

WAY TO SHILOH

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The misery of ungodliness

(Extract from 'The Godly Man's Picture', by the Puritan Thomas Watson 1666)

In order that I may persuade men to become godly, I shall lay down some forcible motives and arguments, and may the Lord make them like nails fastened by his Spirit.

A. LET MEN SERIOUSLY WEIGH THEIR MISERY WHILE THEY REMAIN IN A STATE OF UNGODLINESS

It may make them run out of this Sodom. The misery of ungodly men appears in nine particulars:

1. They are in a state of death: 'dead in trespasses' (Eph. 2:1)

Dead they must surely be who are cut off from Christ, the principle of life. For as the body without the soul is dead, so is the soul without Christ. This spiritual death is visible in the effect. It bereaves men of their senses. Sinners have no sense of God in them: 'who being past feeling' (Eph. 4:1p). All their moral endowments are only flowers strewn on a dead corpse, and what is hell but a sepulchre to bury the dead in?

2. Their offerings are polluted

Not only the ploughing but the praying of the wicked is sin; 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord' (Prov. 15:8; 21:4). If the water is foul in the well, it cannot be clean in the bucket. If the heart is full of sin, the duties cannot be pure. What straits every ungodly person is in if he does not come to the ordinance. He despises it if he does not come; he defiles it.

3. Those who live and die ungodly have no right to the covenant of grace

'At that time ye were without Christ, strangers from the covenants of promise' (Eph. 2:12). And to be without covenant is to be like anyone in the old world without an ark. The covenant is the gospel charter, which is enriched with many glorious privileges. But who may plead the benefit of this covenant? Surely only those whose hearts are inlaid with grace. Read the charter: 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you... I will be your God' (Ezek. 36:26,28). A person dying in his ungodliness has no more to do with the new covenant than a ploughman has to do with the privileges of a city corporation.

God's writing always comes before his seal. 'Ye are declared to be the epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart' (2 Cor. 3:3). Here is a golden epistle: the writing is the work of faith; the tablet it is written on is the heart; the finger that writes it is the Spirit. Now, after the Spirits' writing comes the Spirit's sealing: 'after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit' (Eph. 1:13). That is, you were sealed with an assurance of glory. What have ungodly men - those who have no writing - to do with the seal of the covenant?

4. The ungodly are spiritual fools

'I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly, and to the wicket, Lift not up the horn' (Psa. 75:4). If a parent had a child who was very beautiful but a fool, he would take little joy in him. The Scripture has dressed the sinner in a fool's coat and let me tell you, better be a fool void of reason than a fool void of grace. This is the devils fool (Pron. 14:9). Is not that man a fool who refuses a rich share? God offers Christ and salvation, but the sinner refuses this share: 'Israel would none of me' (Psa. 81: 11). Is not that man a fool who prefers an annuity to an inheritance? Is not that man a fool who tends his mortal part and neglects his angelic part, as if a man should paint the wall of his house and let the timber rot? Is not that man a fool who will feed the devil with his soul - like that emperor who fed his lion with pheasant? Is not that man a fool who lays a snare for himself (Prov. 1:18); who consults His own shame (Hab, 2:10); who loves death (Prov. 8:36)?

5. The ungodly are vile persons

'I will make thy grave; for thou art vile' (Nah. 1:14). Sin makes men base; it blots their name; it taints their blood. 'They are all together become filthy' (Psa. 14:13). In the Hebrew it is 'they have become they are swine (Matt. 7:6); vipers (Matt, 3:7); devils (John 6:70). The wicked are dross and refuse (Psa. 119:119), and heaven is too pure to have any dross mingled with it.

6. Their temporal mercies are continued in judgment

The wicked may have health and estate, yes, more than heart can wish (Psa. 73:7), but 'their table is a snare' (Psa. 69:22). Sinners have their mercies with God's leave but not with his love. The people of Israel would have been better without their quails than to have had such sour sauce. The ungodly are usurpers; they lack a spiritual title to what they possess. Their good things are like cloth picked up at the draper's which is not paid for, Death will bring a sad reckoning at Last.

7. Their temporal judgments are not removed in mercy

Pharaoh had ten arrows shot at him (ten plagues) and all those plagues were removed; but as his heart remained hard, those plagues were not removed in mercy. It was not a preservation, but a reservation. God reserved him as a single monument of his justice when he was drowned in the depths of the sea. God may reprieve men's persons when he does not remit their sins. The wicked may have sparing mercy but not saving mercy.

8. The ungodly, while they live, are exposed to the wrath of God

'He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him' (John 3.36). Whoever lacks grace is like someone who lacks a pardon; every hour he is in fear of execution. How can a wicked man rejoice? Over his head hangs the sword of God's Justice and under him hell-fire burns.

9. The ungodly at death must undergo Gods fury and indignation

'The wicked shall be turned into hell' (Psa. 9:17). I have read of a lodestone in Ethiopia, which has two corners. With one it attracts iron and with the other it repels it. So God has two hands: one of mercy and one of justice. With the one, he will draw the godly to heaven; with the other, he will thrust the sinner to hell. And oh, how dreadful is that place! It is called a fiery lake (Rev. 20:15): a lake to denote the many torments in hell, a fiery lake to show their fierceness. Fire is the most torturing element. Strabo in his 'Geography' mentions a lake in Galilee of such a pestiferous nature that it

scalds off the skin of whatever is thrown into it. But alas, that lake is cool compared with this fiery lake into which the damned are thrown. To demonstrate that this fire is terrible, there are two most pernicious qualities in it:

(i) It is sulphurous; it is mixed with brimstone (Rev. 21: 9), which is unsavoury and suffocating.

(ii) It is inextinguishable: the wicked shall be choked in the flames, though not consumed: 'And the devil was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever' (Rev. 20:10). See the deplorable condition of all ungodly people! In the other world, they shall have a life that always dies and a death that always lives. May this not frighten men off their sins and make them become godly, unless they are resolved to try how hot hell-fire is?

B. CONSIDER HOW VAIN AND CONTEMPTIBLE OTHER THINGS ARE, ABOUT WHICH PERSONS VOID OF GODLINESS BUSY THEMSELVES

Men are taken up with the things of this life, and 'what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?' (Eccles. 5:16). Can the wind fill? What is gold but dust (Amos 2:7), which will sooner choke than satisfy? Pull off the mask of the most beautiful thing under the sun and look what is inside. There is care and vexation. And the greatest care is still to come - and that is to give account to God. The things of the world are just like a bubble in the water or a meteor in the air.

But godliness has real worth in it. If you speak of true honour it is to be born of God; if of true valour, it is to fight the good fight of faith; if of true delight, it is to have joy in the Holy Ghost. Oh, then, espouse godliness! Here reality is to be had. Of other things we may say, 'They comfort in vain' (Zech. 10:2).

Run to Christ as that prodigal son in his godless state and fall on your knees in true repentance and faith and receive that free gift which comes from above. The God of forgiveness will have mercy and you will obtain what you do not deserve but what has been purchased on your behalf by that Great friend of the penitent sinner, and He will make you godly, go and see.