign in its exercises, not that God cannot help but deliver sinners from misery. This is a mean and most unworthy idea of the divine mercy.

It is also as absurd as it is contrary to plain fact, for if there be any meaning in the objection, this is supposed in it, that all misery of the creature, whether just or unjust, is in itself contrary to the nature of God. For if His mercy be of such a nature that a very great degree of misery, though just, is contrary to His nature, then it is only to add to the mercy, and then a less degree of misery is contrary to His nature, again to add further to it, and a still less degree of misery is contrary to His nature. And so, the mercy of God being infinite, all misery must be contrary to His nature, which we see to be contrary to fact, for we know that God in His providence doth indeed inflict very great calamities on mankind, even in this life.

However strong such kinds of objections against the eternal misery of the wicked may seem to the carnal, senseless hearts of men, as though it were against God's justice and mercy, yet their seeming strength and the seeming incredibility that God should give over any of His creatures to such a dreadful calamity as eternal, helpless misery and torment, altogether arises from a want of a sense of the infinite evil, odiousness, and provocation that there is in sin. Hence, it seems to us not suitable that any poor creature should be the subject of such misery, because we have no sense of anything abominable and provoking in any creature answerable to it. If we had, then this infinite calamity would not seem unsuitable, for one thing would but appear answerable and proportionable to another, and so the mind would rest in it as fit and suitable, and no more than what is proper to be ordered by the just, holy, and good governor of the world.

That this is so, we may be convinced by this consideration, that is, when we hear or read, as sometimes we do, of very horrid things committed by some men, as for instance some horrid instance of cruelty to a poor innocent child, or some holy martyr, or when we read or hear how such and such persons delighted themselves in torturing them with lingering torments, and what terrible distress the poor innocent creatures were in under their hands for many days together, and their cruel persecutors, having no regard to their shrieks and cries, only sported themselves with their misery, and would not vouchsafe even to put an end to their lives. I say when we hear or read of such things, we have a sense of the evil of them, and they make a deep impression on our minds. Hence, it seems just, and not only so, but in every way fit and suitable that God should inflict a very terrible punishment on persons who have perpetrated such wickedness.

It seems in no way disagreeable to any perfection of the judge of the world. We can think of it without being at all shocked. The reason is that we have a sense of the evil of their conduct, and a sense of the proportion there is between the evil or demerit of their conduct and the punishment.

Just so, if we saw a proportion between the evil of sin and eternal punishment, if we saw something in wicked men that should appear as hateful to us as eternal misery appears dreadful, something that should as much stir up indignation and detestations as eternal misery does terror, all objections against this

doctrine would vanish at once. Though now it seems incredible, though when we hear of it, and are often told of it, we do not know how to realize it, though when we hear of such a degree and duration of torments as are held forth in this doctrine and think what eternity is, it almost seems impossible that such torments should be inflicted on poor feeble creatures by a creator of infinite mercy, yet these thoughts arise principally from these two causes. A. It is so contrary to the depraved inclinations of mankind.

They are so averse to the truth of the doctrine that they hate to believe it and cannot bear that it should be true. B. They do not see the suitableness of eternal punishment to the evil of sin. They do not see that eternal punishment is proportional and no more than proportionable to the demerit of sin.

Having thus shown that the eternal punishment of the wicked is not inconsistent with the divine perfections, I shall now proceed further and show that it is so far from being inconsistent with the divine perfections that those perfections evidently require it. That is, they require that sin should have so great a punishment, either in the person who has committed it or in a surety. Therefore, with respect to those who do not believe in the surety and have no interest in him, the divine perfections require that this punishment should be inflicted on them.

It is not only unsuitable that sin should not be eternally punished, but it is positively suitable, decent, and proper. If it is clear that it is positively suitable that sin should be thus punished, then it will follow that the perfections of God require it, for certainly the perfections of God require that that should be done which is proper to be done. The perfections and excellencies of the nature of God require that that should take place which is perfect, excellent, and proper in its own nature.

But that sin should be punished eternally is such a thing which appears by the following considerations. A. It is suitable that God should infinitely hate sin and be an infinite enemy to it. Sin, as I have before shown, is an infinite evil and therefore is infinitely odious and detestable.

It is proper that God should hate every evil and hate it according to its odious and detestable nature. Sin being infinitely evil and odious, it is proper that God should hate it infinitely. B. If infinite hatred of sin is suitable to the divine character, then the expressions of such hatred are also suitable to his character.

If it is suitable that God should hate sin, then it is suitable that he should express that hatred, because that which is suitable to be is suitable to be expressed. That which is lovely in itself is lovely when it appears. If it is suitable that God should be an infinite enemy to sin or that he should hate it infinitely, then it is suitable that he should act as such an enemy.

No possible reason can be given why it is not suitable for God to act as such a one as it is suitable for him to be. If it is suitable that he should hate and have enmity against sin, then it is suitable for him to express that hatred and enmity in that to which hatred and enmity by its own nature tends. But certainly hatred in its own nature tends to opposition and to set itself against that which is hated, and to procure its evil and not its good, and that in proportion to the hatred.

Great hatred naturally tends to the great evil and infinite hatred to the infinite evil of its object. Whence it follows that if it be suitable that there should be infinite hatred of sin in God, as I have shown it is, it is suitable that he should execute an infinite punishment on it. Thus the perfections of God require that he should punish sin with an infinite or eternal punishment.

Thus we see not only the great objection against this doctrine answered, but the truth of the doctrine established by reason. I now proceed further to establish it by considering the remaining particulars under this doctrine. Two, that eternal death or punishment which God threatens to the wicked is not annihilation, but an abiding sensible punishment or misery.

The truth of this proposition will appear by the following particulars. One, the scripture everywhere represents the punishment of the wicked as implying very extreme pains and sufferings. But a state of annihilation is no state of suffering at all.

Persons annihilated have no sense or feeling of pain or pleasure, and much less do they feel that punishment which carries in it extreme pain or suffering. They no more suffer to eternity than they did suffer from eternity. Two, it is agreeable both to scripture and reason to suppose that the wicked will be punished in such a manner that they shall be sensible of the punishment they are under.

That they should be sensible that now God has executed and fulfilled what he threatened, and which they disregarded and would not believe. That they should know themselves that justice takes place upon them, and that they should see and rind that God vindicates that majesty which they despised. That they should see that God is not so despicable a being as they thought him to be.

That they should be sensible for what they are punished while they are under the threatened punishment. That they should be sensible of their own guilt, and should remember their former opportunities and obligations, and should see their own folly in God's justice. If the eternal punishment be eternal annihilation, when it is inflicted, they will never know that it is inflicted.

They will never know that God is just in their punishment, or that they have their desserts. And how is this agreeable to the scripture in which God threatens that he will repay the wicked to his face? Deuteronomy chapter 7 verse 10. And to that in Job chapter 21 verses 19 and 20, speaking there of God's punishing wicked men, it is said, He rewardeth him, and he shall know it.

His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty. And to that in Ezekiel chapter 22 verses 21 and 22, Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof.

And ye shall know that I the Lord have poured out my fury upon you. And how is it agreeable to that expression so often annexed to the threatenings of God's wrath against wicked men? And ye shall know that I am the Lord. 3. The scripture teaches that the wicked will suffer different degrees of torment according to the different aggravations of their sins.

Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Rekha, shall be in danger of the counsel. But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, thou shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 22. Here Christ teaches us that the torments of wicked men will be different in different persons according to the different degrees of their guilt. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, than for the cities where most of Christ's mighty works were wrought.

Matthew chapter 11 verses 20 through 24. Again our Lord assures us that he that knows his Lord's will and neither prepares himself nor does according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that

does not know and commits things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes.

Luke chapter 12 verses 47 and 48. These several passages of Scripture prove that there will be different degrees of punishment in hell which is utterly inconsistent with the supposition that punishment consists in annihilation in which there can be no degrees but is the same thing to everyone who is the subject of it. Four, the Scriptures are very express and abundant in teaching that the eternal punishment of the wicked shall consist of sensible misery and torment not annihilation.

What is said of Judas is worthy to be observed here. It had been good for that man if he had not been born. Matthew chapter 26 verse 24.

This seems plainly to teach us that the punishment of the wicked is such that their existence upon the whole is worse than non-existence. But if their punishment consists merely in annihilation this is not true. The wicked in their punishment are said to weep and wail and gnash their teeth.

Matthew chapter 13 verse 42 which implies not only real existence but life, knowledge and activity and that they are in a very sensible and exquisite manner affected with their punishment. In Isaiah chapter 33 verse 14 sinners in the state of their punishment are represented as dwelling with everlasting burnings. But if they are only turned into nothing where is the foundation for this representation? It is absurd to say that sinners will dwell with annihilation for there is no dwelling in that case.

It is also absurd to call annihilation a burning which implies a state of existence, sensibility and extreme pain. Whereas in annihilation there is neither one nor another of these. The state of the future punishment of the wicked is evidently represented to be a state of existence and sensibility when it is said that they shall be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone.

Revelation chapter 19 verse 20. How can this expression with any propriety be understood to mean a state of annihilation? Yes they are expressly said to have no rest day or night but to be tormented with fire and brimstone forever and ever. Revelation chapter 20 verse 10.

But annihilation is a state of rest, a state in which not the least torment can possibly be suffered. The rich man in Hades lifted up his eyes being in torments and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom and entered into a particular conversation with Abraham all of which proves that he was not annihilated. Luke chapter 16 verses 19 through 31.

The spirits of ungodly men before the resurrection are not in a state of annihilation but in a state of misery. They are spirits in prison as the gospel says of them that were drowned in the flood. First Peter chapter 3 verse 19.

And this appears very plainly from the instance of the rich man before mentioned if we consider him as representing the wicked in their separate state between death and the resurrection. But if the wicked even then are in a state of torment much more will they be when they shall come to suffer that which is the proper punishment of their sins. Annihilation is not so great a calamity but that some men would have undoubtedly chosen it rather than such a state of suffering as they have been in even in this life.

This was the case of Job a good man but if a good man in this world may suffer that which is worse than annihilation doubtless the proper punishment of the wicked in which God means to manifest his peculiar abhorrence of their wickedness will be a calamity vastly greater still and therefore cannot be annihilation. That must be a very mean and contemptible testimony of God's wrath towards those who have rebelled

against his crown and dignity have broken his laws and have despised both his vengeance and his grace which is not so great a calamity as some of his true children have suffered in this life. The eternal punishment of the wicked is said to be the second death once and again as Revelation chapter 20 verse 14 and 21 verse 8. It is doubtless called the second death in reference to the death of the body as the death of the body is ordinarily attended with great pain and distress so the like or something vastly greater is implied in calling the eternal punishment of the wicked the second death.

There would be no propriety in calling it so if it consisted merely in annihilation. This second death wicked men will suffer for it cannot be called the second death with respect to any other than men. It cannot be called so with respect to devils as they die no temporal death which is the first death.

In Revelation chapter 2 verse 11 it is said he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death implying that all who do not overcome their lusts but live in sin shall suffer the second death. Again wicked men will suffer the same kind of death with the devils as in the 41st verse of Matthew 25 depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Now the punishment of the devil is not annihilation but torment he therefore trembles for fear of it not for fear of being annihilated he would be glad of that but what he is afraid of is torment as appears in Luke chapter 8 verse 28 where he cries out and beseeches Christ that he would not torment him before the time it is said the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation chapter 20 verse 10 it is strange how men will go directly against so plain and full revelations of scripture as to suppose notwithstanding all these things that the eternal punishment against the wicked signifies no more than annihilation. Three, as the future punishment of the wicked consists in sensible misery so it shall not only continue for a very long time but shall be absolutely without end. Of those who have held that the torments of hell are not absolutely eternal there have been two sorts.

A, some suppose that in the threatenings of everlasting punishment the terms used do not necessarily import a proper eternity but only a very long duration. B, others suppose that if they do import a proper eternity yet we cannot necessarily conclude that God will fulfill his threatenings therefore I shall show that the threatenings of eternal punishment do very plainly and fully import a proper absolute eternity and not merely a long duration. This appears, A, because when the scripture speaks of the wicked being sentenced to their punishment at the time when all temporal things are come to an end it speaks of it as everlasting as in the text and elsewhere.

It is true that the term forever is not always used in scripture to signify eternity. Sometimes it means as long as a man lives. In this sense it is said that the Hebrew servant who chose to abide with his master should have his ear bored and should serve his master forever.

Exodus chapter 21 verse 6. Sometimes it means during the continuance of the state and church of the Jews. In this sense several laws which were peculiar to that church and were to continue in force no longer than that church should last are called statutes forever. Exodus chapter 27 verse 21 and Exodus chapter 28 verse 43.

Sometimes it means as long as the world stands. So in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 4. One generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever. This last is the longest temporal duration that such a term is used to signify.

There is no instance of using such a term for a long duration when it signifies a temporal duration. For the duration of the world is doubtless the longest of any of those things that are temporal as its beginning was the earliest of any of those things that are temporal. Therefore when the scripture speaks of things as being before the foundation of the world it means that they existed from eternity and before the beginning of time.

So those things which continue after the end of the world are eternal things and are after the end of time. Doubtless when the temporal world is at an end there will be an end to temporal things. When the time comes that heaven and earth are shaken and removed those things that remain will be things that cannot be shaken but will remain forever.

Hebrews chapter 12 verses 26 and 27. This visible world contains all things that are seen and are temporal. Therefore when that is at an end there will be an end of all things that are temporal and the things that remain after that will be eternal.

The punishment of the wicked will not only remain after the end of the world but it is called everlasting. As in the text these shall go away into everlasting punishment. So in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 9 and 10 who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe.

Now what can be meant by a thing being everlasting after all temporal things are come to an end but that it is absolutely without end. B. Such expressions are used to set forth the duration of the punishment of the wicked as are never used in the scriptures of the New Testament to signify anything but a proper eternity. It is said not only that the punishment shall be forever but forever and ever.

The smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever. Revelation chapter 14 verse 11. And they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation chapter 20 verse 10. Doubtless the New Testament has some expression to signify a proper eternity of which it has so often occasion to speak but it is ignorant of any higher expression than this. If this does not signify an absolute eternity there is no expression that does.

C. The scripture uses the same way of speaking to set forth the eternity of the punishment of the wicked that it uses to set forth the eternity of the happiness of the righteous or the eternity of God himself. These shall go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous into life eternal. Matthew chapter 25 verse 46.

The words everlasting and eternal in the original are the same. And they, the saints, shall reign forever and ever. Revelation chapter 22 verse 5. The scripture has no higher expression to signify the eternity of God himself than that of his being forever and ever as Revelation chapter 4 verse 9. To him that sat on the throne who liveth forever and ever.

And in the 10th verse and in chapter 5 verse 14 and chapter 10 verse 6 and chapter 15 verse 7. Again the scripture expresses God's eternity by this. That it shall be forever after the world has come to an end. They shall perish but thou shalt endure.

Yea all of them shall wax old like a garment. As a vesture shalt thou change them and they shall be changed. But thou art the same and thy years shall have no end.

Psalm 102 verses 26 and 27. D. The scriptures say that wicked men shall not be delivered until they have paid the uttermost farthing of their debt. Matthew chapter 5 verse 26.

And until they have paid the last mite. Luke chapter 12 verse 59. That is the utmost that is deserved and all mercy is excluded by this expression.

But we have shown that they deserve an infinite endless punishment. E. The scripture says absolutely that their punishment shall not have an end. Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

Mark chapter 9 verse 44. It will not do to say that the meaning is their worm shall live a great while or that it shall be a great while before their fire is quenched. If ever the time comes that their worm shall die.

If ever there shall be a quenching of the fire at all. Then it is not true that their worm dieth not and that the fire is not quenched. For if there be a dying of the worm and a quenching of the fire, let it be at what time it will, nearer or farther off, it is equally contrary to such a negation.

It dieth not. It is not quenched. 2. There are others who allow that the expressions of the threatenings to denote a proper eternity.

But then, they say, it doth not certainly follow that the punishment will really be eternal because, they say, God may threaten and yet not fulfill his threatenings. Though they allow that the threatenings are positive and preemptory, without any reserve, yet, they say, God is not obligated to fulfill absolute positive threatenings as he is absolute promises. Because in promises a right is conveyed that the creature to whom the promises are made will claim.

But there is no danger of the creatures claiming any right by a threatening. Therefore, I am not to show that what God has positively declared in this manner does indeed make it certain that it shall be as he has declared. To this end I shall mention two things.

a. It is contrary to divine truth positively to declare anything to be real, whether past, present, or to come, which God at the same time knows is not so. Absolutely threatening that anything shall be is the same as absolutely declaring that it is to be. For any to suppose that God absolutely declares that anything will be which he at the same time knows will not be is blasphemy, if there be any such thing as blasphemy.

Indeed, it is very true that there is no obligation on God arising from the claim of the creature as there is in promises. They seem to reckon the wrong way, who suppose the necessity of the execution of the threatenings to arise from a proper obligation on God to the creature to execute according to his threatenings. For indeed the certainty of the execution arises the other way, that is, on the obligation there was on the omniscient God in threatening to conform his threatenings to what he knew would be future in execution.

Though strictly speaking God is not properly obliged to the creature to execute because he has threatened, yet he was obliged not absolutely to threaten if at the same time he knew that he should not or would not fulfill, because this would not have been consistent with his truth. So that from the truth of God there is an inviolable connection between positive threatenings and execution. They that suppose that God absolutely threatened or positively declared that he would do contrary to what he knew would come to pass, do therein suppose that he absolutely threatened contrary to what he knew to be the truth.

And how can anyone speak contrary to what he knows to be true in declaring promising or threatening or any other way consistently with inviolable truth is inconceivable. Threatenings are significations of something and if they are made consistently with truth they are true significations, significations of truth or significations of that which shall be. If absolute threatenings are significations of anything they are significations of the futurity of the things threatened.

But if the futurity of the things threatened be not true and real then how can the threatenings be a true signification. And if God in them speaks contrary to what he knows and contrary to what he intends, how he can speak truth is inconceivable. Absolute threatenings are a kind of predictions and though God is not properly obliged by any claim of ours to fulfill predictions unless they are of the nature of promises, yet it certainly would be contrary to truth to predict and say such a thing would come to pass which he knew at the same time would not come to pass.

Threatenings are declarations of something future and they must be declarations of future truth if they are true declarations. Its being future does not alter the case any more than if it were present. It is equally contrary to truth to declare contrary to what at the same time is known to be truth whether it be of things past present or to come for all are alike to God.

Besides we often have declarations in scripture of the future eternal punishment of the wicked in the proper form of the predictions and not in the form of threatenings. So in the text these shall go away into everlasting punishment. So in these frequent assertions of eternal punishment in the revelation some of which I have already quoted.

The revelation is a prophecy and is so called in the book itself. So are those declarations of eternal punishment. The like declarations we have also in many other parts of scripture.

The doctrine of those who teach that it is not certain that God will fulfill these absolute threatenings is blasphemous in another way. That is that God according to their supposition was obliged to make use of a fallacy to govern the world. They own that it is needful that men should apprehend themselves liable to an eternal punishment that they might thereby be restrained from sin and that God has threatened such a punishment for the very end that they might believe themselves exposed to it.

But what an unworthy opinion does this convey of God and his government of his infinite majesty wisdom and all sufficiency. Besides they suppose that though God has made use of such a fallacy yet it is not such a one but that they have detected him in it. Though God intended men should believe it to be certain that sinners are liable to an eternal punishment yet they suppose that they have been so cunning as to find out that it is not certain.

God has not laid his design so deep but that such cunning men as they can discern the cheat and defeat the design because they have found out that there is no necessary connection between the threatenings of eternal punishment and the execution of the threatenings. Considering these things is it not greatly to be wondered at that the great Archbishop Tillotson who has made so great a figure among the new-fashioned divines should advance such an opinion as this. Before I conclude this head it may be proper for me to answer an objection or two that may arise in the minds of some.

Objection number one. It may be here said we have instances wherein God has not fulfilled his threatenings as his threatenings to Adam and in him to mankind that they should surely die if they should eat the forbidden fruit. I answer it is not true that God fulfilled that threatening.

He fulfilled it and will fulfill it in every jot and tittle. When God said thou shalt surely die if we respect spiritual death it was fulfilled in Adam's person in the day that he ate. God immediately took away his image his Holy Spirit and original righteousness which was the highest and best life of our first parents and they were immediately in a doleful state of spiritual death.

If we respect temporal death that was also fulfilled Adam brought death upon himself and all his posterity and he virtually suffered that death on that very day in which he ate. His body was brought into a corruptible mortal and dying condition and so it continued until it was dissolved. If we look at eternal death and indeed all that death which was comprehended in the threatening it was properly fulfilled in Christ.

When God said to Adam if thou eatest thou shalt die he spoke not only to him and of him personally but the words respected mankind Adam and his race and doubtless were so understood by him. His offspring were to be looked upon as sinning in him and so should die with him. The words do as justly allow an imputation of death as of sin.

They are as well consistent with dying in a surety as with sinning in one. Therefore the threatening is fulfilled in the death of Christ the surety. Objection number two.

Another objection may arise from God's threatenings to Nineveh. He threatened that in 40 days Nineveh should be destroyed which yet he did not fulfill. I answer that threatening could justly be looked upon in no otherwise than as conditional.

It was of the nature of a warning and not of an absolute denunciation. Why was Jonah sent to the Ninevites but to give them warning that they might have opportunity to repent reform and avert the approaching destruction? God had no other design or end in sending the prophet to them but that they might be warned and tried by him as God warned the Israelites and warned Judah and Jerusalem before their destruction. Therefore the prophets together with their prophecies of approaching destruction joined earnest exhortations to repent and reform that it might be averted.

No more could justly be understood to be certainly threatened than that Nineveh should be destroyed in 40 days continuing as it was. For it was for their wickedness that the destruction was threatened and so the Ninevites took it. Therefore when the cause was removed the effect ceased.

It is contrary to God's known manner to threaten punishment and destruction for sin here in this world absolutely so that it should come upon the persons threatened unavoidably though they repent and reform and do what they would. Jeremiah 18 verse 7 and 8 is agreeable to this. At what instance I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up and pull down and to destroy it.

If that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. All threatenings of this nature had a condition implied in them according to the known and declared manner of God's dealing. The Ninevites did not take it as an absolute sentence or denunciation.

If they had they would have despaired of any benefit by fasting and reformation. The threatenings of eternal wrath are positive and absolute. There is nothing in the Word of God from which we can gather any condition.

The only opportunity of escaping is in this world. This is the only state of trial wherein we have any offers of mercy or there is any place of repentance. For I shall mention several good and important ends which will be obtained by the eternal punishment of the wicked.

1. Hereby God vindicates his injured majesty whereas sinners cast contempt upon it and trample it in the dust. God vindicates and honors it and makes it appear as it is indeed infinite by showing that it is infinitely dreadful to contemn or offend it. 2. God hereby glorifies his justice.

The glory of God is the greatest good. It is that which is the chief end of creation. It is a thing of greater importance than anything else.

One way in which God will glorify himself will be in the eternal destruction of ungodly men wherein he will glorify his justice. Therein he will appear as a just governor of the world. The vindicative justice of God will appear strict, exact, awful, and terrible and therefore glorious.

3. God hereby indirectly glorifies his grace on the vessels of mercy. The saints in heaven will behold the torments of the damned. The smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.

Revelation chapter 14 verse 11. And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me, for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh. Isaiah chapter 66 verse 24.

And in Revelation chapter 14 verse 10 it is said that they shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. So they will be tormented also in the presence of the glorified saints. Hereby the saints will be made the more sensible how great their salvation is.

When they shall see how great the misery is from which God has saved them and how great a difference he has made between their state and the state of others who were by nature and perhaps by practice no more sinful and ill-deserving than they, it will give them more of a sense of the wonderfulness of God's grace to them. Every time they look upon the damned, it will excite in them a lively and admiring sense of the grace of God in making them so to differ. This, the apostle informs us, is one end of the damnation of ungodly men.

What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had aforeprepared unto glory? Romans chapter 9 verses 22 and 23. This view of the misery of the damned will double the ardor of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven. For the sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever.

It will not only make them more sensible of the greatness and freeness of the grace of God in their happiness, but it will make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness. It will give them a more lively relish of it. It will make them prize it more when they see others who were of the same nature and born under the same circumstances, plunged in such misery, and they so distinguished.

Oh, it will make them sensible of how happy they are. A sense of the opposite misery in all cases greatly increases the relish of any joy or pleasure. The sight of the wonderful power, the great and dreadful majesty, the awful justice and holiness of God manifested in the eternal punishment of ungodly men will make them prize His favor and love vastly the more, and they will be so much the happier in the enjoyment of it.

Application 1. From what has been said, we may learn the folly and madness of the greater part of mankind in that, for the sake of present momentary gratification, they run the venture of enduring all these

eternal torments. They prefer a small pleasure, or a little wealth, or a little earthly honor and greatness, which can last but a moment, to an escape from this punishment. If it can be true that the torments of hell are eternal, what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Mark 8, verse 36 and 37.

What is there in this world which is not a trifle and lighter than vanity in comparison with these eternal things? How mad are men who so often hear of these things and pretend to believe them, who can live but a little while, a few years, who do not even expect to live here longer than others of their species ordinarily do, and yet are careless about what becomes of them in another world where there is no change and no end? How mad are they when they hear that if they go on in sin they shall be eternally miserable, that they are not moved by it, but hear it with as much carelessness and coldness as if they were no way concerned in the matter, when they know not but what they may be suffering these torments before a week is at an end, and that if it should be so it would be no strange thing, no other than a common thing. How can men be so careless of such a matter as their own eternal and desperate destruction and torment? What a strange stupor and senselessness possesses the hearts of men! How common a thing it is to see men who are told from Sabbath to Sabbath of eternal misery, and who are as mortal as other men, so careless about it that they seem not to be at all restrained by it from whatever their souls lust after. It is not half so much their care to escape eternal misery as it is to get money and land, and to be considered in the world, and to gratify their senses.

Their thoughts are much more exercised about these things, and much more of their care and concern is about them. Eternal misery, though they lie every day exposed to it, is a thing neglected. It is but now and then thought of, and then with a great deal of stupidity, and not with concern enough to stir them up to do anything considerable in order to escape it.

They are not sensible that it is worth their while to take any considerable pains in order to avoid it, and if they do take pains for a little while, they soon leave off, and something else takes up their thoughts and concern. Thus you will see it to be among young and old. Multitudes of those who are in youth lead a careless life, taking little care about their salvation.

So you may see it to be among persons of middle age, so it is still with many when advanced in years, and when they certainly draw near to the grave. Yet these same persons will seem to acknowledge that the greater part of men go to hell and suffer eternal misery, and this through carelessness about it. However, they will do the same.

How strange it is that men can enjoy themselves and be at rest when they are thus hanging over eternal burnings, at the same time having no lease on their lives, and not knowing how soon the thread by which they hang will break, nor do they pretend to know. And if it breaks, they are gone, they are lost forever, and there is no remedy. Yet they do not trouble themselves much about it, nor will they hearken to those who cry to them and entreat them to take care for themselves and labor to get them out of their dangerous condition.

They are not willing to take so much pains. They choose not to be diverted from amusing themselves with those toys and vanities which they have in hand. Thus well might the wise men say, as in Ecclesiastes, The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Chapter 9 verse 3. How much wiser are those few who make it their main business to lay a foundation for eternity to secure their salvation. Application 2. I shall improve this subject with an exhortation to sinners to take care to escape these eternal torments. If they be eternal, one would think that would be enough to awaken your concern and excite your diligence.

If the punishment be eternal, it is infinite, as we said before. Therefore no other evil, no death, no temporary torment that you have ever heard of, or that you can imagine, is anything in comparison with it, but is as much less considerable not only as a grain of sand is less than the whole universe, but as it is less than the boundless space which encompasses the universe. Therefore, a. Here be entreated to consider attentively how great and awful a thing eternity is.

Although you cannot comprehend it the more by considering, yet you may be more sensible that it is not a thing to be disregarded. Do but consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever, to suffer it day and night, from one day to another, from one year to another, from one age to another, and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking and gnashing your teeth, with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazements, with your bodies and every member full of racking torture, without any possibility of getting ease, without any possibility of moving God to pity your cries, without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation or help or change for the better anyway, without any possibility of hiding yourselves from God. b. Do but consider how dreadful despair will be in such torment, how dismal it will be when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them, to have no hope when you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it, when you shall wish that you might be turned into a toad or a serpent, but shall have no hope of it, when you would rejoice, if you might but have any relief, after you shall have endured these torments for millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it, when, after you shall have worn out the age of the sun, moon and stars in your dolorous groans and lamentations, without any rest, day or night, or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of ever being delivered, when after you shall have worn out a thousand more ages, yet you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments, but that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you, and that the smoke of your torments shall still ascend up for ever and ever, and that your souls, which shall have been agitated with the wrath of God all this while, yet will still exist to bear more wrath, your bodies, which shall have been burning and roasting all this while in these glowing flames, yet shall not have been consumed, but will remain to roast through an eternity, yet which shall not have been at all shortened by what shall have been past.

You may, by considering, make yourself more sensible than you ordinarily are, but little can you conceive of what is to have no hope in such torments. How sinking would it be to you to endure such pain as you have felt in this world, without any hopes, and to know that you never should be delivered from it, nor have one minute's rest. You can now scarcely conceive how doleful that would be, how much more to endure the vast weight of the wrath of God without hope.

The more the damned in hell think of the eternity of their torments, the more amazing it will appear to them. Alas, they are not able to avoid thinking of it, they will not be able to keep it out of their minds, their tortures will not divert them from it, but will fix their attention to it. Oh, how dreadful will eternity appear to them after they have been thinking on it for ages together, and shall have had so long an experience of their torments.

The damned in hell will have two infinitives perpetually to amaze them and swallow them up. One is an infinite God whose wrath they will bear, and whom they will behold as their perfect and irreconcilable enemy. The other is the infinite duration of their torment.

If it were possible for the damned in hell to have a comprehensible knowledge of eternity, their sorrow and grief would be infinite in degree. The comprehensive view of so much sorrow which they must endure would cause infinite grief for the present. Though they will not have a comprehensive knowledge of it, yet they will doubtless have a vastly more lively and strong apprehension of it than we can have in this world.

Their torments will give them an impression of it. A man in his present state, without any enlargement of his capacity, would have a vastly more lively impression of eternity than he has if he were only under some pretty sharp pain in some member of his body, and were at the same time assured that he must endure that pain forever. His pain would give him a greater sense of eternity than other men have.

How much more will those excruciating torments which the damned will suffer have this effect? Besides, their capacity will probably be enlarged. Their understandings will be quicker and stronger in a future state, and God can give them as great a sense and as strong an impression of eternity as He pleases to increase and torment. O be entreated, you that are in a Christless state and are going on in a way to hell, that are daily exposed to damnation, to consider these things.

If you do not, it will surely be but a little while before you will experience them, and then you will know how dreadful it is to despair in hell. It may be before this year, or this month, or this week is at an end, before another Sabbath, or before you shall have opportunity to hear another sermon. See that you may effectually escape these dreadful and eternal torments, be entreated to flee and embrace Him who came into the world for the very end of saving sinners from these torments, who has paid the whole debt due to the divine law and has exhausted the eternal torments in His temporal sufferings.

What great encouragement it is to those of you who are sensible that you are exposed to eternal punishment, that there is a Savior provided who is able and who freely offers to save you from the punishment, and that in a way which is perfectly consistent with the glory of God, yea, which is more to the glory of God than it would be if you should suffer the eternal punishment of hell. For if you should suffer that punishment, you would never pay the whole of the debt. Those who are sent to hell never will have paid the whole of the debt which they owe to God, nor indeed a part which bears any proportion to the whole.

They never will have paid a part which bears so great a proportion to the whole as one might to ten thousand talents. Justice therefore never can be actually satisfied in your damnation, but it is actually satisfied in Christ. He is accepted of the Father, and all who believe are accepted and justified in Him.

Therefore, believe in Him, come to Him, commit your souls to Him, to be saved by Him. In Him you shall be safe from the eternal torments of hell. Nor is that all.

Through Him you shall inherit inconceivable blessedness and glory which will be of equal duration with the torments of hell. For as at the last day the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, so shall the righteous, or those who trust in Christ, go into life eternal. Amen.

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