

The Helpless State of the Sinner Under Condemnation

by Philip Doddridge

The sinner is helpless and hopeless under condemnation, and can only find salvation through God's mercy and loving-kindness.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:18

Topics: "Total Depravity", "Divine Salvation"

Description

Philip Doddridge delivers a powerful sermon urging sinners to consider how they can be saved from impending ruin, emphasizing that salvation cannot be attained through personal offerings, endurance, future duties, alliances with others, or intercession of angels or saints. The sermon highlights the futility of relying on human efforts or worldly alliances for deliverance from eternal death, pointing to the insufficiency of sacrifices, sufferings, or future reformation to atone for sins. It concludes with the lamentation of a sinner in a desperate state, seeking guidance and mercy from God in the face of impending judgment.

Transcript

1.2. The sinner urged to consider how he can be saved from this impending ruin.--3 Not by any thing he can offer.--4. Nor by any thing he can endure.--5 Nor by any thing hr can do in the course of future duty.--6-8. Nor by any alliance with fellow-sinners on earth or in hell.--9. Nor by any interposition or intercession of angels or saints in his favor. Hint of the only method to be afterwards more largely explained. The lamentation of a sinner in this miserable condition.

1. SINNER, thou hast heard the sentence of God as it stands upon record in his sacred and immutable word; and wilt thou lie down under its in everlasting despair? wilt thou make no attempt to be delivered from it, when it speaks nothing less than eternal death to thy soul? If a criminal, condemned by human laws, has but the least shadow of hope that he may escape, he is all attention to it. If there be a friend who he thinks can help him, with what strong importunity does he entreat! the interposition of that! friend?

And even while he is before the judge. how difficult is it! often to force him away from the bar, while the cry of mercy, mercy, mercy, may be heard, though it be never so unseasonable? A mere possibility that it may make some eager in it, and unwilling to be silenced and removed. 2. Wilt thou not then, O Sinner! ere yet execution is done, that execution which may perhaps be done this very day, wilt thou not cast about in thy

thoughts what measures may be taken for deliverance?

Yet what measures can be taken? Consider attentively, for it is an affair of moment. Thy wisdom, thy power, thy eloquence, thy interest can never be exerted on a greater occasion. If thou canst help thyself, do it. If thou hast any secret source of relief, go not out of thyself for other assistance. If thou hast any sacrifice to offer, if thou hast any strength to exert; yea, if thou hast any allies on earth, or in the invisible world, who can defend or deliver thee, take thy own way, so that thou mayest but be delivered at all, that we may not see thy ruin.

But say, O sinner! in the presence of God, what sacrifice thou wilt present, what strength thou wilt exert, what allies thou wilt have recourse to on so urgent, so hopeless an occasion. For hopeless I must indeed pronounce it, if such methods are taken. 3. The justice of God is injured; hast thou any atonement to make to it? If thou wast brought to an inquiry and proposal, like that of an awakened sinner, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" (Mic. 6:6,7) Alas! wert thou as great a prince as Solomon himself and couldst thou indeed purchase such sacrifices as these, there would be no room to mention them. "Lebanon would not be sufficient to burn, nor all the beasts thereof for a burnt-offering." (Isa. 40:18) Even under that dispensation which admitted and required sacrifices in some cases, the blood of bulls and of goats, though it exempted the offender from farther temporal punishment, "could not take away sin," (Heb. 10:4) nor prevail by any means to purge the conscience in the sight of God.

And that soul that had "done aught presumptuously" was not allowed to bring any sin-offering, or trespass-offering at all, but was condemned to "die without mercy." (Num. 15:30) Now God and thine own conscience know that thine offences have not been merely the errors of ignorance and inadvertency, but that thou hast sinned with a high hand in repeated aggravated instances, as thou hast acknowledged already. shouldst thou add, with the wretched sinner described above, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic. 6:7) What could the blood of a beloved child do in such a case, but dye thy crimes so much the deeper and add a yet unknown horror to them?

Thou hast offended a Being of infinite majesty; and if that offence is to be expiated by blood, it must be another kind of blood than that which flows in the veins of thy children, or in thine own. 4. Wilt thou then suffer thyself till thou hast made full satisfaction? But how shall that satisfaction be made? Shall it be by any calamities to be endured in this mortal, momentary life? Is the justice of God then esteemed so little a thing, that the sorrows of a few days should suffice to answer its demands?

Or dost thou think of future sufferings in the invisible world? If thou dost, that is not deliverance; and with regard to that, I may venture to say, when thou hast made full satisfaction, thou wilt be released; when thou hast paid the uttermost farthing of that debt, thy prison-doors shall be opened; but in the mean time thou must "make thy bed in hell;" (Psa. 139:8) and, oh! unhappy man, wilt thou lie down there with a secret hope that the moment will come when the rigor of Divine justice will not be able to inflict any thing more than thou hast endured, and when thou mayest claim thy discharge as a matter of right?

It would indeed be well for thee if thou couldst carry down with thee such a hope, false and flattering as it is; but, alas! thou wilt see things in so just a light, that to have no comfort but this will be eternal despair. That one word of thy sentence, "everlasting fire;" that one declaration, "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," will be sufficient to strike such a thought into black confusion, and to over-whelm thee with

hopeless agony and horror. 5. Or do you think that your future reformation and diligence in duty for the time to come will procure your discharge from this sentence?

Take heed, sinner, what kind of obedience thou thinkest of offering to a holy God. That must be spotless and complete which his infinite sanctity can approve and accept, if he consider thee in thyself alone: there must be no inconstancy, no forgetfulness, no mixture of sin attending it. And wilt thou, enfeebled as thou art by so much original corruption and so many sinful habits contracted by innumerable actual transgressions, undertake to render such an obedience, and that for all the remainder or thy life!

In vain wouldst thou attempt it, even for one day. New guilt would immediately plunge thee into new ruin. But if it did not, if from this moment to the very end of thy life all were as complete obedience as the law of God required from Adam in Paradise, would that be sufficient to cancel past guilt? Would it discharge an old debt, that thou hast not contracted a new one? Offer this to thy neighbor, and see if he will accept it for payment; and if he will not, wilt thou presume to offer it to thy God? 6.

But I will not multiply words on so plain a subject. While I speak thus, time is passing away death presses on, and judgment is approaching. And what can save thee from these awful scenes, or what can protect thee in them? Can the world save thee--that vain delusive idol of thy wishes and suits, to which thou art sacrificing thine eternal hopes? Well dost thou know that it will utterly forsake thee when thou needest it most; and that not one of its enjoyments can be carried along with thee into the invisible state, no, not so much as a trifle to remember it by, if thou couldst desire to remember so inconstant and so treacherous a friend as the world has been. 7.

And when you are dead, or when you are dying, can your sinful companions save you? Is there any one of them, if he were ever so desirous of doing it, that "can give unto God a ransom for you," (Psa. 49:7) to deliver you from going down to the grave, or from going down to hell? Alas! you will probably be so sensible of this, that when you lie on the borders of the grave you will be unwilling to see or to converse with those that were once your favorite companions. They will afflict you rather than relieve you, even then; how much less can they relieve you before the bar of God, when they are overwhelmed with their own condemnation! 8.

As for the powers of darkness, you are sure they will be far from having any ability or inclination to help you. Satan has been watching and laboring for your destruction, and he will triumph in it. But if there could be any thing of an amicable confederacy between you, what would that be but an association in ruin? For the day of judgment of ungodly men will also be the judgment of these rebellious spirits; and the fire into which thou, O sinner, must depart, is that which was "prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41) 9.

Will the celestial spirits then save thee? Will they interpose their power or their prayers in thy favor? An interposition of power, when sentence is gone forth against thee, were an act of rebellion against heaven, which these holy and excellent creatures would abhor. And when the final pleasure of the Judge is known, instead of interceding in vain for the wretched criminal, they would rather, with ardent zeal for the glory of their Lord, and cordial acquiescence in the determination of his wisdom and justice, prepare to execute it.

Yea, difficult as it may at present be to conceive it, it is a certain truth, that the servants of Christ, who now most tenderly love you, and most affectionately seek your salvation, not excepting those who are allied to you in the nearest bonds of nature or of friendship, even they shall put their amen to it. Now indeed their bowels yearn over you, and their eyes pour out tears on your account. Now they expostulate with you, and

plead with God for you, if by any means, while yet there is hope, you may "be plucked as a firebrand out of the burning." (Amos 4:11) But, alas! their remonstrances you will not regard; and as for their prayers, what should they ask for you?

What but that you may see yourself to be undone; and that utterly despairing of any help from yourself, or from any created power, you may lie before God in humility and brokenness of heart; that, submitting yourself to his righteous judgment and in an utter renunciation of all self-dependence and of all creature dependence, you may lift up an humble look towards him, as almost from the depths of hell, if peradventure he may have compassion upon you, and may himself direct you to that only method of rescue, which, while things continue as in present circumstances they are, neither earth, nor hell, nor heaven can afford you.

The Lamentation of a Sinner in this miserable Condition.

"O! doleful, uncomfortable, helpless state! O wretch that I am, to have reduced myself to it! Poor, empty, miserable, abandoned creature! Where is my pride and the haughtiness of my heart? Where are my idol deities. `whom I have loved and served, after whom I have walked, and whom I have sought,' (Jer. 8:2) while I have been multiplying my transgressions against the majesty of heaven? Is there no heart to have compassion upon me? Is there no hand to save me? `Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me;' (Job, 19:21) hath seized me!

I feel it pressed upon me hard, and what shall I do? Perhaps they have pity upon me; but, alas! how feeble a compassion! Only, if there be any where in the whole compass of nature any help, tell me where it may be found! O point it out, direct me toward it; or rather, confounded and astonished as my mind is, take me by the hand and lead me to it! "O ye ministers of the Lord, whose office it is to guide and comfort distressed souls, take pity upon me! I fear I am a pattern of many other helpless creatures who have the like need of your assistance.

Lay aside your other cares to care for my soul, to care for this precious soul of mine, which lies as it were bleeding to death, (if that expression may be used) while you perhaps hardly afford me a look, or, glancing an eye upon me, `pass over to the other side.' (Luke 10:32) Yet, alas! in a case like mine, what can your interposition avail if it be alone: `If the Lord do not help me, how can you help me?' (2 Kin. 6:27) "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh,' (Num. 16:22) I lift up mine eyes unto thee, and `cry unto thee as out of the belly of hell.' (Jon., 2:2) I cry unto thee, at least from the borders of it.

Yet, while I lie before thee in this infinite distress, I know that thine Almighty power and boundless grace can still find out a way for my recovery. "Thou art he whom I have most of all injured and affronted; and yet from thee alone must I now seek redress. `Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight;' so that `thou mightest- be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest,' (Psa. 51:4) though thou shouldst at this moment adjudge me to eternal misery.

And yet I find something that secretly draws me to thee, as if I might find rescue there, where I have deserved the most aggravated destruction. Blessed God, I `have destroyed myself; but in thee is my help,' (Hos. 13:9) if there can be help at all. "I know, in the general, that `thy ways are not as our ways, nor thy thoughts as our thoughts;' but are as `high above them as the heavens are above the earth.' (Isa. 55:8,9) `Have mercy,' therefore, `upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies!' (Psa. 51:1) O point out the path to the city of refuge!

O 'lead me' thyself 'in the way everlasting!' (Psa. 139:24) I know, in the general, that thy Gospel is the only remedy: O teach thy servants to administer it! O prepare my heart to receive it! and suffer not, as in many instances, that malignity which has spread itself through all my nature, to turn that noble medicine into poison!"

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