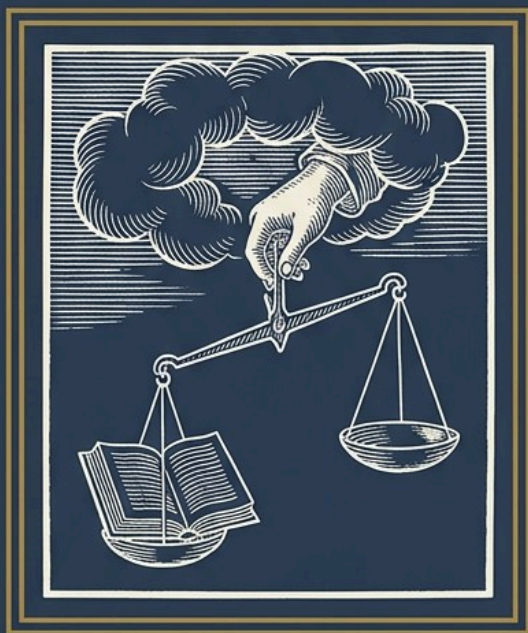


TRUE GRACE DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF DEVILS

Jonathan Edwards



TRUE GRACE
DISTINGUISHED FROM
THE EXPERIENCE OF
DEVILS

Jonathan Edwards



A free edition from

CHRISTIAN READER

A reading & audiobook app for classic Christian literature

ABOUT THIS BOOK



A penetrating sermon on **James 2:19**, arguing that intellectual belief, emotional conviction, and even trembling before God are **no sure signs of saving grace**—since devils possess all these experiences too. Edwards systematically dismantles common marks of religion—doctrinal knowledge, sense of God's majesty, awareness of eternity, sorrow for sin—showing each falls short as evidence of true conversion. What distinguishes genuine faith is something **wholly different in nature**: a spiritual, holy transformation that no unregenerate heart can counterfeit. A vital work for anyone seeking to discern authentic faith from religious self-deception.



ABOUT CHRISTIAN READER



Christian Reader is a free reading and audiobook app for classic Christian literature, with high-quality narration available as a premium upgrade.

Available on iOS and Android.

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/christian-reader/id6755921023>

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.samfrisch.christian_reader

CONTENTS



Title Page	5
Approbation	6
True Grace, Distinguished from the Experience of Dev... ..	7
Improvement	14
Introduction	54
Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God	55
Application	64

TITLE PAGE



TRUE GRACE, Distinguished from the EXPERIENCE OF
DEVILS;

A SERMON, Preached before the SYNOD OF **NEW-YORK**, Gathered at **Newark**, in **NEW-JERSEY**, On **September 28, New Style**, 1752.

By **Jonathan Edwards**, Master of Arts, Pastor of the Church of **CHRIST** in **Stockbridge** in **New England**.

(Printed at the Request of the SYNOD.)

2 Corinthians 11:3. I am afraid that, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity that is in **CHRIST**.

Verse 14. For **Satan** himself disguises himself as an angel of light.

NEW-YORK: Printed by JAMES PARKER, at the **New Printing-Office** in **Beaver Street**, 1753.

APPROBATION



At a Meeting of the Synod of New York, at Newark,
September 28, 1752.

The Synod agreed to ask the Reverend Mr. Edwards to
publish his sermon, which he preached before them.

A true Copy, Richard Treat, Synod Clerk.

TRUE GRACE, DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF DEVILS



TRUE GRACE, DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF DEVILS.

JAMES 2:19._ You believe that there is one GOD; you do well; the devils also believe and tremble.

Notice what these words contain. 1. Something that some people relied on as evidence of their good standing and acceptance as objects of GOD's favor -- namely, a merely intellectual faith, or belief of the doctrines of religion. The great doctrine of the existence of one GOD is specifically mentioned, probably because this was a doctrine where there was an especially visible and well-known distinction between professing Christians and the pagans among whom the Christians of that time were scattered. Because of this, many trusted in it as something that made them acceptable to GOD, or at least served as evidence of their share in the great spiritual and eternal privileges that set real Christians apart from the rest of the world.

2. How much is granted about this faith -- namely, that it is a good thing: **You do well.** It was good because it was necessary. This doctrine was one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, and in some ways the most foundational of all. Believing it was necessary for salvation. To lack belief in this doctrine -- especially among those who had such great opportunities to know the truth, like those the Apostle was writing to -- would be a great sin, one that would greatly increase their condemnation. This belief was also good because it had a beneficial effect in many ways.

3. What is implicitly denied about it -- namely, that it is any evidence of a person's being in a state of salvation. The entire context shows that this is the Apostle's purpose in these words. This is especially clear from the conclusion of the verse, which is the

4. Fourth thing to notice in the words -- namely, the argument by which the Apostle proves that this belief is no sign of a state of grace: that it is found in the devils. They believe that there is one GOD, and that He is a holy, sin-hating GOD. They believe He is a GOD of truth who will fulfill His threats of future judgments and a great increase of misery upon them. And they believe He is an almighty GOD who is able to carry out His threatened vengeance upon them.

Therefore, the DOCTRINE I draw from the words, to make the subject of my present sermon, is this:

Nothing in the mind of man that is of the same nature as what the devils experience, or are the subjects of, is any sure sign of saving grace.

If there is anything that the devils have, or find in themselves, that serves as evidence of the saving grace of the Spirit of GOD, then the Apostle's argument fails. His argument is plainly this: **What is found in the devils, or what they do, is no certain evidence of grace. But the devils believe that there is one GOD. Therefore, your believing that there is one GOD is no sure evidence that you are gracious.** So the entire foundation of the Apostle's argument rests on this proposition: **What is found in the devils is no certain sign of grace.**

Nevertheless, I will mention two or three additional reasons, or arguments, for the truth of this doctrine.

1. The devils have no degree of **holiness**. Therefore, those things which go no further than what the devils experience cannot be **holy experiences**.

The devil was once holy, but when he fell, he lost all his holiness and became completely wicked. He is the greatest sinner, and in some sense, the father of all sin. John 8:44. **You are of your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.** 1 John 3:8. **The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.** He is often spoken of, as a title of distinction, as THE WICKED ONE. So, Matthew 13:19. **Then the wicked one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.** Verse 38. **The tares are the sons of the wicked one.** 1 John 2:13. **I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.** Chapter 3:12. **Not as Cain, who was**

of the wicked one. Chapter 5:18. **Whoever is born of GOD keeps himself, and the** wicked one **does not touch him.** So the devils are called **evil spirits, unclean spirits, powers of darkness, rulers of the darkness of this world,** and **wickedness** itself: Ephesians 6:12. **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against** the rulers of the darkness of this world, **against spiritual** wickedness **in heavenly places.**

Therefore, what the minds of devils experience can surely have nothing of the nature of true holiness in it. The knowledge and understanding that they have of the things of GOD and religion cannot have the nature of divine and holy light, nor can any knowledge that is merely of the same kind. No impressions made on their hearts can be spiritual in nature. Whatever sense they have of divine things, however great, cannot be a holy sense. Whatever emotions move their hearts, however powerful, cannot be holy affections. If there is no holiness in these things as they exist in the devil, there can be no holiness in them as they exist in man -- unless something is added beyond what is found in the devil. And if anything is added, then they are no longer the same things but are something beyond what devils experience. This contradicts the original premise, because the point I am making is that those things which are of the **same nature** and **nothing beyond** what devils experience cannot be holy experiences. It is not the subject that makes the emotion, experience, or quality holy; it is the quality that makes the subject holy.

And if the qualities and experiences that devils have contain nothing of the nature of holiness, then they can be no certain signs that the people who have them are holy or gracious. There is no

certain sign of true grace except what is spiritual and gracious. GOD's image is His seal and mark -- the stamp by which those who are His are known. But what has nothing of the nature of holiness has nothing of this image. What serves as a sure sign of grace must either have the nature and essence of grace itself, or must flow from or in some way belong to its essence. What distinguishes one thing from another is its essence or something connected to its essence. Therefore, what is sometimes found entirely without the essence of holiness or grace can be no essential, sure, or distinguishing mark of grace.

2. The devils are not only completely without all true holiness, but they do not even have any common grace.

If anyone imagines that some things can be signs of grace without being grace itself, or without having anything of the nature and essence of grace and holiness in them, they would still surely agree that the qualities which serve as sure evidence of grace must be things closely related to grace, or having some notable similarity to it. But the devils are not only entirely without any true holiness; they are as far from it as possible and have nothing in them that is in any way related to it.

There are many in this world who are entirely without saving grace, yet still have common grace. They have no true holiness, but they still have something of what is called **moral virtue** and experience some degree of the common influences of the Spirit of GOD. This is generally true of those who live under the light of the Gospel and have not been given over to judicial blindness and hardness. Yes, even those who have been given over to that still have some degree of restraining grace while they live in this world. Without it, the earth could not bear them, and they would not be

tolerable members of human society in any way. But when anyone is damned or cast into hell, as the devils are, GOD completely withdraws His restraining grace and all merciful influences of His Spirit. They have neither saving grace nor common grace, neither the **grace** of the Spirit nor any of the common **gifts** of the Spirit, neither true holiness nor moral virtue of any kind. This is what causes the vast increase in the exercise of wickedness in the hearts of people when they are damned. And this is the main difference between the damned in hell and unregenerate, graceless people in this world. It is not that wicked people in this world have any more holiness or true virtue than the damned, or that wicked people have any principles of wickedness poured into them when they leave this world. Rather, when people are cast into hell, GOD completely removes His Spirit from them in all its merciful common influences and entirely withdraws all the restraints of His Spirit and good providence.

3. It is unreasonable to suppose that a person's being in any way like the devil should be a certain sign that he is very unlike and opposite to him, and will not share his fate. True saints are extremely unlike and contrary to the devil, both in their relationship to GOD and in their actual character. They are so **in their relationship to GOD**. The devil is the great rebel, the chief enemy of GOD and CHRIST, the object of GOD's greatest wrath, a condemned criminal utterly rejected and cast off by Him, forever shut out of His presence, a prisoner of His justice, an everlasting inhabitant of the infernal world. The saints, on the other hand, are citizens of the heavenly **Jerusalem**, members of the family of the glorious KING of Heaven, children of GOD, brothers and bride of His dear Son, heirs of GOD, joint-heirs with CHRIST, kings and

priests to GOD. And they are extremely different **in their actual character**. The devil, because of his hateful nature and those accursed attitudes that rule in him, is called **Satan**, the Adversary, **Abaddon** and **Apollyon**, the great Destroyer, **the Wolf, the roaring Lion, the great Dragon, the old Serpent**. The saints are described as GOD's **holy ones**, His **anointed ones**, **the excellent of the earth; the meek of the earth; lambs and doves**; CHRIST's **little children**; having the **image of GOD, pure in heart**; GOD's **jewels; lilies in CHRIST's garden; plants** of paradise; **stars of heaven; temples of the living GOD**. The saints, as far as they are saints, are as different from the devil as heaven is from hell -- and far more opposite than light is to darkness. And the eternal state they are appointed to is correspondingly different and opposite.

Now it is not reasonable to suppose that being like **Satan** in any respect, or experiencing any of the same properties, qualities, emotions, or actions that are in him, is any certain evidence that a person is so extremely different from him -- in such different circumstances and appointed to an eternal state so completely opposite in every way. Wicked people are called in Scripture the **children of the devil**. Is it reasonable to suppose that being like the devil in any way can be a certain sign that a person is not his child, but a child of the infinitely holy and blessed GOD? We are told that wicked people will share the fate of devils -- they will be sentenced to the same everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Can a person's being like the devil in any respect be a sure sign that he will not share his fate, but instead dwell with glorious angels and with JESUS CHRIST, living where He is, beholding and sharing in His glory?

FINIS.

IMPROVEMENT



APPLICATION.

The first use of this doctrine may be drawn out in several conclusions for our **instruction**.

First, from what has been said, we may conclude by the same reasoning that nothing **damned people** experience, or ever will experience, can be any sure sign of grace.

Damned people are like the **devils** -- they share the same nature and condition. They have nothing better in them than the devils. They have no higher principles in their hearts, experience nothing superior, and do nothing of a more excellent kind. They are the children and servants of the devil, and as such they will live with him and share in the same misery. As Christ says about the saints in their future state, in Matthew 22:30, that **they shall be like the angels of God in heaven**, so it may be said about ungodly people in their future state: that they **will be like the fallen, wicked angels in hell**.

Each of the reasons given above to prove this doctrine regarding devils holds equally true regarding damned people. Damned people have no degree of holiness. Therefore, experiences that go

no further than what they have cannot be holy experiences. Likewise, damned people are not only completely without all true holiness, but they do not even have any common grace. Finally, it is unreasonable to suppose that a person's being like the damned in hell in any respect should be a certain sign that he is very unlike and opposite to them, and will not share their fate.

Second, we may conclude from this that no degree of intellectual knowledge about religious matters is any certain sign of saving grace. Before his fall, the devil was among those bright and glorious angels of heaven who are described as morning stars and flames of fire, excelling in strength and wisdom. And though he has now become sinful, his sin has not destroyed his angelic mental abilities -- just as when man fell, he did not lose the abilities of human nature. Sin destroys **spiritual principles** but not **natural abilities**. It is true that sin, when it has full control, entirely prevents the use of natural abilities for holy and spiritual understanding, and places many obstacles in the way of their proper use in other respects. It puts the natural ability of reason at a great disadvantage through the many strong prejudices that gain power over the mind. And in fallen humanity, the abilities of the soul are undoubtedly greatly hindered in their function through the great weakness and disorder of the body to which the soul is closely united -- a consequence of sin. But there seems to be nothing in the nature of sin or moral corruption that tends to destroy natural capacity, or even to reduce it in the strict sense. If sin were of such a nature as to necessarily have that tendency and effect, then we would expect that wicked people in the next life -- where they are given over entirely to the unrestrained exercise of their corruptions and desires, and sin reaches its fullest development in them --

would have greatly diminished mental capacity. We have no reason to suppose this. On the contrary, their capacities are greatly enlarged, their actual knowledge is vastly increased, and this is true even regarding GOD, religious matters, and the great concerns of immortal souls. In fact, when it comes to these things, the eyes of wicked people are opened, and they in some ways emerge from darkness into clear light when they enter the next world.

The greatness of the abilities of the devils may be seen from the description in **Ephesians 6:12: We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers**, and so on. The same may also be seen from what Scripture says of Satan's craftiness. **Genesis 3:1. 2 Corinthians 11:3. Acts 13:10.**

And since the devil has such a large intellectual capacity, he is capable of great theoretical knowledge of the things of GOD and the invisible, eternal world, as well as other things. He must actually possess a great understanding of these things, since they have always been his primary focus, and his circumstances from his very first existence have been such as to mainly drive him to pay attention to them. Before his fall, he was one of those **angels who always beheld the face of the Father who is in heaven.** And sin does not tend to destroy the memory. Therefore, it does not tend to erase any theoretical knowledge that was formerly there.

As the devil's craftiness shows his great capacity, so the way that craftiness is used and displayed -- which is mainly through his skillful tactics regarding religious matters, his extremely subtle arguments, insinuations, reasoning, and temptations about these things -- demonstrates his great actual understanding of them. Just as someone who wants to be a very skillful debater in any field

of study, even if only to confuse and deceive those who study it, needs to have a great and extensive familiarity with the things that belong to that field.

The devil undoubtedly has a great degree of theological knowledge, having been educated, so to speak, in the best school of theology in the universe: the highest heaven. He must have such an extensive and accurate knowledge of the nature and attributes of God that we, mere creatures of dust in our present condition, are not capable of. He must also have a far more extensive knowledge of God's works. Regarding creation in particular, he was a spectator when this visible world was made. He was one of those **morning stars** we read about in **Job 38:4-7**, who **sang together**, and one of those **sons of God** who **shouted for joy when God laid the foundations of the earth, set its measurements, and stretched the line upon it**. He must also have a very great knowledge of God's works of providence. He has watched the entire series of these works from the beginning. He has seen how God has governed the world in all ages. He has seen the whole course of God's wonderful successive dealings with **His Church** from generation to generation. He has not been an indifferent spectator. The great conflict between God and him throughout the whole course of these events has necessarily gripped his attention and driven him to observe them with the closest scrutiny. He must have a great degree of knowledge about Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity, and about the nature and method of the work of redemption, and the wonderful wisdom of God in this plan. It is that work of God in which, above all others, God has acted in opposition to him, and in which he has chiefly set himself against God. It is in connection with this matter that the mighty war has been

waged between **Michael** and his angels, and the devil and his angels, through all ages from the beginning of the world, and especially since Christ appeared. The devil has had every reason to pay close attention to the steps of divine wisdom in this work, because it is against that wisdom that he has matched his own craftiness. He has seen and found, to his great disappointment and unspeakable torment, how divine wisdom exercised in that work has defeated and confounded his schemes. He has a great knowledge of the things of the next world, because the things of that world are directly before him. He has a great knowledge of heaven, because he was once an inhabitant of that world of glory. He also has a great knowledge of hell and the nature of its misery, because he is hell's first inhabitant. Above all the other inhabitants, he has experienced its torment and has felt it constantly for more than five thousand seven hundred years. He must have a great knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, because he is clearly not prevented from knowing what is written there, as shown by his use of the words of Scripture when he tempted our Savior. If he can know Scripture, he has plenty of opportunity to know it. He must also have a strong desire to know it with the greatest precision, so that he can more effectively twist and misuse Scripture and prevent the Word of God from having the kind of effect on people's hearts that would overthrow his kingdom. He must have a great knowledge of human nature, human capacity, human tendencies, and the corruptions of the human heart, because he has had long and great experience observing these things. The human heart is what he has chiefly worked with in his subtle schemes, mighty efforts, and tireless operations from the beginning of the world. It is clear that he

has great theoretical knowledge of the nature of genuine religious experience, because he is able to imitate it so skillfully, in such a way as to **transform himself into an angel of light.**

Therefore, it is clear from my text and doctrine that no degree of intellectual knowledge of religious matters is any certain sign of true godliness. A person may have perfectly clear ideas about the attributes of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature of the two covenants, the roles of each Person of the Trinity, and the part each plays in human redemption. He may speak with great skill about the offices of Christ, the way of salvation through Him, and the admirable methods of divine wisdom. He may describe the harmony of God's various attributes in the plan of salvation. He may explain the method of a sinner's justification with perfect clarity and precision, and the nature of conversion, and the operations of the Spirit of God in applying Christ's redemption. He may make excellent distinctions, skillfully resolve difficulties, and answer objections in a way that greatly enlightens the ignorant, builds up the Church of God, convinces opponents, and greatly increases understanding in the world. He may have more knowledge of this kind than hundreds of true saints with an ordinary education, and more than most pastors. Yet none of this is any certain evidence of even the smallest degree of saving grace in his heart.

It is true that Scripture often speaks of knowledge of divine things as something unique to true saints, as in John 17:3: **This is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.** Matthew 11:27: **No one knows the Son but the Father; neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.** Psalms 9:10: **Those who know Your**

name will put their trust in You. Philippians 3:8: **I count all things as loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.** But we must understand this as referring to a different kind of knowledge from the intellectual understanding that the devil has to such a great degree. It should also be granted that spiritual, saving knowledge of God and divine things greatly promotes intellectual knowledge. It engages the mind in searching out things of this kind and greatly helps a person gain a clear understanding of them. So, all other things being equal, those who have spiritual knowledge are much more likely than others to have a good doctrinal familiarity with religious matters. Yet such familiarity may not be a distinguishing mark of true saints.

Third, it may also be concluded from what has been observed that merely giving intellectual agreement to the doctrines of religion as true is no certain evidence of a state of grace. My text tells us that the devils **believe**, and just as they believe that there is one God, so they believe the truth of the doctrines of religion in general. The devil is orthodox in his faith. He believes the true system of doctrine. He is no **Deist, Socinian, Arian, Pelagian, or Antinomian**. The articles of his faith are all sound, and he is thoroughly settled in them.

Therefore, for a person to believe the doctrines of Christianity merely through intellectual influence, or from the force of arguments as grasped only by the intellect, is no evidence of grace.

Although it is probably very rare for unregenerate people to have a strong conviction of the truth of religious doctrines, especially those that are very mysterious and far above what reason can comprehend, it is clear that we have no grounds to say it can never happen, or to treat such conviction as an unmistakable evidence of

grace. No person can safely determine that his spiritual condition is good based on this evidence alone. Even if someone not only seems very confident in the truth of Christianity and its doctrines, but is also able to argue for them with great skill, in this he goes no further than the devil. The devil undoubtedly has a great knowledge of the rational arguments by which the truth of the Christian religion and its various principles are demonstrated.

Therefore, when Scripture speaks of **believing that Jesus is the Son of God** as a sure evidence of grace, as in 1 **John** 5:1 and other places, it must be understood not as a mere intellectual agreement, but as another kind and manner of believing, which is called the faith of God's elect. **Titus** 1:1. There is a spiritual conviction of the truth, a believing with the whole heart, that is unique to true saints. I will speak about this in more detail shortly.

4. It may be concluded from the doctrine we have been discussing that it is no certain sign of saving conversion for people to have experienced very great distress and terrors of mind through fears of God's wrath and dread of damnation.

That the devils experience great terrors through fears of God's wrath and dread of its future effects is implied in my text, which speaks not only of their **believing** but also of their **trembling**. The terror must be no small degree to make those principalities and powers, those mighty, proud, and stubborn beings, tremble.

Many terrors that some people concerned for their salvation experience do not come from any genuine awakening of conscience or perception of truth. Instead, they come from depression, frightening impressions on the imagination, groundless fears, or the delusions and false suggestions of Satan. But even if someone has

had extremely great and long-lasting terrors from real awakenings, genuine convictions of truth, and accurate views of things as they really are, this is no more than what the devils experience and what all wicked people will experience in the next world. However numb and unresponsive most ungodly people are now, all will be effectively awakened at last. There will be no sleeping in hell. Many people cannot be awakened by the most serious warnings and terrifying threats of God's Word, by the most alarming sermons, or by the most frightening events in God's providence. But all will be thoroughly awakened by the sound of the last trumpet and the appearance of Christ in judgment. All sorts of people will then be filled with the most overwhelming terrors from seeing the truth and seeing things as they really are. **The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men** -- even those who were the most arrogant and hard-hearted, the most ready to treat the things of religion with contempt -- **shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and say to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?'** Revelation 6:15-17.

Therefore, if people have first been awakened and then afterward experienced comfort and joy, it is no certain sign that their comforts are genuine just because they were preceded by very great terrors.

5. It may be further concluded from this doctrine that no work of the law on people's hearts, convicting them of guilt and their just deserving of punishment, is a sure proof that a person has

been savingly converted.

Not only are no awakenings and terrors any certain evidence of this, but no merely legal work whatsoever, even if carried to its fullest possible extent, can prove it. Nothing in which there is no grace or spiritual light, but only the conviction of natural conscience and the mental responses that result from it -- responses that are forced, as it were, by the clear light of conscience without any agreement of the heart and will with that light -- none of these things are any certain sign of saving grace or that a person was ever savingly converted.

The proof of this from my text and doctrine is conclusive, because the devils experience these very things, and all wicked people who finally perish will experience the same. Natural conscience is not destroyed in the damned in hell. On the contrary, it remains and is there at its greatest strength, brought to its most complete exercise. It fully performs its proper duty as God's representative in the soul: to condemn those rebels against the King of heaven and earth, to display God's just wrath and vengeance, and by that means to torment them and be like a never-dying worm within them. In this world, wretched people find ways to blind the eyes and silence the voice of this representative of a sin-avenging God. But they will not be able to do it forever. In the next world, the eyes and mouth of conscience will be fully opened. God will make wicked people see and know things that they now deliberately hide their eyes from. **Isaiah 26:10-11: Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not see the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when Your hand is lifted up, they will not see. But they shall see and be ashamed for**

their envy of Your people. Yes, the fire meant for Your enemies shall devour them. We often find this expression attached to God's threats of wrath against His enemies: **And they shall know that I am the Lord.** This will be fulfilled through their painful experience and the clear light in their consciences, by which they will be made to know, whether they want to or not, how great and terrible, holy and righteous a God **JEHOVAH** is, whose authority they have despised. They will know that He is righteous and holy in their destruction. All the ungodly will be convinced of this at the day of judgment, when all their wickedness of heart and behavior is brought to light, and all their sins, with all their aggravating circumstances, are set in order -- not only in view of others and of the whole world, but in view of their own consciences. This is what is threatened in **Psalm 50:21: These things you have done, and I kept silence. You thought that I was altogether like you. But I will reprove you and set them in order before your eyes.** Compare this with the first four verses of the Psalm. The purpose of the day of judgment is not **to find out what is just**, as with human courts, but **to reveal what is just** -- to make God's justice known to people's own consciences and to the world. Therefore that day is called **the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Romans 2:5.** Now sinners often argue against the justice of God's dealings, and particularly the justice of the punishment God threatens for their sins. They excuse themselves and condemn God. But when God comes to display their wickedness in the light of that day and to call them to account, they will be speechless. **Matthew 22:11-12: And when the King came in to see the guests, He saw there a man who did not have on a wedding garment. And**

He said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. When the King of heaven and earth comes in judgment, their consciences will be so perfectly enlightened and convicted by the all-searching light they will stand in, that their mouths will be completely shut. They will have no excuses for themselves, no claims of their own righteousness to justify them, and no objections against the justice of their Judge. Their conscience will condemn them alone, and not God.

Therefore, it follows from this doctrine that it can be no certain sign of grace for people to have had great convictions of sin, to have had the sins of their life with all their aggravating circumstances set vividly before them so as to greatly affect and terrify them, and along with this to have had a deep awareness of the wickedness of their hearts. It is no certain sign even if they have been convinced of the greatness of the sin of unbelief, of the inexcusable and terrible nature of their most secret spiritual sins, and have been brought to see the total inadequacy of their own righteousness and to despair of being accepted by God through it. Even if they have been stripped of reliance on their own righteousness as thoroughly as anyone ever is under mere legal conviction, and have been convinced that they are entirely without excuse before God and deserve damnation, and that God would be just in carrying out the threatened punishment upon them, however dreadful it may be -- all these things will be true of all the ungodly on the day of judgment, when they will stand with the devils at the left hand and be sentenced as accursed to everlasting fire with them.

Indeed, there will be no submission in them. Their conscience will be convinced that God is just in their condemnation, but their will shall not bow to God's justice. There will be no acceptance of mind toward that divine attribute, no yielding of the soul to God's sovereignty, but the highest degree of hostility and opposition. A true submission of the heart and will to the justice and sovereignty of God is therefore rightly recognized as something unique to true converts. It is something the devils and damned souls are, and always will be, far from. A mere work of the law and convictions of conscience, however great and clear, will never bring people to it.

When sinners experience great convictions of conscience and a remarkable work of the law, it is only the business of the day of judgment being carried out in the conscience ahead of time. GOD sits enthroned in the conscience, just as on the last day He will sit enthroned in the clouds of heaven. The sinner is brought, as it were, before GOD's court, and GOD appears in His awesome greatness as a just and holy, sin-hating and sin-punishing GOD -- just as He will appear then. The sinner's wrongdoings are brought to light and his sins set in order before him. The hidden things of darkness and the intentions of the heart are made known -- just as they will be then. Many witnesses rise up, as it were, against the sinner under conviction of conscience, just as they will against the wicked at the day of judgment. And the books are opened -- particularly the book of GOD's strict and holy law is opened in the conscience, and its rules are applied for the condemnation of the sinner. This is the book that will be opened at the day of judgment as the great standard of judgment for all wicked people who have lived under it. And the sentence of the law is pronounced against the sinner, and the justice of the sentence is made clear -- just as it

will be at the day of judgment. The conviction of a sinner at the day of judgment will be a work of the law, just as the conviction of conscience in this world is. And the work of the law, if it is **merely legal**, is certainly never carried further in sinners' consciences now than it will be on that day, when its work will be complete in thoroughly silencing every sinner. **Romans 3:19: Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to GOD.** Every mouth will be silenced by the law, either now or in the future, and all the world will become clearly guilty before GOD -- guilty of death, deserving of damnation. Therefore, if sinners have experienced a great work of the law and have become guilty in this way and their mouths have been silenced, it is no certain sign that they have ever been converted.

Indeed, the lack of a thorough sense of guilt, deserved punishment, and conviction of GOD's justice in threatening damnation is a good negative sign -- it is a sign that a person **never was** converted and truly brought, with the whole soul, to embrace CHRIST as a Savior from this punishment. For it is easily demonstrated that there is no such thing as fully and sincerely accepting GOD's offer of a Savior from a punishment that He threatens, which we think we do not deserve. But having such a conviction is no certain sign that a person has true faith or has ever truly received CHRIST as their Savior. And if people have great comfort, joy, and confidence suddenly entering their minds after great convictions of the kind that has been described, it is no infallible evidence that their comforts are built on a good foundation.

It is clear, then, that too much weight has been placed by many people on a great work of the law preceding their spiritual comforts. They seem not only to have viewed such a work of the law as necessary before faith, but also to have treated it as the chief evidence that the faith and comforts that follow are genuine. It is to be feared that this approach has deceived a great many people and established them in a false hope. And what we can see in the outcomes of many cases confirms this. It may be safely granted that great convictions of conscience are less likely to prove fruitless and fail to produce a good result than lesser convictions. Generally, when the Spirit of GOD goes so far with sinners in the work of the law as to give them a deep awareness of their hearts and the heinousness of their spiritual sins, and to convince them that they are without excuse and that all their righteousness can do nothing to earn GOD's favor, but that they lie justly exposed to GOD's eternal judgment without mercy -- generally, a work of saving conversion follows. But we have no warrant to say this is always the case, or to lay it down as an infallible rule that when convictions of conscience have gone this far, saving faith and repentance will surely follow. If anyone thinks they have grounds for such a conclusion because they cannot imagine what purpose GOD would have in carrying a work of conviction so far, preparing the heart for faith, and then never giving saving faith to the soul, consider this: where will our doubts and difficulties ever end if we think ourselves capable of determining so positively and specifically what GOD's purposes are in everything He does? Such an objector could be asked: what is GOD's purpose in giving a sinner **any degree** of the strivings of His Spirit and conviction of conscience, when He afterward allows it to come to nothing and prove useless? If He may give

some degree that ultimately proves fruitless, who shall set the limit and say how great that degree can be? Who can, on sure grounds, determine that when a sinner has reached the level of conviction that the devils and the damned in hell have, true faith and eternal salvation will be the certain result? This we can say for certain: if the Apostle's argument in the text is valid, nothing whatsoever that the devils possess is certainly connected with such a result. Since sinners, while still sinners, are capable of the most complete convictions and will have them at the day of judgment and in hell, who can say that GOD will never cause the condemned to experience their future judgment and damnation in advance? And if He does, who can say to Him, 'What are You doing?' Or call Him to account for His purposes in doing so? Not that many possible wise purposes could not be suggested if it were necessary, or if I had time for it now. The Spirit of GOD is often quenched by the exercise of wickedness in people's hearts, even after He has gone far in a work of conviction, so that their convictions never reach a good result. And who can say that sinners, through the exercise of their opposition and hostility against GOD -- which is not at all put to death by the greatest legal convictions, either in the damned in hell or in sinners on earth -- may not provoke GOD to take His Spirit from them, even after He has gone to the greatest lengths in a work of conviction? Who can say that GOD never destroys some after He has brought them, as it were, through the wilderness, right to the edge of the promised land? He did kill some of the **Israelites** even in the plains of **Moab**.

And let it be considered: where is our warrant in Scripture to use any legal convictions, or any method or order of successive events in a work of the law and subsequent comforts, as a sure sign

of regeneration? The Scripture gives abundant, explicit evidences of grace, a state of favor with GOD, and characteristics of true saints. But where do we ever find things like these among those evidences? Or where do we find any other signs pointed to, besides grace itself -- its nature, its exercises, and its fruits? These were the evidences that **Job** relied upon. These were the things that the Psalmist everywhere points to as evidence of his sincerity, and particularly in Psalm 119, from beginning to end. These were the signs that **Hezekiah** trusted in during his sickness.

These were the characteristics given of those who are truly blessed, by our Savior, at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount. These are the things that CHRIST mentions as the true evidences of being His real disciples, in His last discourse to His disciples before His death, in chapters 14, 15, and 16 of **John**, and in His intercessory prayer in chapter 17. These are the things that the Apostle **Paul** often speaks of as evidences of his sincerity and sure title to a crown of glory. And these are the things he often mentions to others in his epistles as the proper evidences of real Christianity, a justified state, and a title to glory. He points to the **fruits of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control** -- as the proper evidences of **belonging to CHRIST** and **living in the Spirit**: Galatians 5:22-25. It is that **love** which is **pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy**, and so on, that he points to as the most essential evidence of true godliness -- without which all other things are nothing. Such are the signs which the Apostle **James** points to as the proper evidence of a truly wise and good person: **James 3:17. The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of**

mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And such are the signs of true Christianity that the Apostle **John** emphasizes throughout his epistles. And nowhere in the Bible, from beginning to end, are any other signs of godliness ever given besides these. If people clearly have such things in them, it should be determined that they are truly converted, without insisting that it first be known what steps or method the Spirit of GOD took to introduce these things into the soul -- which is often entirely impossible to trace. All the works of GOD are, in some respects, beyond our ability to fully search out. But Scripture often presents the works of the Spirit of GOD as especially so. **Isaiah 40:13: Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him? Ecclesiastes 11:5: Just as you do not know the path of the wind, or how bones are formed in the womb of a pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of GOD who makes all things.** John 3:8: **The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**

6. It follows from my text and doctrine that it is no certain sign of grace that people have earnest desires and longings for salvation.

The devils undoubtedly long for deliverance from the misery they suffer and from the greater misery they expect. If they tremble from fear of it, they must necessarily have an earnest desire to be delivered from it. Wicked people are described in Scripture as longing for the privileges of the righteous when the door is shut and they are excluded. They come to the door and cry, **Lord, Lord, open to us.** Therefore, we should not look on all desires,

or even all desires that are very earnest and intense, as certain evidences of a godly heart. There are earnest desires of a religious nature that saints have, which are the natural expressions of a new nature and distinguishing qualities of true saints. But there are also longings that unregenerate people may have, which are often mistaken for marks of godliness. They think they hunger and thirst after righteousness, and have earnest desires for GOD and CHRIST, and long for heaven. But in reality, it all comes down to desires for salvation motivated by self-love -- longings that arise from no higher principles than the earnest desires of devils.

7. It may be concluded from what has been observed that people who have no grace may have a great awareness of outward glory in heavenly and divine things, and of everything external that relates to religion.

If people have strong impressions on their minds of the kind of ideas that come through the outward senses -- whether through hearing, such as any kind of sound, the most pleasant music, or words spoken with excellent meaning, words of Scripture or any other, directly suggested as though they were spoken, however fitting they may seem to their situation or the subject of their thoughts -- or whether through sight, such as ideas of visible beauty and glory, a shining light, the outward glory of heaven, golden streets, walls and gates of precious stone, splendid palaces, glorious inhabitants shining like the sun, a most magnificent throne surrounded by angels and saints in shining rows -- or anything outward pertaining to JESUS CHRIST, whether in His humbled state, such as JESUS hanging on the cross with His crown of thorns, His wounds open and blood running down, or in His glori-

fied state with awesome majesty or captivating beauty and sweetness in His face, His face shining brighter than the sun, and the like -- these things are no certain signs of grace.

Multitudes who are now in hell will have impressions of the outward glory of heavenly things far beyond what anyone has ever had in this world. They will see all the outward glory and beauty in which CHRIST will appear at the day of judgment, when the sun will be turned to darkness before Him -- which will undoubtedly be ten thousand times greater than anything ever impressed on the imagination of either saints or sinners in this present life, or ever conceived by any mortal person.

8. It may be concluded from this doctrine that people who have no grace may have a very great and deeply moving sense of many divine things on their hearts.

The devil has not only great theoretical knowledge, but he has a sense of many divine things that deeply affects him and is most strongly impressed on his heart. Such as:

1. The devils and damned souls have a great sense of the **vast importance** of the things of the next world. They are **in** the invisible world, and they see and know how great the things of that world are. Their experience teaches them in the most deeply moving way. They have a great sense of the worth of salvation, the worth of immortal souls, and the vast importance of everything that concerns people's eternal well-being. The parable at the end of Luke chapter 16 teaches this, showing the **rich man** in hell as begging that **Lazarus** might be sent **to his five brothers to warn them, so they would not come to that place of torment**. Those who endure the torments of hell undoubtedly have the most

vivid and deeply felt sense of the vastness of an endless eternity, and of the comparatively brief nature of this life and the emptiness of the concerns and pleasures of this present time. They are effectively convinced that all the things of this world, even those that appear greatest and most important to the people of the earth, are worthless trifles compared to the things of the eternal world. They have a great sense of the preciousness of time, of the means of grace, and of the priceless value of the privileges enjoyed by those who live under the Gospel. They are fully aware of the foolishness of those who go on in sin, neglect their opportunities, make light of GOD's counsel and warnings, and they bitterly regret their own extreme foolishness in their sins -- by which they have brought such great and hopeless misery upon themselves. When sinners, through painful experience, discover the dreadful outcome of their evil way, they will **mourn at the last, saying, 'How I hated instruction, and my heart despised correction, and I did not obey the voice of my teachers, nor incline my ear to those who instructed me!'** Proverbs 5:11-13.

Therefore, although true godliness is accompanied by a great sense of the importance of divine things, and it is rare for people without grace to maintain such a sense in any steady and lasting way, it is still clear that these things are no certain evidences of grace. Unregenerate people may have a sense of the importance of the things of eternity and the emptiness of the things of time, the worth of immortal souls, the preciousness of time and the means of grace, and the foolishness of living in deliberate sin. They may have such a deep sense of these things that it deeply moves them and causes them to mourn for their own sins and to be greatly con-

cerned for others. Though it is true that they do not have these things in the same way, or in all respects from the same sources and perspectives, as godly people do.

2. Devils and damned people have a strong and deeply moving sense of the awesome **greatness** and **majesty** of GOD. The awesome majesty of GOD is powerfully displayed in the executions of divine wrath that they experience. Making this known is one of GOD's purposes in His vengeance on His enemies. **Romans 9:22: What if GOD, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?** The devils tremble before this **great and terrible** GOD, under a strong sense of His **awesome majesty**. It is powerfully displayed to them and to damned souls now, but it will be displayed to an even greater degree **on that day when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire to take vengeance on them**. Then they will earnestly desire to flee and **be hidden from the face of Him who sits on the throne (because of the glory of His majesty, Isaiah 2:10)**, and they **will be punished with everlasting destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power**. When Christ **comes** at the last day **in the glory of His Father, every eye will see Him** in that glory -- in the sense that they will see His terrible majesty -- **and those also who pierced Him: Revelation 1:7**. Both the devils and the wicked people who tormented and mocked Him when He appeared in lowliness and shame will then see Him in the glory of His Father.

It is evident, therefore, that a sense of GOD's terrible majesty is no certain evidence of saving grace, since wicked people and devils are clearly capable of it. Indeed, many wicked people in this world have actually had it. This is a revelation that GOD made of Himself in the sight of that wicked assembly at **Mount Sinai**, which they saw and were deeply affected by, **so that all the people in the camp trembled.**

3. Devils and damned people have some kind of conviction and sense of all the attributes of GOD, both natural and moral, that is strong and deeply affecting.

The devils know GOD's **almighty power.** They saw a great display of it when they saw GOD lay the foundation of the earth and so on, and they were deeply moved by it. And they have seen countless other great demonstrations of His power -- such as the universal flood, the destruction of **Sodom**, the wonders in **Egypt**, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, the causing of the sun to stand still in **Joshua's** time, and many others. They had a deeply affecting demonstration of GOD's mighty power upon themselves when He cast all their hosts down from heaven into hell, and they have continual affecting experience of it as GOD holds them in strong chains of darkness and in the strong pains they feel. They will have a far more affecting experience of it in the future, when **they will be punished by the glory of GOD's power** with that mighty destruction which they now tremble in expectation of. The devils also have a great knowledge of the **wisdom** of GOD. They have had unspeakably more opportunity and occasion to observe it in the work of creation and in the works of providence than any mortal person has ever had. They themselves have been the subjects of countless affecting demonstrations of it, as GOD has

thwarted and confounded their most cunning schemes in such wonderful and astonishing ways. They also see and feel the **infinite purity and holiness** of the divine nature in the most affecting way, as this appears in His infinite hatred of sin through the dreadful effects of that hatred which they experience. They know already by what they suffer, and will know to a greater degree and in a far more affecting way in the future, that GOD's opposition to sin is so great that it is like a consuming fire that burns with infinite intensity against it. They will feel the fierce heat of that fire in a most dreadful way. They will also see the holiness of GOD as it is exercised in His love for righteousness and holiness, in what they will see of the reward of Christ's righteousness and the holiness of His people, in the glory of Christ and His church. This also will deeply affect devils and wicked people. And the **exact justice** of GOD will be displayed to them in the clearest, strongest, most convincing, and most deeply affecting light at the day of judgment. At that time they will also see great and affecting demonstrations of the riches of His **grace** in the marvelous fruits of His love to the vessels of mercy. They will see them at the right hand of Christ, shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and will hear the blessed sentence pronounced upon them, and will be deeply affected by it -- as seems naturally implied in **Luke** 13:28-29. The devils know GOD's **truth**, and therefore they believe His threats and tremble in expectation of their fulfillment. And wicked people who now doubt His truth and dare not trust His word will in the future, in the most convincing and affecting way, find His word to be true in all that He has threatened. They will see that He is faithful to His promises in the rewards of His saints. Devils and

damned people know that GOD is **eternal** and **unchangeable**, and therefore they despair of there ever being an end to their misery.

Therefore, it is clear that merely having a deeply felt sense of some, or even all, of GOD's attributes is no certain sign that a person has the true grace of GOD in his heart.

Objection. Here someone may possibly object to the force of the preceding reasoning. They may say that ungodly people in this world are in vastly different circumstances from the devils, and from what wicked people will face at the day of judgment. The things that are visible and present to the latter are still future and invisible to the former. And wicked people in this world are in the body, which weighs down and hinders the soul, and they are surrounded by objects that blind and numb them. Therefore, it does not follow that because the wicked in the next world have a great and vivid sense of such things without grace, ungodly people in their present state can have the same.

Answer. To this I answer: it is not being claimed that people in this life ever have all the things that have been mentioned to the same degree that the devils and the damned have them. No one claims that anyone in this life has terrors of conscience equal in degree to theirs. It is not to be supposed that any mortal person, whether godly or ungodly, has an equal degree of theoretical knowledge to the devil. And, as was just observed, the wicked at the day of judgment will have a vastly greater impression of the outward glory of Christ than anyone ever has in the present life. Likewise, they will undoubtedly have a far greater sense of GOD's awesome greatness and terrible majesty than anyone could endure in this frail state. So we may well conclude that the devils and

wicked people in hell have a greater and more deeply felt sense of the vastness of eternity, and in some respects a greater sense of the importance of the things of the next world, than anyone has here. And they also have longings for salvation to a higher degree than any wicked people in this world.

But still, it is evident that people in this world may have things of **the same kind** as devils and damned people. They may have the same sort of light in the understanding, the same views, the same emotions, the same sense of things, the same kind of impressions on the mind and on the heart. If this objection challenges the conclusiveness of the reasoning I have used to prove this, it really challenges the conclusiveness of the Apostle's reasoning more than mine. The Apostle considered it a conclusive argument against those who thought their **believing there was one** GOD was evidence of their being gracious, that the devils believed the same thing. So the argument works exactly the same way against those who think they have grace because they believe GOD is a **holy** GOD, or because they have a sense of the **awesome majesty** of GOD. The same may be said of the other things that have been mentioned. My text refers not only to the act of the devils' minds in believing, but to the emotion of their hearts that accompanies their views, since **trembling** is an effect of the heart's emotion. This shows that if people have both the same views of understanding and the same emotions of heart that the devils have, it is no sign of grace.

As for the particular degree to which these things may be carried in people in this world without grace, it does not appear safe to try to pin it down so precisely as to use it as an infallible rule for determining people's spiritual state. I do not know where we have

any rule to go by for fixing the precise degree to which GOD, by His providence or His common influences on the mind, will stir up in wicked people in this world the same views and emotions that the wicked have in the next world. It is clear that people in this life are capable of these things just as much as those in the next, since they have the same faculties and principles of soul. And it is evident that they often actually experience them to some degree -- some more and some less. The infallible evidences of grace laid down in Scripture are of a different kind entirely. They are all of a holy and spiritual nature, and therefore are things that a heart that is wholly carnal and corrupt cannot receive or have any experience of. 1 **Corinthians** 2:14.

I might also add here that observation and experience, in a great many cases, seem to confirm what Scripture and reason teach in these matters.

The second use of this doctrine may be for **self-examination**.

Let the things that have been observed lead everyone to examine themselves and ask whether they have any better evidences of saving grace than those that have been mentioned.

We see how the infallible Spirit of GOD, in the text, plainly presents the things the devils experience as no sure sign of grace. And we have now, in some cases, observed how far the devils and damned people go, and will go, in their experience: their knowledge of divine things, their belief of truth, their awakenings and terrors of conscience, their conviction of guilt, their recognition of the justice of GOD in their eternal, dreadful damnation, their longings for salvation, their sight of the outward glory of Christ and heavenly things, their sense of the vast importance of religious

matters and the next world, their sense of the awesome greatness and terrible majesty of GOD -- yes, even of all GOD's attributes. These things may well drive us to serious self-examination, asking whether we have anything to prove our good spiritual state beyond what the devils experience. Christ said to His disciples, **Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.** So the Spirit of Christ, in His Apostle **James**, effectively says in my text: unless what you experience in your souls goes beyond the experiences of devils, you will by no means enter the kingdom of GOD.

Here, perhaps, some will be ready to say: 'I have something besides all these things that have been mentioned. I have things the devils do not have -- namely, **love** and **joy**.'

I answer: you may have something **besides** the experiences of devils, and yet nothing **beyond** them. Although the experience may be different, it may not come from any different principle, but only from the different circumstances under which these principles operate. The principles from which the things mentioned above arise in devils and damned people are these two: **natural understanding** and **self-love**. It is from natural understanding or reason that they have such a degree of knowledge in divine things, and such a belief of them. It is from these principles of natural understanding and self-love, as exercised regarding their own dispositions and actions and God as their Judge, that they have **natural conscience** and such convictions of conscience as have been spoken of. It is from these principles that they have such a sense of the importance of religious matters and the eternal world, and such longings for salvation. It is from the combined exercise of these

two principles that they are so aware of the awesome majesty of God and of all the attributes of the divine nature, and so greatly affected by them. It is from these principles, joined with outward sense, that the wicked at the day of judgment will have so great an awareness of and will be so greatly affected by the outward glory of Christ and His saints. The fact that you have a kind of love, or gratitude and joy, which devils and damned people do not have, may not come from any principles in your heart different from these two. It may arise only from these same principles operating under different circumstances. For instance, you may be a subject of God's restraining grace, and may be in circumstances of hope and the receipt of mercy. The natural understanding and self-love of devils might affect them in the same way if they were in the same circumstances. If your love for God has its first source from nothing else than a supposed immediate divine witness, or any other supposed evidence, that Christ died for you in particular and that God loves you, it springs from no higher principle than self-love -- a principle that reigns in the hearts of devils. Self-love is enough, without grace, to cause people to love those who love them, or those they imagine love them and treat them well. **Luke 6:32: For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For sinners also love those who love them.** Would not the hearts of devils be filled with great **joy** if they somehow became confidently convinced that God had pardoned them, had become their friend, and that they would be delivered from the wrath they now tremble in expectation of? If the devils go as far as you have heard, even in their circumstances -- being totally cast off, given up to unrestrained wickedness, without hope, knowing that God is and ever will be their enemy, suffering His wrath without mercy --

how far may we reasonably suppose they might go in imitating grace and godly experience if they had the same degree of knowledge, as clear a view, and as strong a conviction, under circumstances of hope and offers of mercy, while also being subjects of common grace that restrains their corruptions and assists and stimulates the natural principles of reason, conscience, and so on? Such things as devils experience -- such great conviction of conscience, such a sense of the importance of eternal things, such affecting views of the awesome majesty, greatness, power, holiness, justice, and truth of God, and such a sense of His great grace to the saints -- if these things, or anything like them, were in the heart of a sinner in this world, at the same time that he, from some strong impression on his imagination of Christ appearing to him, or sweet words spoken to him, or by some other means, has suddenly after great terrors taken on a strong confidence that now this great God is his friend and father, has released him from all the misery he feared, and has promised him eternal happiness -- such things would undoubtedly vastly heighten his ecstasy of joy and raise the exercise of natural gratitude (that principle by which sinners love those who love them), and would produce a great imitation of many graces in strong exercises. Is it any wonder, then, that multitudes under this sort of emotion are deceived? Especially when they have devils to help the delusion forward, whose great craftiness has chiefly been exercised in deceiving humanity through all past generations.

Inquiry. Here perhaps some may be ready to ask: if there may be so many things that people can experience from no higher principles than are in the minds and hearts of devils, what are those

exercises and emotions that are of a higher nature, which I must find in my heart, and which I may rightly look upon as sure signs of the saving grace of God's Spirit?

Answer. Those exercises and emotions that are good evidences of grace differ from everything the devils experience, and from everything that can arise from such principles as are in their hearts, in two things: their **foundation** and their **tendency**.

1. They differ in their **foundation**, that is, in what is most fundamental in them and the basis of everything else that belongs to them: **a perception or sense of the supreme holy beauty and excellence of divine things as they are in themselves, in their own nature.**

The devils and the damned in hell are, and forever will be, entirely without this. The devils once had this while they stood in their integrity, but they completely lost it when they fell. And this is the only thing that can be named, belonging to the devil's perception and sense of the divine Being, that he actually lost. Nothing else belonging to the knowledge of GOD can be identified that he lacks. It has been observed that there is no single attribute of the divine nature that he is not aware of and knows, and of which he does not have a strong and deeply affecting conviction. This, I think, is evident and undeniable. But the supreme beauty of the divine nature he is completely blind to. He sees no more of it than a person born completely blind sees of colors. The great awareness he has of GOD's attributes gives him an idea and a strong sense of His awesome majesty, but no idea of His beauty and excellence. Though he has seen so much of GOD's wonderful works of power, wisdom, holiness, justice, and truth, and His wonderful works of grace to mankind, for so many thousands of years,

and has had every reason to observe them with the closest attention, all of it fails to give him the slightest sense of divine beauty. And though the devils should continue to exercise their mighty powers of mind with the strongest effort, and should consider things from every possible angle, in every order and arrangement, they will never see this. So unrelated is the knowledge they have to this that the greater degrees of that knowledge bring them no nearer to it. Yet the more knowledge they have of GOD of that kind, the more they hate GOD. That in which the beauty of the divine nature most essentially consists -- namely, His holiness, or moral excellence -- appears in their eyes as the farthest thing from beauty. It is on that very account, chiefly, that He appears hateful to them. The more holiness they see in Him, the more hateful He appears. The greater their awareness of His holiness, the higher their hatred of Him rises. And because of their hatred of His holiness, they hate Him the **more**, the **more** they see of His other attributes. They would hate a holy being whatever his other attributes were, but they hate such a holy being even worse for his being infinitely wise and infinitely powerful, and so on -- more than they would if they saw in him less power and less wisdom.

The wicked, at the day of judgment, will see everything else in Christ except His beauty and loveliness. There is no single quality or property of His person that can be thought of that will not be set before them in the strongest light on that day, except those that consist in this. They will see Him coming in the clouds of heaven **in power and great glory, in the glory of His Father**. They will have a view of His outward glory that is vastly beyond anything we can imagine. And they will have the strongest and most convincing demonstrations of all His attributes and perfections.

They will have a sense of His great majesty that will be, as it were, infinitely affecting to them. They will be made to know effectively **that He is the Lord**. They will see what He is and what He does. His nature and works will appear in the strongest view. But His holy and infinite beauty and loveliness, which is everything -- and without which every other quality and property is nothing, and worse than nothing -- they will see nothing of.

Therefore, it is a sight or sense of this that fundamentally constitutes the difference between the things in which the saving grace of GOD's Spirit consists and the experiences of devils and damned souls. This is the foundation of everything else that is distinctive in true Christian experience. This is the foundation of the faith of GOD's elect. This gives the mind a saving belief of the truth of divine things. It is a view of the excellence of the things presented in the Gospel, or a sense of the divine beauty and loveliness of the plan of doctrine there set forth, that savingly convinces the mind that it is indeed divine, or from GOD. This account of the matter is plainly implied in **2 Corinthians 4:3-4: But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of GOD.** And verse 6: **For GOD, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD in the face of Jesus Christ.** It is very evident that a saving belief of the Gospel is here spoken of by the Apostle as arising from a view of the divine glory or beauty of the things it presents. It is by this view that the soul of a true convert is enabled to see, in a saving way, the sufficiency of

Christ for his salvation. The person who has his eyes opened to see the divine, surpassing beauty and loveliness of Jesus Christ is convinced of His sufficiency to stand as a mediator between him -- a guilty, hell-deserving sinner -- and an infinitely holy GOD, in an entirely different way than he could ever be convinced by all the arguments used by the most excellent authors or preachers.

When a person comes to see Christ's divine loveliness, he no longer wonders that God the Father considers Him worthy to be accepted on behalf of the worst sinner. Now it is no longer difficult for him to understand how the blood of Christ could be regarded by God as so precious, so worthy to be accepted as payment for the greatest sins. The soul now truly sees the preciousness of Christ, and so it truly sees and understands the very ground and reason for His acceptableness to God, and the value God places on His blood, obedience, and intercession. This satisfies the poor guilty soul and gives it rest, when the finest and most carefully constructed arguments about the sufficiency of Christ and the suitability of the way of salvation could not do it. When a person then comes to see the proper foundation of faith and trust with his own eyes, then he believes savingly. **He who sees the Son and believes in Him has everlasting life.** John 6:40. When Christ in this way **reveals God's name** to people, then **they believe that all things that God has given to Christ are from Him, and they believe that Christ was sent by God.** John 17:6-8. And **those who thus know Christ's name will trust in Him.** Psalm 9:10. In order for true faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God is **revealed in** people. Galatians 1:15-16. It is this sight of the divine beauty of Christ that bows the will and draws the hearts of people. A sight of the greatness of God in His attributes may overwhelm people and

be more than they can endure, but the hostility and opposition of the heart may remain at full strength, and the will may remain unbending. One glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God and the supreme loveliness of Jesus Christ, shining into the heart, overcomes and destroys this opposition and inclines the soul to Christ by what is, as it were, an all-powerful force. So that now, not only the understanding, but the will and the whole soul receives and embraces the Savior. This is most certainly the discovery that is the first internal foundation of saving faith in Christ in the soul of the true convert. It is not based on having it immediately suggested and revealed to the soul by a text of Scripture, or any immediate outward or inward witness, that Christ loves **him**, or that He died for **him in particular**, and is **his** Savior -- so producing confidence and joy and a seeming love for Christ because He loves him. By this kind of faith and conversion, which is demonstrably empty and counterfeit, multitudes have been deceived. The sight of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ produces true, supreme love for God. This is a sight of the proper foundation for supreme love for God -- the supreme loveliness of His nature. A love for Him on this ground is truly above anything that can come from a mere principle of self-love, which is in the hearts of devils as well as people. This produces true spiritual and holy joy in the soul, which is indeed joy in God and glorying in Him, and not rejoicing in ourselves.

This sight of the beauty of divine things will stir up true desires and longings of soul for those things -- not like the longings of devils, or any such forced desires as those of a person in great danger of death who longs for some bitter medicine he hopes will save his life. These are natural, free desires, the desires of appetite, the

thirstings of a new nature -- as a newborn baby desires its mother's milk, as a hungry person longs for some pleasant food he thinks of, or as the thirsty deer pants after the cool, clear stream.

This sense of divine beauty is the first thing in the actual change made in the soul in true conversion, and is the foundation of everything else that belongs to that change. This is evident from the words of the Apostle in 2 **Corinthians** 3:18: **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

2. Truly gracious emotions and exercises of mind differ from counterfeits, which arise from no higher principles than are in the hearts of devils, in their tendency. And this in two respects.

(1.) They have a tendency and influence that is the very opposite of what was especially the devil's sin: pride. That pride was in a special way the devil's sin is clear from 1 **Timothy** 3:6: **Not a new convert, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.** False and deceptive experiences always tend toward this, though often under the disguise of great and extraordinary humility. Spiritual pride is the dominant attitude and general character of hypocrites who are deceived by false discoveries and emotions. They are, in general, disposed in a way directly contrary to two things belonging to the Christian character that the Apostle directs. One is in **Romans** 12:16: **Do not be wise in your own estimation.** And the other is in **Philippians** 2:3: **Let each esteem others as better than himself.** False experience is impressed with itself and fascinated by itself. The person who has false humility is greatly moved to think about how humbled he is before God. The person who has

false love is moved when he thinks about the greatness of his love. The very food and nourishment of false experience is to contemplate itself and pay close attention to itself. Its very breath and life is to talk about itself extensively, or in some way to put itself on display. Truly gracious views and emotions, however, have a completely opposite tendency. They feed no self-importance, no exalted opinion of the person's own righteousness, experience, or privileges, and no inflated view of his own humility. They incline toward no showing off and no self-exaltation, under any disguise whatsoever. Rather, that sense of the supreme, holy beauty and glory of God and Christ which is their foundation, and that alone, puts pride to death and truly humbles the soul. It does not only cut off some of the outermost branches of pride (causing many branches to grow where only one was before), but it strikes at the very root. It changes the very nature and disposition of the heart. The light of God's beauty, and that alone, truly shows the soul its own ugliness and effectively inclines it to exalt God and humble itself.

(2) These gracious exercises and emotions also differ from the other in their tendency to destroy Satan's influence. First, in the person himself, through their tendency to cause the soul to **hate every evil and false way** and to produce universal holiness of heart and life, disposing him to make the service of GOD, the promoting of His glory, and the good of mankind the very business of his life. False discoveries and emotions do not have this effect. There may indeed be great zeal and a great deal of what is called religion, but it is not a truly Christian zeal. It is not being zealous for good works. Their religion is not the service of GOD; it is not seeking and serving GOD, but actually seeking and serving them-

selves. Though there may be a change of life, it is not a change from every wicked way to a consistent Christian life and practice. It is only a turning the stream of corruption from one channel to another. Thus the Apostle **James** distinguishes, in our passage, a true faith from the faith of devils: James 2:19-20: **You believe that there is one GOD. The devils also believe and tremble. But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?** And thus the Apostle **John** distinguishes true communion with GOD: 1 John 1:6-7: **If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.** By this he distinguishes true spiritual knowledge. Chapter 2:3-4: **By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** And by this the same Apostle distinguishes true love. Chapter 3:18-19: **Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed [in action, as the word means] and in truth. By this we will know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before Him.**

2. Truly gracious experiences also have a tendency to destroy Satan's influence in the world.

False religion, consisting of counterfeits of the operations of the Spirit of GOD and great **claims** and impressive **appearances** of inward spiritual experience -- when this spreads among a people, though for the present it may surprise many and may serve to alarm and awaken some sinners -- yet in the final outcome it

greatly wounds and weakens the cause of genuine religion and strengthens the influence of Satan. It desperately hardens the hearts of sinners, fills the world with prejudice against the power of godliness, promotes unbelief and immoral principles and practices, and builds up and strengthens the devil's kingdom in the world more than open immorality and profanity, or professed atheism, or public persecution -- and perhaps more than anything else whatsoever.

But it is not so with true religion in its genuine beauty. True religion, if it spreads with great power, will certainly stir up the rage of the devil and many other enemies of religion. However, it gives great advantage to its friends and greatly strengthens their cause, and tends to convince or silence enemies. True religion is a divine light in the souls of the saints, and as it shines out in their conduct before others, it tends to lead people to glorify GOD. There is nothing like it, as a means, to awaken people's consciences, to convince unbelievers, and to silence opponents. Though people naturally hate the power of godliness, when they see its fruits, there is a witness in their consciences in its favor. **He who serves Christ in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit is acceptable to GOD and approved by men.** Romans 14:17-18. The spread of true religion always tends to bring honor to religion in the world, though it commonly is the occasion of great persecution. This is certain: the more it appears and is demonstrated in the view of the world, the more its honor and the honor of its Author will be advanced. Philippians 1:11: **Being filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of GOD.**

The **third** use of this doctrine may be for **exhortation** -- to seek those distinguishing qualities and emotions of soul that neither the devil nor any unholy being **has** or **can have**.

How excellent is that inward virtue and religion which consists in these things! In these consists the most excellent experience of saints and angels in heaven. In these consists the best experience of the Man, Christ Jesus, whether in His humbled or glorified state. In these consists the image of GOD. Indeed, this is spoken of in Scripture as a sharing in something of GOD's own beauty and excellence, **a participation in the divine nature**; 2 Peter 1:4. **A sharing in His holiness**; Hebrews 12:10. **A sharing in Christ's fullness**; John 1:16. By this the saints are **filled with all the fullness of GOD**; Ephesians 3:18-19. By this they **have fellowship with both the Father and the Son** (1 John 1:3) -- that is, they share in Their happiness. Indeed, by means of this divine virtue, there is a mutual indwelling of GOD and the saints. 1 John 4:16: **GOD is love, and the one who remains in love remains in GOD, and GOD remains in him**.

This quality must make the person who has it truly excellent and happy. It is undoubtedly the highest dignity and blessedness of any creature. This is the special gift of GOD, which He gives only to His chosen favorites. As for silver, gold, and diamonds, earthly crowns and kingdoms -- He often throws these out to those He regards as dogs and swine. But this is the special blessing of His dear children. This is what flesh and blood cannot give, and what all the devils in hell cannot produce in the slightest degree in any heart. GOD alone can give it. This was the special benefit that Christ died

to obtain for His elect -- the most excellent token of His everlasting love, the chief fruit of His great labors, and the most precious purchase of His blood.

By this, above all other things, people glorify God. By this, above all other things, the saints shine as lights in the world and are blessings to humanity. This, above all things, tends to their own comfort. From it arises that **peace which surpasses all understanding** and that **joy which is inexpressible and full of glory**. This is what will most certainly result in the eternal salvation of those who have it. It is impossible for the soul in which it exists to sink and perish. It is an immortal seed. It is eternal life begun. Therefore those who have it **can never die**. It is the dawning of the light of glory. It is **the morning star risen in the heart**, a sure forerunner of the sunrise that will bring on an everlasting day. This is that **water which Christ gives, which becomes in the one who drinks it a well of water springing up into everlasting life**: John 4:14. It is something from heaven, of a heavenly nature, and tending toward heaven. Those who have it, however they may now wander in a wilderness or be tossed back and forth on a stormy sea, will certainly arrive in heaven at last. There this heavenly spark will be increased and perfected, and the souls of the saints will all be transformed into a bright and pure flame. They will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Amen.

INTRODUCTION



Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.
A sermon preached at **Enfield, July 8, 1741.**

At a time of great spiritual awakenings, accompanied by remarkable impressions on many of the hearers.

By **Jonathan Edwards**, Master of Arts, Pastor of the Church of Christ in **Northampton.**

Amos 9:2-3 Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. And though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out from there; and though they are hidden from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.

The **Second Edition.**


Boston: Printed: New York: Reprinted by **James Parker**, at the **New Printing-Office** in **Beaver Street**, 1753.

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD



SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD.

Deuteronomy 32:35_ -- Their foot shall slide in due time. --

In this verse, God threatens vengeance on the wicked,  unbelieving Israelites who were God's visible people and lived under the means of grace. Despite all God's wonderful works toward that people, they still remained, as **verse 28** puts it, void of counsel, having no understanding. Under all the care heaven had given them, they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit, as described in the two verses just before the text.

The expression I have chosen for my text, **Their foot shall slide in due time**, seems to imply the following things about the punishment and destruction these wicked Israelites were exposed to.

1. They were **always** exposed to destruction, as someone who stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to falling. This is implied by the way their destruction is described as coming

upon them -- represented by their foot slipping. The same idea is expressed in Psalm 73:18: **Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.**

2. It implies that they were always exposed to **sudden**, unexpected destruction. Someone who walks in slippery places is liable to fall at every moment. He cannot foresee for one moment whether he will stand or fall the next, and when he does fall, he falls all at once, without warning. This is also expressed in Psalm 73:18-19: **Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are brought to desolation in a moment!**

3. Another thing implied is that they are liable to fall **by themselves**, without being thrown down by the hand of another. Someone who stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.

4. The reason they have not already fallen and do not fall now is only that God's appointed time has not come. For it says that when that due time, or appointed time, comes, **their foot shall slide**. Then they will be left to fall, as they are pulled by their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go. At that very instant they will fall into destruction, like someone standing on such slippery, sloping ground at the edge of a pit who cannot stand alone -- when he is let go, he immediately falls and is lost.

The point I would draw from these words is this: there is nothing that keeps wicked people out of hell at any one moment except the mere will of God.

By the mere will of God, I mean His sovereign will, His free decision, restrained by no obligation and hindered by no difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had the slightest part, in any respect whatsoever, in the preservation of wicked people for one moment.

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

1. There is no lack of **power** in God to cast wicked people into hell at any moment. Human strength cannot stand when God rises up. The strongest have no power to resist Him, nor can anyone deliver out of His hands.

He is not only able to cast wicked people into hell, but He can do it most **easily**. Sometimes an earthly ruler has great difficulty subduing a rebel who has found ways to fortify himself and has made himself strong through the number of his followers. But it is not so with God. There is no fortress that provides any defense against the power of God. Though people join forces together and vast multitudes of God's enemies combine and band together, they are easily broken in pieces. They are like great heaps of light chaff before the whirlwind, or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames. We find it easy to step on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the ground. It is easy for us to cut or burn through a thin thread that something hangs by. Just as easily can God, when He pleases, cast His enemies down to hell. What are we, that we should think we can stand before Him, at whose rebuke the earth trembles and before whom the rocks are thrown down?

2. They **deserve** to be cast into hell. Divine justice never stands in the way and makes no objection against God using His power at any moment to destroy them. On the contrary, justice calls loudly for an infinite punishment of their sins. Divine justice says of the tree that produces such grapes of Sodom, **Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?** Luke 13:7. The sword of divine justice is brandished over their heads at every moment, and nothing but the hand of sovereign mercy and God's mere will holds it back.

3. They are **already** under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They do not only justly deserve to be cast down there. The sentence of the law of God -- that eternal and unchangeable rule of righteousness that God has established between Himself and humanity -- has gone out against them and stands against them. They are already bound over to hell. John 3:18: **He who does not believe is condemned already.** So every unconverted person properly belongs to hell. That is his place; that is where he is from. John 8:23: **You are from beneath.** And that is where he is bound. It is the place that justice, God's Word, and the sentence of His unchangeable law assign to him.

4. They are now the objects of that very **same** anger and wrath of God that is expressed in the torments of hell. The reason they do not go down to hell at every moment is not because God, in whose power they are, is not angry with them at that time. He is as angry with them as He is with many of those miserable creatures He is now tormenting in hell, who are there feeling and bearing the fierceness of His wrath. Indeed, God is far more angry with great

numbers who are now on earth -- yes, undoubtedly with many who are now in this congregation, who may be at ease and unconcerned -- than He is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell.

So it is not because God is unaware of their wickedness, or does not take offense at it, that He does not let loose His hand and cut them off. God is not like them, though they may imagine Him to be. The wrath of God burns against them. Their damnation does not sleep. The pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, and the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them. The flames are raging and glowing right now. The glittering sword is sharpened and held over them, and the pit has opened its mouth beneath them.

5. The **devil** stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own the moment God allows him. They belong to him. He has their souls in his possession and under his control. The Scripture describes them as his **goods** (Luke 11:21). The devils watch them. They are always beside them, at their right hand. They stand waiting for them like greedy, hungry lions that see their prey and expect to have it, but are for the present held back. If God should withdraw His hand by which they are restrained, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls. The ancient serpent is gaping for them. Hell opens its mouth wide to receive them. If God should allow it, they would be quickly swallowed up and lost.

6. There are hellish **principles** ruling in the souls of wicked people that would immediately kindle and flame out into hellfire if it were not for God's restraints. In the very nature of sinful people there is a foundation for the torments of hell. There are corrupt principles in ruling power within them and in full possession of them that are seeds of hellfire. These principles are active and powerful, extremely violent in their nature. If it were not for the

restraining hand of God upon them, they would soon break out. They would flame out in the same way that the same corruptions and the same hostility do in the hearts of damned souls, and would produce the same torments in them. The souls of the wicked are compared in Scripture to the troubled sea. **Isaiah** 57:20. For now God restrains their wickedness by His mighty power, as He does the raging waves of the troubled sea, saying, **This far you may come, and no farther.** But if God should withdraw that restraining power, it would soon sweep everything before it. Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul. It is destructive by nature. If God should leave it without restraint, nothing else would be needed to make the soul perfectly miserable. The corruption of the human heart is a thing that is extreme and boundless in its fury. While wicked people live here, it is like fire held in by God's restraints. If it were let loose, it would set ablaze the whole course of nature. Just as the heart is now a pit of sin, so if sin were not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven, a furnace of fire and brimstone.

7. It is no security for wicked people, even for one moment, that there are no **visible means of death** at hand. It is no security for a natural person that he is now in health and that he does not see any way he could immediately leave this world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The constant and widespread experience of the world in all ages shows that this is no evidence that a person is not on the very brink of eternity, and that his very next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unexpected ways and means by which people suddenly leave this world are countless and unimaginable. Unconverted people walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering,

and there are countless places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noonday. The sharpest sight cannot detect them. God has so many different and unsearchable ways of taking wicked people out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to suggest God would need to perform a miracle or go outside the ordinary course of His providence to destroy any wicked person at any moment. All the means by which sinners leave this world are so completely in God's hands, and so absolutely subject to His power and decision, that whether sinners go to hell at any moment depends no less on the mere will of God than if no natural means were ever used or involved at all.

8. People's **prudence** and **care** to preserve their own **lives**, or the care of others to preserve them, does not keep them safe for a moment. God's providence and universal experience also testify to this. There is clear evidence that human wisdom is no protection from death. If it were otherwise, we would see some difference between the wise and clever people of the world and others, regarding how likely they are to face early and unexpected death. But how is it in reality? Ecclesiastes 2:16: **How does the wise man die? Just like the fool.**

9. All the **efforts** and **schemes** that wicked people use to escape **hell**, while they continue to reject Christ and so remain wicked, do not protect them from hell for one moment. Almost every natural person who hears of hell flatters himself that he will escape it. He depends on himself for his own security. He flatters himself about what he has done, what he is now doing, or what he intends to do. Everyone maps out in his own mind how he will avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he has planned well and

that his schemes will not fail. They hear indeed that only a few are saved and that the greater part of people who have died have gone to hell. But each one imagines that he has laid out better plans for his own escape than others have. He does not intend to come to that place of torment. He says to himself that he intends to take effective precautions and to arrange matters so that he will not fail.

But the foolish children of humanity miserably deceive themselves with their own schemes and their confidence in their own strength and wisdom. They trust in nothing but a shadow. The greater part of those who previously lived under the same means of grace and are now dead have undoubtedly gone to hell. It was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive. It was not because they did not plan just as carefully to secure their own escape. If we could speak with them and ask them one by one whether they expected, when they were alive and used to hear about hell, to ever end up suffering that misery, we would undoubtedly hear one after another reply: 'No, I never intended to come here. I had planned things differently in my mind. I thought I had arranged things well for myself. I thought my plan was good. I intended to take effective precautions. But it came upon me unexpectedly. I did not look for it at that time or in that way. It came like a thief. Death outwitted me. God's wrath was too quick for me. Oh, my foolishness! I was flattering myself and entertaining myself with empty dreams of what I would do in the future, and while I was saying peace and safety, then sudden destruction came upon me.'

10. God has placed Himself under **no obligation**, by any promise, to keep any natural person out of hell for one moment. God has certainly made no promises of eternal life, or of any deliv-

erance or preservation from eternal death, except those contained in the covenant of grace -- the promises given in Christ, in whom all the promises are Yes and Amen. But surely those who are not children of the covenant, who do not believe in any of the promises of the covenant, and who have no share in the **Mediator** of the covenant have no claim on its promises.

So whatever some have imagined and claimed about promises made to natural people's earnest seeking and knocking, it is plain and clear that whatever efforts a natural person makes in religion, whatever prayers he offers, until he believes in Christ, God is under no obligation at all to keep him from eternal destruction for a single **moment**.

So this is how it is: natural people are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell. They have deserved the fiery pit and are already sentenced to it. God is terribly provoked. His anger toward them is as great as toward those who are actually suffering the fierceness of His wrath in hell. They have done nothing whatsoever to calm or reduce that anger, nor is God bound in the slightest by any promise to hold them up for one moment. The devil is waiting for them. Hell is gaping for them. The flames gather and flash around them and long to seize them and swallow them up. The fire confined in their own hearts is struggling to break out. They have no share in any Mediator. There are no means within reach that can give them any security. In short, they have no refuge and nothing to hold on to. All that preserves them every moment is the mere free will and uncommitted, unobligated patience of an offended God.

The End.

APPLICATION



APPLICATION.

This message may serve as an **Awakening** to unconverted people in this congregation. What you have heard is the condition of every one of you who is outside of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning sulfur, stretches out beneath you. **There** is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of GOD. There is hell's wide gaping mouth, open wide. You have nothing to stand on and nothing to grab hold of. There is nothing between you and hell but the air. It is only the power and sheer will of GOD that holds you up.

You are probably not aware of this. You know you are being kept out of hell, but you do not see the hand of GOD in it. Instead, you look at other things -- the good condition of your body, your own care for your life, and the steps you take to preserve yourself. But truly these things are nothing. If GOD were to withdraw His hand, they would do no more to keep you from falling than thin air would do to hold up a person suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you, as it were, as heavy as lead, pressing downward with great weight toward hell. If GOD were to let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly plunge into the

bottomless pit. Your healthy body, your own care and caution, your best plans, and all your righteousness would do no more to hold you up and keep you out of hell than a spider's web would do to stop a falling rock. If it were not the sovereign will of GOD, the earth would not hold you for one moment, because you are a burden to it. Creation groans under you. The created world is subjected to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly. The sun does not willingly shine on you to give you light to serve sin and Satan. The earth does not willingly produce its crops to satisfy your sinful desires. It is not a willing stage for your wickedness to be performed on. The air does not willingly serve you for breath to keep the flame of life going in your body while you spend your life serving GOD's enemies. GOD's creatures are good and were made for people to use in serving GOD. They do not willingly serve any other purpose, and they groan when they are used for purposes so directly opposed to their nature and purpose. And the world would spit you out if it were not for the sovereign hand of the One who has subjected it in hope. There are the black clouds of GOD's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of a dreadful storm and heavy with thunder. If it were not for the restraining hand of GOD, the storm would immediately burst upon you. The sovereign will of GOD, for the present, holds back His fierce wind. Otherwise it would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff on the summer threshing floor.

The wrath of GOD is like great waters that are dammed up for the time being. They keep rising higher and higher until an outlet is given. The longer the stream is held back, the more rapid and powerful its flow when it is finally released. It is true that judg-

ment against your evil works has not yet been carried out. The floods of GOD's vengeance have been held back. But your guilt is constantly increasing in the meantime, and you are storing up more wrath every day. The waters are continually rising and growing more and more powerful. There is nothing but the sheer will of GOD that holds back the waters that strain to be released and push hard to rush forward. If GOD were to simply withdraw His hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of GOD would rush out with unimaginable fury and come upon you with almighty power. Even if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is -- yes, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the mightiest, most powerful devil in hell -- it would be nothing against it.

The bow of GOD's wrath is bent, and the arrow is fitted to the string. Justice aims the arrow at your heart and pulls the bow tight. It is nothing but the sheer will of GOD -- and that of an angry GOD, without any promise or obligation whatsoever -- that keeps the arrow from being released and made drunk with your blood at this very moment.

This is the condition of every one of you who has never experienced a great change of heart by the mighty power of the SPIRIT of GOD upon your soul -- all who were never born again and made new creatures, raised from being dead in sin to a state of new and previously unknown light and life. However much you may have reformed your life in many ways, however strong your religious feelings may have been, however carefully you may maintain a form of religion in your families and private devotions and in the house of GOD, and however strict you may be in it -- you are in the

hands of an angry GOD. It is nothing but His sheer will that keeps you from being swallowed up in everlasting destruction at this very moment.

However unconvinced you may be right now of the truth of what you are hearing, sooner or later you will be fully convinced of it. Those who have already left circumstances like yours now see that this was true for them. Destruction came suddenly upon most of them when they expected nothing of it, while they were telling themselves, **Peace and safety**. Now they see that the things they depended on for peace and safety were nothing but thin air and empty shadows.

The GOD who holds you over the pit of hell, much as someone holds a spider or some disgusting insect over a fire, is repulsed by you and is terribly provoked. His wrath toward you burns like fire. He considers you worthy of nothing except to be thrown into the fire. He is too pure to stand having you in His sight. You are ten thousand times more disgusting in His eyes than the most hateful, poisonous snake is in ours. You have offended Him infinitely more than a stubborn rebel has ever offended his king. And yet it is nothing but His hand that keeps you from falling into the fire every moment. It can only be credited to Him that you did not go to hell last night -- that you were allowed to wake up again in this world after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason why you have not dropped into hell since you got up this morning except that GOD's hand has held you up. There is no other reason why you have not gone to hell since you have been sitting here in the house of GOD, provoking His pure eyes by your sinful, wicked

way of attending His solemn worship. Yes, there is nothing else to be given as a reason why you do not drop down into hell at this very moment.

O sinner! Consider the terrifying danger you are in. It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that GOD whose wrath is provoked and burning against you as much as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a thin thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing around it, ready at any moment to burn through it. You have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to grab hold of to save yourself. You have nothing to keep off the flames of wrath -- nothing of your own, nothing that you have ever done, nothing that you can do -- to persuade GOD to spare you for one moment.

And consider here more specifically several things about the wrath that you are in such danger of.

1. Consider **whose** wrath it is: It is the wrath of the infinite GOD. If it were only the wrath of a man, even the most powerful ruler, it would be relatively small. The wrath of kings is greatly feared, especially that of absolute monarchs who hold the possessions and lives of their subjects entirely in their power, to do with as they please. Proverbs 20:2. **The fear of a king is like the roaring of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own soul.** A subject who greatly enrages a tyrannical ruler can expect to suffer the most extreme torments that human skill can devise or human power can inflict. But the greatest earthly rulers, in all their majesty and strength, and dressed in their most terrifying authority, are nothing but feeble, insignificant worms of the dust compared to the great and almighty Creator and

King of heaven and earth. There is little they can do when most enraged and when they have exerted the full extent of their fury. All the kings of the earth before GOD are like grasshoppers. They are nothing -- less than nothing. Both their love and their hatred are to be disregarded. The wrath of the great King of Kings is as much more terrible than theirs as His majesty is greater. Luke 12:4-5. **And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell. Yes, I say to you, fear Him.**

2. It is the **fierceness** of His wrath that you are exposed to. We often read of the **fury** of GOD, as in Isaiah 59:18: **According to their deeds, He will repay fury to His adversaries.** And Isaiah 66:15: **For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebukes with flames of fire.** And so in many other places. We also read of GOD's **fierceness**. Revelation 19:15. There we read of **the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty GOD.** The words are extremely terrifying. If it had only said **the wrath of GOD**, the words would have described something infinitely dreadful. But it does not stop there -- it says **the fierceness and wrath of GOD.** The fury of GOD! The fierceness of JEHOVAH! Oh, how dreadful that must be! Who can express or even imagine what such words carry in them! But it does not stop there either -- it says **the fierceness and wrath of ALMIGHTY GOD.** As though there would be a tremendous display of His almighty power in what the fierceness of His wrath would inflict -- as though omnipotence itself were enraged and ex-

erting itself, as people do when they pour out their strength in the fierceness of their fury. Oh! Then what will be the result! What will happen to the poor creature who suffers it! Whose hands can be strong enough? And whose heart can endure? To what a dreadful, inexpressible, unimaginable depth of misery must the poor creature sink who becomes the subject of this!

Consider this, you who are here today and still remain in an unconverted state. When GOD executes the fierceness of His anger, it means He will pour out wrath without any pity. When GOD sees the unspeakable extremity of your condition and sees your torment so vastly beyond what your strength can bear -- when He sees how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down into what seems like an infinite darkness -- He will have no compassion on you. He will not hold back the execution of His wrath or lighten His hand in the slightest. There will be no restraint or mercy. GOD will not hold back His fierce wind. He will have no concern for your welfare, and He will not be at all careful that you should not suffer too much -- except only that you will not suffer beyond what strict justice requires. Nothing will be withheld because it is too hard for you to bear. Ezekiel 8:18. **Therefore I will also deal in fury. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.** Right now GOD stands ready to pity you. This is a day of mercy. You may cry out now with some hope of receiving mercy. But once the day of mercy has passed, your most heart-breaking and agonizing cries and screams will be useless. You will be completely abandoned and cast off by GOD as far as any concern for your welfare. GOD will have no other use for you but to suffer misery. You will continue to exist for no other purpose. You

will be a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, and there will be no other use for this vessel except to be filled full of wrath. GOD will be so far from pitying you when you cry to Him that it is said He will only **laugh and mock**. Proverbs 1:25-26.

How awful are these words from Isaiah 63:3, which are the words of the great GOD: **I will tread them in My anger and trample them in My fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled on My garments, and I will stain all My clothing**. It is perhaps impossible to imagine words that carry greater expressions of these three things: **contempt**, hatred, and fierceness of anger. If you cry to GOD to pity you, He will be so far from pitying you in your miserable condition or showing you the least regard or favor that instead He will only trample you underfoot. And though He will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence pressing down on you, He will not care. He will crush you under His feet without mercy. He will press out your blood and make it fly, and it will be sprinkled on His garments, staining all His clothing. He will not only hate you, but He will hold you in the utmost contempt. No place will be considered fit for you except under His feet, to be trampled down like the mud in the streets.

3. The misery you are exposed to is what GOD will inflict for the purpose of showing what the **wrath** of JEHOVAH is. GOD has had it on His heart to show both angels and people how excellent His love is and also how terrible His wrath is. Sometimes earthly kings want to show how terrible **their** wrath is by the extreme punishments they carry out on those who provoke them. **Nebuchadnezzar**, that mighty and proud monarch of the **Chaldean** Empire, wanted to show **his** wrath when he was enraged with **Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego**. He gave or-

ders that the burning fiery furnace should be heated seven times hotter than before. No doubt it was raised to the greatest intensity that human skill could achieve. But the great GOD is also willing to show **His wrath** and display His awesome majesty and mighty power in the extreme sufferings of His enemies. Romans 9:22. **What if GOD, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?** And since this is His purpose -- what He has determined, to show how terrible His unmixed, unrestrained wrath, the fury and fierceness of JEHOVAH, truly is -- He will accomplish it fully. Something will be accomplished and brought to pass that will be dreadful beyond all doubt. When the great and angry GOD has risen up and carried out His awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of His wrath, then GOD will call upon the whole universe to see that awesome majesty and mighty power displayed in it. Isaiah 33:12-14. **And the people shall be like the burning of lime, like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire. Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge My might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites.**

This is what will happen to you if you remain in an unconverted state. The infinite might, majesty, and terribleness of the OMNIPOTENT GOD will be displayed upon you in the overwhelming force of your torments. You will be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And when you are in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven will go out and look upon the awful sight, so that they may see what the

wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is. And when they have seen it, they will fall down and worship that great power and majesty. Isaiah 66:23-24. **And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord. And they shall go forth and look upon the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against Me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.**

4. It is **everlasting** wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty GOD for even one moment. But you must suffer it for all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisitely horrible misery. When you look forward, you will see an endless forever, a boundless span of time stretching before you that will swallow up your thoughts and overwhelm your soul. You will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any relief, any rest at all. You will know with certainty that you must endure long ages -- millions upon millions of ages -- wrestling and struggling against this almighty, merciless vengeance. And then, when you have done so, when that many ages have actually been spent in this way, you will know that it is all just a single point compared to what remains. So your punishment will truly be infinite. Oh, who can express what it is like for a soul to be in such a condition! Everything we can possibly say about it gives only a very faint and feeble picture of it. It is inexpressible and beyond imagination. For **who knows the power of GOD's anger?**

How dreadful is the condition of those who are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the terrible situation of every soul in this congregation that has not

been born again, however moral and proper, sober and religious they may otherwise be. Oh, that you would think about this, whether you are young or old! There is reason to think that many in this congregation who are now hearing this message will actually be the subjects of this very misery for all eternity. We do not know who they are, or where they are sitting, or what they are thinking right now. It may be that they are comfortable at this moment and are hearing all these things without much disturbance, flattering themselves that they are not the ones and promising themselves that they will escape. If we knew that there was one person -- just one -- in the whole congregation who was going to suffer this misery, what an awful thing that would be to think about! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight it would be to see that person! How the rest of the congregation might lift up a grieving and bitter cry over him! But instead of one, how many will likely remember this message in hell? And it would be no surprise if some who are here right now should be in hell in a very short time, even before this year is over. And it would be no surprise if some people who now sit here in this meeting house in good health, calm and unconcerned, should be there before tomorrow morning. Those of you who remain in your natural condition and stay out of hell the longest will still be there soon enough! Your damnation does not sleep. It will come swiftly, and in all likelihood very suddenly, upon many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in hell. It is no doubt the case of some whom you have seen and known, who never deserved hell more than you and who previously seemed just as likely to still be alive as you are. Their case is beyond all hope now. They are crying out in extreme misery and utter despair. But here you are in the land of the living,

in the house of GOD, with an opportunity to obtain salvation. What would those poor, damned, hopeless souls give for just one day of the opportunity you now enjoy!

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity -- a day when CHRIST has thrown the door of mercy wide open and stands in the doorway, calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners. It is a day when many are flocking to Him and pressing into the kingdom of GOD. Many are coming daily from the east, west, north, and south. Many who were very recently in the same miserable condition that you are in now are in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love for Him who loved them and washed them from their sins in His own blood, rejoicing in the hope of the glory of GOD. How awful it is to be left behind on such a day! To see so many others feasting while you are wasting away and perishing! To see so many rejoicing and singing for joy of heart while you have reason to mourn with sorrow of heart and cry out in anguish of spirit! How can you rest for even one moment in such a condition? Are not your souls as precious as the souls of the people at **Suffield**, where they are flocking to Christ day after day?

Are there not many here who have lived **long** in the world and are not to this day born again -- who are still strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and have done nothing since they have been alive but store up wrath against the day of wrath? Oh sirs, your situation is especially dangerous. Your guilt and hardness of heart are extremely great. Do you not see how people of your age are generally being passed over and left out in this present remarkable and wonderful outpouring of GOD's mercy? You need to examine yourselves and wake up completely from sleep. You cannot bear the fierceness and wrath of the infinite GOD.

And you **young men** and **young women** -- will you neglect this precious season that you now enjoy, when so many others your age are turning away from all youthful foolishness and flocking to CHRIST? You especially have an extraordinary opportunity right now. But if you neglect it, it will soon be with you as it is with those who wasted all the precious days of their youth in sin and have now reached such a dreadful state of blindness and hardness.

And you **children** who are unconverted -- do you not know that you are going down to hell to bear the dreadful wrath of that GOD who is angry with you every day and every night? Will you be content to be the children of the devil when so many other children in the land are being converted and are becoming the holy and happy children of the King of Kings?

Let everyone who is still outside of Christ and hanging over the pit of hell -- whether old men and women, or middle-aged, or young people, or little children -- now listen to the loud calls of God's Word and providence. This acceptable year of the Lord, which is a day of such great favor to some, will undoubtedly be a day of equally remarkable vengeance to others. People's hearts harden and their guilt increases rapidly on a day like this, if they neglect their souls. There has never been such great danger of such people being given up to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. God seems now to be rapidly gathering in His elect in all parts of the land. Probably the greater part of adult persons who will ever be saved will be brought in now in a short time. It will be as it was during the great outpouring of the Spirit upon the **Jews** in the apostles' days: the elect will obtain salvation, and the rest will be blinded. If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day you were ever born to see such a

season of the pouring out of God's Spirit. You will wish that you had died and gone to hell before you had seen it. Now undoubtedly, as it was in the days of **John the Baptist**, the axe is in an extraordinary way laid at the root of the trees, so that every tree that does not produce good fruit may be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Therefore, let everyone who is outside of Christ now awake and flee from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let everyone flee from **Sodom: Hurry and escape for your lives! Do not look behind you! Escape to the mountain, or you will be consumed!**

THANKS FOR READING



If you spotted a typo or have feedback, the email is **sam@goodsoilapps.com** — or use the in-app feedback form in *Christian Reader*.