

## Jonathan Edwards Paints the Horrors of Hell “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741)

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, **abhors**<sup>1</sup> you, and is dreadfully **provoked**<sup>2</sup>; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so **abominable**<sup>3</sup> in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet ‘tis nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment; ‘tis to be **ascribed**<sup>4</sup> to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you was suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep: and there is no other reason to be given why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up; there is no other reason to be given why you **han't**<sup>5</sup> not gone to hell since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship: yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: ‘tis 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 incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell; you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it **asunder**<sup>6</sup>; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to **induce**<sup>7</sup> God to spare you one moment.

It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity: there will be no end to this **exquisite**<sup>8</sup> horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless **duration**<sup>9</sup> before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any **deliverance**<sup>10</sup>, any end, any **mitigation**<sup>11</sup>, any rest at all; you will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite!

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath, and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation, that has not been **born again**<sup>12</sup>, however moral and strict, **sober**<sup>13</sup> and religious they may otherwise be. Oh that you would consider it, whether you be young or old!

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<sup>1</sup> **abhor** – to hates or loathe

<sup>2</sup> **provoked** – angered, enraged, irritated, exasperated (OED)

<sup>3</sup> **abominable** – detestable, horrid, loathsome

<sup>4</sup> **ascribed** – attributed

<sup>5</sup> **han't** – have not

<sup>6</sup> **asunder** – into separate parts; in two, in pieces (OED)

<sup>7</sup> **induce** – cause, prompt

<sup>8</sup> **exquisite** – elaborately devised; hence, excruciating, intensely painful (OED)

<sup>9</sup> **duration** – length (of time)

<sup>10</sup> **deliverance** – liberation, release, rescue (OED)

<sup>11</sup> **mitigation** – alleviation of anything painful, oppressive, or calamitous (OED)

<sup>12</sup> Edwards uses the phrase ‘born again’ to mean ‘truly converted to Christianity’

<sup>13</sup> **sober** – moderate, temperate, avoiding excess; grave, serious, solemn (OED)

There is reason to think, that there are many in this congregation now hearing this discourse, that will actually be the subjects of this very misery to all eternity. We know not who they are, or in what seats they sit, or what thoughts they now have: it may be they are now at ease, and hear all these things without much disturbance, and are now flattering themselves that they are not the persons, promising themselves that they shall escape. If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing would it be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation lift up a lamentable and bitter cry over him! But alas! instead of one, how many is it likely will remember this discourse in hell? And it would be a wonder if some that are now present, should not be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some person that now sits here in some seat of this meeting house<sup>14</sup> in health, and quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning.

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards refers to the church in Enfield, CT in which he preached this sermon