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Filers in the Eyes of a Watchful Auditor

Unbeknownst to anyone, a descendant of Jonathan Edwards sends his greetings from his office in the Internal Revenue Service:

Were it not for the fiscal leniency of this Department, your government would not bear you one moment; for you are a tax burden to it; the Treasury groans with you; the I.R.S. is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; you have precious little time left to submit your 1040; there are black clouds now hanging directly over your heads, not uncommon in early spring; delay no longer lest you become a delinquent and, thus, offend your government, this office, and the Commissioner.

The wrath of the Commissioner, when once it is let loose, would spare no one, regardless of filing status. There would be nowhere to hide; no loophole would provide escape; no annuity would provide shelter; no I.R.A. would assuage the ire of the I.R.S. However, despite the powerful potential of His anger, the Commissioner is merciful and good. He has bestowed upon you an increased standard deduction, a new rule for earned income credit, and a special dispensation in case you die before you file. But still you delay as the Hour draws nearer and nearer. You must see it is futile to resist any longer; join the myriads who are flocking to their post offices to beat His deadline. Do not tempt the alternate consequences.

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For, to carry out His will, the Commissioner has agents aplenty whose pencils are sharp enough to draw blood and whose pens are loaded with black ink to put you in the red. His agents are everywhere; no major corporation is too big, and no individual filer is too small to avoid scrutiny. Be not deceitful. Declare. Show the profits netted from that business venture. Reveal the winnings after that vacation in Las Vegas. Yield the information about that secret savings account about which you thought no one knew. His agents know. He knows; we know everything. Avoid submitting a tainted form that, in return, earns you a summons to that ultimate confrontation--the audit.

O filer! Consider the fearful danger you are in: the I.R.S. is a juggernaut from which there is no escape. Either now or eventually it will be fed your 1040, only to digest it contentedly or to spit it out with your name engraved on its cold heart. If you try to flee, it will inexorably overtake you and grind you under its wheels. And if you stand still and try to deceive it, you will be ferreted out by one of the Commissioner's agents and forced to pay the price, either by check or money order, for your transgression.

Therefore, now, before it is too late, awake and settle your account with the Internal Revenue. The wrath of the Commissioner is now undoubtedly hanging, like those black clouds, over a great many of you would-be tax chiselers. Do not tempt disaster by dawdling away whatever time remains. It has been said that there are only two things you have to do--die and pay taxes. Remember, your government loves you, but if you do die before you file, be sure to have someone follow the instructions on page eight of your I.R.S. manual.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

(1703-1758)

During the delivery of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," as a local historian noted, "there was heard such a breathing of distress and weeping that the preacher was obliged to speak to the people and desire silence that he might be heard."

FROM *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

WERE IT NOT for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you; the creature¹ is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies. God's creatures are good, and were made for men to serve God with, and do not willingly subserve to any other purpose, and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end. And the world would spew you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of Him who hath subjected it in hope. There are black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God, for the present, stays² His rough wind; otherwise it would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff of the summer threshing floor.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more

¹ the creature: that which was created by God: the world.

² stays: restrains.

rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose. It is true that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back that are unwilling to be stopped and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw His hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in Hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets³ and in the house of God, it is nothing but His mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you

³ closets: private rooms.

hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it. Those that are gone¹ from being in the like circumstances with you see that it was so with them, for destruction came suddenly upon most of them when they expected nothing of it, and while they were saying, Peace and safety: now they see that those things on which they depended for peace and safety were nothing but thin air and empty shadows.

The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: His wrath toward 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 more abominable in His eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended Him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else that you did not go to Hell the last night, that you was suffered to wake 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 have 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: 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 incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in Hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine

¹ are gone: have died.

wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; 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 God to spare you one moment.

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in the 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, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be. Oh that you would consider it, whether you be young or old! 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, even before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some persons, that now sit here in some seats of this meeting house in health, quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning. Those of you that finally continue in a natural condition, that shall keep out of Hell longest, will be there in a little time! your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly and, in all probability, very suddenly upon

many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in Hell. It is doubtless the case of some whom you have seen and known, that never deserved Hell more than you, and that heretofore appeared as likely to have been now alive as you. Their case is past all hope; they are crying in extreme misery and perfect despair; but here you are in the land of the living and in the house of God, and have an opportunity to obtain salvation. What would not those poor damned hopeless souls give for one day's opportunity such as you now enjoy!

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands in calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to Him and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming from the east, west, north, and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day! To see so many others feasting, while you are pining and perishing! To see so many rejoicing and singing for joy of heart, while you have cause to mourn for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit! How can you rest one moment in such a condition? Are not your souls as precious as the souls of the people at Suffield,¹ where they are flocking from day to day to Christ?

Are there not many here who have lived long in the world, and are not to this day born again? and so are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and have done nothing ever since they have lived but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath? Oh, sirs, your case in an especial manner is extremely dangerous. Your guilt and hardness of heart is extremely great. Do you not see how generally per-

¹ Suffield: a nearby town.

sons of your years are passed over and left, in the present remarkable and wonderful dispensation of God's mercy? You had need to consider yourselves and awake thoroughly out of 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 which you now enjoy, when so many others of your age are renouncing all youthful vanities and flocking to Christ? You especially have now an extraordinary opportunity; but if you neglect it, it will soon be with you as with those persons who spent all the precious days of youth in sin, and are now come to such a dreadful pass in blindness and hardness. And you, children, who are unconverted, do not you know that you are going down to Hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of that God who is now 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 converted, and are become the holy and happy children of the King of kings?

And let every one that is yet of Christ, and hanging over the pit of Hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle-aged, or young people, or little children, now hearken to the loud calls of God's word and providence. This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favors to some, will doubtless be a day of as remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden, and their guilt increases apace at such a day as this, if they neglect their souls; and never was there so great danger of such persons being given up to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. God seems now to be hastily gathering in His elect in all parts of the land; and probably the greater part of adult persons that ever shall be saved, will be brought in now in a little time, and that it will be as it was on the great outpouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostles' days; the election will obtain,² and the rest will be blinded.

² election . . . obtain: Those destined for salvation will be chosen.

If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day that ever you was born to see such a season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, and will wish that you had died and gone to Hell before you had seen it. Now undoubtedly it is as it was in the days of John the Baptist; the ax is in an extraordinary manner laid at the root of the trees, that every tree which brings not forth good fruit may be hewn down and cast into the fire.

Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation: Let everyone fly out of Sodom: ¹ "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."²

¹ **Sodom:** a Biblical city destroyed because of the sinfulness of its people.

² **Haste . . . consumed:** the angels' warning to Lot, the one upright man in Sodom.