


JONATHAN EDWARDS

ONATHAN EDWARDS, a celebrated American divine and metaphysician, son of the Rev. Timothy Edwards, for sixty-three years pastor at East Windsor, Conn., where the future able theologian was born, Oct. 5, 1703. Young Edwards entered Yale College in 1716, and took his degree of B.A. in 1720, standing highest in his class. For a year or two he continued at Yale as a tutor and studied for the ministry, and in 1727 was installed at Northampton, Mass., as colleague to his grandfather in the pastorate of the Congregational Church. Here he labored for twenty-three years, after which he took the duties of missionary to the Indians at Stockbridge, Mass., and there wrote several of his famous treatises, such as that on "The Freedom of the Will," a masterpiece of acute, original thought. On account of the fame which this work acquired for him, Edwards was in 1758 called to the presidency of the college of New Jersey, Princeton (now Princeton University). He was scarcely installed in that office, however, ere he died, on March 22 of that year (1758). He wrote a number of works, besides the celebrated treatise above named, including a work on "The Religious Affections," a "Life of David Brainerd," a "History of the Redemption," and the "Doctrine of Original Sin Defended." Of his numerous sermons, the most notable is the one entitled: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards has stamped his theology indelibly upon New England character. He was a profound thinker and possessed a clear, logical mind, with great powers of arousing and impressing the hearts and souls of his hearers.

WRATH UPON THE WICKED TO THE UTMOST

"To fill up their sins alway; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."—I Thess. ii, 16.

IN VERSE 14 the Apostle commends the Christian Thessalonians that they became the followers of the churches of God in Judea, both in faith and in sufferings; in faith in that they received the word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the "word of God"; in sufferings in that they had suffered like things of their own countrymen, as they had of the Jews. Upon which the Apostle sets forth the persecuting, cruel, and perverse wickedness of that people "who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have," says he, "persecuted us; and they please not God, and are

(222)

contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved." Then come in the words of the text, "To fill up their sins alway; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

In these words we may observe two things:

To what effect was the heinous wickedness and obstinacy of the Jews, namely, to fill up their sins. God hath set bounds to every man's wickedness; he suffers men to live, and to go on in sin, till they have filled up their measure, and then cuts them off. To this effect was the wickedness and obstinacy of the Jews; they were exceedingly wicked and thereby filled up the measure of their sins a great pace. And the reason why they were permitted to be so obstinate under the preaching and miracles of Christ and of the apostles, and under all the means used with them, was that they might fill up the measure of their sins. This is agreeable to what Christ said, "Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers."

The punishment of their wickedness: "The wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." There is a connection between the measure of men's sin and the measure of punishment. When they have filled up the measure of their sin then is filled up the measure of God's wrath.

The degree of their punishment is the uttermost degree. This may respect both a national and personal punishment. If we take it as a national punishment, a little after the time when the epistle was written, wrath came upon the nation of the Jews to the uttermost in their terrible destruction by the Romans, when, as Christ said, "was great tribulation, such as never was since the beginning of the world to that time." That nation had before suffered many of the fruits

of divine wrath for their sins; but this was beyond all, this was their highest degree of punishment as a nation. If we take it as a personal punishment, then it respects their punishment in hell. God often punishes men very dreadfully in this world, but in hell "wrath comes on them to the uttermost." By this expression is also denoted the certainty of this punishment. For though the punishment was then future, yet it is spoken of as present: "The wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." It was as certain as if it had already taken place. God, who knows all things, speaks of things that are not as though they were; for things present and things future are equally certain with him. It also denotes the near approach of it. The wrath is come; that is, it is just at hand; it is at the door; as it proved with respect to that nation; their terrible destruction by the Romans was soon after the Apostle wrote this epistle.

Doctrine. When those that continue in sin shall have filled up the measure of their sin, then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost.

There is a certain measure that God hath set to the sin of every wicked man. God says concerning the sin of man, as he says to the raging waves of the sea, Hitherto shalt thou come and no further. The measure of some is much greater than of others. Some reprobates commit but a little sin in comparison with others, and so are to endure proportionably a smaller punishment. There are many vessels of wrath, but some are smaller and others greater vessels; some will contain comparatively but little wrath, others a greater measure of it. Sometimes, when we see men go to dreadful lengths and become very heinously wicked, we are ready to wonder that God lets them alone. He sees them go on in such audacious wickedness and keeps silence, nor does any-

thing to interrupt them, but they go smoothly on and meet with no hurt. But sometimes the reason why God lets them alone is because they have not filled up the measure of their sins. When they live in dreadful wickedness they are but filling up the measure which God hath limited for them. This is sometimes the reason why God suffers very wicked men to live so long; because their iniquity is not full: "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." For this reason also God sometimes suffers them to live in prosperity. Their prosperity is a snare to them and an occasion of their sinning a great deal more. Wherefore God suffers them to have such a snare because he suffers them to fill up a larger measure. So, for this cause, he sometimes suffers them to live under great light and great means and advantages, at the same time to neglect and misimprove all. Everyone shall live till he hath filled up his measure.

While men continue in sin they are filling the measure set them. This is the work in which they spend their whole lives; they begin in their childhood, and if they live to grow old in sin they still go on with this work. It is the work with which every day is filled up. They may alter their business in other respects; they may sometimes be about one thing and sometimes about another; but they never change from this work of filling up the measure of their sins. Whatever they put their hands to, they are still employed in this work. This is the first thing that they set themselves about when they awake in the morning, and the last thing they do at night. They are all the while treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

It is a gross mistake of some natural men who think that when they read and pray they do not add to their sins, but,

on the contrary, think they diminish their guilt by these exercises. They think that instead of adding to their sins they do something to satisfy for their past offences, but, instead of that, they do but add to the measure by their best prayers and by those services with which they themselves are most pleased.

When once the measure of their sins is filled up then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost. God will then wait no longer upon them. Wicked men think that God is altogether such an one as themselves, because when they commit such wickedness he keeps silence. "Because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil." But when once they shall have filled up the measure of their sins judgment will be executed; God will not bear with them any longer. Now is the day of grace, and the day of patience, which they spend in filling up their sins; but when their sins shall be full then will come the day of wrath, the day of the fierce anger of God. God often executes his wrath on ungodly men in a less degree in this world. He sometimes brings afflictions upon them, and that in wrath. Sometimes he expresses his wrath in very sore judgments; sometimes he appears in a terrible manner, not only outwardly, but also in the inward expressions of it on their consciences. Some, before they died, have had the wrath of God inflicted on their souls in degrees that have been intolerable. But these things are only forerunners of their punishment, only slight foretastes of wrath. God never stirs up all his wrath against wicked men while in this world; but when once wicked men shall have filled up the measure of their sins then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost, and that in the following respects:

Wrath will come upon them without any restraint or moderation in the degree of it. God doth always lay, as it were, a restraint upon himself; he doth not stir up his wrath; he stays his rough wind in the day of his east wind; he lets not his arm light down on wicked men with its full weight. But when sinners shall have filled up the measure of their sins there will be no caution, no restraint. His rough wind will not be stayed nor moderated. The wrath of God will be poured out like fire. He will come forth, not only in anger, but in the fierceness of his anger; he will execute wrath with power, so as to show what his wrath is and make his power known. There will be nothing to alleviate his wrath; his heavy wrath will lie on them without anything to lighten the burden or to keep off in any measure the full weight of it from pressing the soul. His eye will not spare, neither will he regard the sinner's cries and lamentations, however loud and bitter. Then shall wicked men know that God is the Lord; they shall know how great that majesty is which they have despised and how dreadful that threatened wrath is which they have so little regarded.

Then shall come on wicked men that punishment which they deserve. God will exact of them the uttermost farthing. Their iniquities are marked before him; they are all written in his book; and in the future world he will reckon with them and they must pay all the debt. Their sins are laid up in store with God; they are sealed up among his treasures, and then he will recompense, even recompense into their bosoms. The consummate degree of punishment will not be executed till the day of judgment; but the wicked are sealed over to this consummate punishment immediately after death; they are cast into hell, and there bound in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day, and they know

that the highest degree of punishment is coming upon them. Final wrath will be executed without any mixture; all mercy, all enjoyments will be taken away. God sometimes expresses his wrath in this world; but here good things and evil are mixed together; in the future there will be only evil things.

Wrath will then be executed without any merciful circumstances. The judgments which God executes on ungodly men in this world are attended with many merciful circumstances. There is much patience and long-suffering, together with judgment; judgments are joined with continuance of opportunity to seek mercy. But in hell there will be no more exercises of divine patience. The judgments which God exercises on ungodly men in this world are warnings to them to avoid greater punishments; but the wrath which will come upon them when they shall have filled up the measure of their sin will not be of the nature of warnings. Indeed they will be effectually awakened and made thoroughly sensible by what they shall suffer; yet their being awakened and made sensible will do them no good. Many a wicked man hath suffered very awful things from God in this world which have been a means of saving good; but that wrath which sinners shall suffer after death will be no way for their good. God will have no merciful design in it; neither will it be possible that they should get any good by that or by anything else.

Wrath will so be executed as to perfect the work to which wrath tends, namely, utterly to undo the subject of it. Wrath is often so executed in this life as greatly to distress persons and bring them into great calamity; yet not so as to complete the ruin of those who suffer it; but in another world it will be so executed as to finish their destruction and render them utterly and perfectly undone; it will take

away all comfort, all hope, and all support. The soul will be, as it were, utterly crushed; the wrath will be wholly intolerable. It must sink, and will utterly sink, and will have no more strength to keep itself from sinking than a worm would have to keep itself from being crushed under the weight of a mountain. The wrath will be so great, so mighty and powerful as wholly to abolish all manner of welfare: "But on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder."

When persons shall have filled up the measure of their sin that wrath will come upon them which is eternal. Though men may suffer very terrible and awful judgments in this world, yet those judgments have an end. They may be long continued, yet they commonly admit of relief. Temporal distresses and sorrows have intermissions and respite and commonly by degrees abate and wear off; but the wrath that shall be executed when the measure of sin shall have been filled up will have no end. Thus it will be to the uttermost as to its duration; it will be of so long continuance that it will be impossible it should be longer. Nothing can be longer than eternity.

When persons shall have filled up the measure of their sin then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost of what is threatened. Sin is an infinite evil, and the punishment which God hath threatened against it is very dreadful. The threatenings of God against the workers of iniquity are very awful; but these threatenings are never fully accomplished in this world. However dreadful things some men may suffer in this life, yet God never fully executes his threatenings for so much as one sin till they have filled up the whole measure. The threatenings of the law are never answered by anything that any man suffers here. The most