Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

Simile

1. “His anger is as great toward them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of His wrath in hell . . .” This simile is comparing lukewarm Puritans to those who are already burning in hell. Edwards is saying that it’s not good to be complacent in your spiritual life. He wants his listeners to reevaluate their spiritual lives.
2. “His wrath toward you burns like fire . . .” Edwards uses this simile to emphasize the severity of God’s anger.
3. “The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present. . .the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose.” Edwards uses this simile to show that you never know when the wrath of God will come; the flood waters will continue to build but at some time the flood gates will open and his judgment will be swift and devastating.
4. “Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead . . .” Edwards compares our sin to lead; both sin and lead are ugly. Also, the heaviness suggests that our sin will drag us closer and closer to hell.
5. “The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire . . .” God hold you like a spider and if you bite him (sin against him), He will drop you into the fire. Also, comparing sinners to spiders or insects suggests that we are insignificant and ugly.
6. “If God should withdraw his hand, [your works] would avail to more to keep you from falling than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it.” Edwards uses this simile to compare our works to thin air, which suggests that they are insubstantial. Just as someone would fall to their deaths if they stepped of a ledge onto thin air, so someone will fall into hell if he trusts his own works to save him.
7. “ . . . and all our righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell than a spider’s web would have to stop a falling rock.” Once again, Edwards uses a simile to compare our righteousness to something weak or insubstantial. If a rock were dropped onto a spider’s web, the web would have no power to catch it; it would break and the rock would fall to the ground. Similarly, the sinner who trusts in his own righteous will find that his own goodness is not sufficient to keep him from the flames of hell.
8. “You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince . . .” Edwards uses this simile to suggest the royalty and goodness of God and the rebelliousness, ingratitude, and treachery of people; they are like traitors who offend their benevolent rulers.

Metaphor

1. “The bow of God’s wrath is bent and the arrow made ready on the string. . .” Edwards uses metaphor to compare God’s wrath to a bow that’s ready to shoot at any time. There is nothing we can do to prevent the bow from shooting, and this metaphor emphasizes that power that God holds over us. Also, God is holding his arrow of judgment back for now, but the tension is building, like the tension on the string that is ready to release the arrow.
2. “It is a great furnace of wrath . . .” Again, Edwards used the image of a fiery furnace to emphasize the intensity of God’s wrath. This is a metaphor.
3. “You hang by a slender thread . . .” Your soul is inches away from being cast into the lake of fire. This comparison emphasizes the precariousness of the situation; the hot flames of hell could at any moment singe the “slender thread,” which could show that God’s patience is grown thin.
4. “The floods of God’s vengeance have been withheld . . .” God has been sparing you until you repent, but God’s vengeance will be powerful and widespread, like a flood.
5. “now they see, that [thinking positive thoughts was] nothing but thin air and empty shadows.” Edwards uses a metaphor comparing people’s good thoughts (saying “Peace and safety”) to “thin air and empty shadows.” They are only an illusion of good things to come, but will actually do nothing to keep the judgment from occurring.

Personification

1. “. . . You are held over in the hand of that God . . .” Edwards uses personification to explain how dependent we are on God. It is only because of Him that we are saved from hell.
2. “There is hell’s wide gaping mouth open . . .” Edwards uses personification to describe how eager hell is to “swallow” us for its next meal.
3. “. . . justice bends the arrow . . .” Edwards personifies justice as an archer. Since the bow and arrow represents God’s wrath or judgment, the fact that Justice bends the arrow suggests that God’s punishment toward sinners is justified. He has every right to punish us for our sins and unrepentance.

Parallel Structure

1. “The devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them . . .” Edwards uses parallel structure to emphasize the terrible reality of hell.
2. “and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the fames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you have ever done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment . . .” Edwards uses parallel structure to emphasize the helplessness of people to do anything to save themselves from sin; the only way to salvation is God’s mercy, not from any human effort.
3. “There is the dreadful pit . . ., there is hell’s wide gaping mouth; . . . There is nothing between you and hell . . .” Edwards creates parallel structure by beginning sever clauses with “there is.” This draws attention to the details he lists—the realities of hell that are right in front of our faces.
4. “. . . you are kept out of hell, but don’t see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation.” Edwards uses parallel structure to emphasize all the things people often put their trust in besides God. He is stressing that none of these things will keep us out of hell.
5. “ . . . 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 closets and in the house of God, and may be strict in it . . .” Edwards uses parallel structure to emphasize the possible ways people try to avoid God’s judgement—changed their lives, gone to church, or enjoyed “religious” things—however, he says that these human efforts are not what keeps us from hell.