

“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

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Excerpts from Jonathan Edwards' Famous Sermon:

Source: <http://www.cs.indiana.edu/~port/teach/reig/sinners.short.htm>

Text for the sermon: `Their foot shall slide in due time' Deut. 32: 35

In this verse is threatened the vengeance of God on the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God's visible people, and who lived under the means of grace; but who, notwithstanding all God's wonderful works towards them, remained... void of counsel, having no understanding in them. Under all the cultivations of heaven, they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit. The expression I have chosen for my text, *Their foot shall slide in due time*, seems to imply the following doings, relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed.

1. That they were always exposed to *destruction*; as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to fall...
2. It implies, that they were always exposed to *sudden unexpected destruction*. As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning...
3. Another thing implied is, that they are liable to fall *of themselves*, without being thrown down by the hand of another; as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.
4. That the reason why they are not fallen already, and do not fall now, is only that God's appointed time is not come. For it is said, that when that due time, or appointed time comes, *their foot shall slide...*

The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this. "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God." By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation...

The truth of this observation may appear by the following considerations.

1. There is no want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment...
2. They deserve to be cast into hell...
3. They... not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but... they are bound over already to hell. John iii. 18. "He that believeth not is condemned already." So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell; that is his place... And thither he is bound...
4. They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment, is not because God, in whose power they are, is not then very angry with them... The wrath of God burns against them... the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.
5. The devil stands ready to fall upon them, and seize them as his own, at what moment God shall permit him...
9. All wicked men's pains and contrivance which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men, do not secure them from hell one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do... They hear indeed that there are but few saved, and that the greater part of men that have died heretofore are gone to hell...

... If we could speak with them, and inquire of them... whether they expected, when alive, and when they used to hear about hell, ever to be the subjects of that misery, we doubtless, should hear one and another reply, "No, I never intended to come here: I had laid out matters otherwise in my mind; I thought I should contrive well for myself... I intended to take effectual care; but [death] came upon me unexpected... it came as a thief... wrath was too quick for me. Oh, my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself... then suddenly destruction came upon me."

10. God has laid himself under no obligation, by any promise to keep any natural man out of hell one moment. God certainly has made no promises either of eternal life, or of any deliverance or preservation from eternal death, but what are contained in the covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ...

So that, thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them... and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment. The devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them... In short, ***they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of, all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God...***

Your wickedness makes you ... heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf...

*The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood... **All you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin... are in the hands of an angry God...***

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider... over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire... nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night - that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep...

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in... You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder... and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment...

Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. *The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation:* Let everyone fly out of Sodom: "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. According to Edwards, what is every human being's natural destination upon his or her death?
2. What evidence did Edwards use to support his conclusion?
3. How does this sermon typify the spirit of the Great Awakening?