

Edwards, *Religious Affections*

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. General Editor, Perry Miller. Vol. 2, *Religious Affections*. Edited by John E. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959. vii + 526 pp.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

“There is no question whatsoever, that is of greater importance to mankind, and that it more concerns every individual person to be well resolved in, than this, what are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God, and entitled to his eternal rewards? Or, which comes to the same thing, **What is the nature of true religion?** and wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness, that is acceptable in the sight of God.” (p. 84, emphasis added)

PART ONE. CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE AFFECTIONS, AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN RELIGION (p. 91)

1 PET. 1:28 *Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.* (p. 93)

DOCT. “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.” (p. 95, emphasis added)

I. What are “the affections of the mind”? “The affections are no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.” (p. 96)

The soul has two “*faculties*,” the understanding and the will [thus he dismisses a long-standing three faculty understanding of human nature]. The understanding is that by which the soul is capable of perception, speculation, discernment, and judgment. The will is that by which the soul is inclined one way or the other (attracted or repelled, likes or dislikes) with respect to the object of its consideration. The two have a separate but somewhat equal status, and they necessarily function together, so that human being is neither merely rational nor merely volitional. There is no pure reason, uncomplicated by value, and there is no capricious act of the will, free from some perception of the good.

The affections are not a third faculty but are, in effect, the center of the self, underlying both the mind and the will, giving a non-rational beginning point for the understanding and a non-volitional beginning point for the will. The affections neither reason nor will themselves, but they provide a fundamental perspective, a point of view, a basic orientation of the self, and an approach to life, and it is on this basis that the soul (or self) does all understanding and willing. By way of contrast with the passions, which are typically short-lived, the affections have a more abiding quality. For holy affections, see especially page 206 below.

II. Some things that render it *evident* [i.e., Edwards will now present ten “evidences”] that **“true religion, in great part, consists in the affections.”** (p. 99, emphasis added)

1. “True religion consists, in great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart.” (p. 99)
2. Affections are the spring of men’s actions. (p. 100)
3. “The things of religion take hold of men’s souls, no further than they affect them.” (p. 101)
4. The Scriptures place religion in the affections: fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal. (p. 102)
5. “The Scriptures do represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in *love*, the *chief* of the affections, and *fountain* of all other affections.” (p. 106, emphasis added)

“*The essence of all true religion lies in holy love.*” (p. 107, emphasis added)

“Great part of true religion consists in the affections.” (p. 107)
6. The religion of the saints in Scripture consisted much in holy affections. (p. 108)

Consider David, Paul, and John.
7. “Jesus Christ, was a person who was remarkably of a tender and affectionate heart.” (p. 111)
8. “The religion of heaven consists very much in *affection*.” (p. 113)
9. The ordinances and duties which God has appointed as expressions of true religion [prayer, praise, sacraments, preaching] are also evidences of the importance of affections. (p. 114)

Note, then, that good preaching must be “affective” and “affecting.” (cf. pp. 9, 121)
10. Conversely, the Scriptures locate sin in the hardness of heart. (p. 116)

“True religion lies very much in the affections.” The affections are always mixed. “Habitual” holy affection is more important than any one manifestation thereof. “Religion consists so much in affection, as that without holy affection there is no true religion,” and nothing in the understanding, will, or outer actions is good without holy affections. (pp. 118-119)

Inferences:

1. “We may hence learn how great their error is, who are for discarding all religious affections, as having nothing solid or substantial in them.” (p. 119)

“For although to true religion, there must indeed be something else besides affection; yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them.” (p. 120)

“If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart.” (p. 120)

“There are false affections, and there are true. A man’s having much affection, don’t prove that he has any true religion: but if he has no affections, it proves that he has no true religion. The right way, is not to reject all affections, nor to approve all; but to distinguish between affections, approving some, and rejecting others; separating between the wheat and the chaff, the gold and the dross, the precious and the vile.” (p. 121)

2. **“If it be so, that true religion lies much in the affections, hence we may infer, that such means are to be desired, as have much of a tendency to move the affections. Such books, and such a way of preaching the Word, and administration of ordinances, and such a way of worshiping God in prayer, and singing praises, is much to be desired, as has a tendency deeply to affect the hearts of those who attend these means.”** (p. 121, emphasis added)

Thus good preaching does not aim first of all to provide information for the understanding or to inspire the will to act, and certainly not to excite the emotions, but to be the occasion for the Holy Spirit to give the hearer new and holy affections. At first glance, this might appear to run against Augustine’s three classic goals for preaching: “It has been said by a man of eloquence, and quite rightly, that the eloquent should speak in such a way as to *instruct, delight, and move* their listeners” [*On Christian Teaching*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Book Four, section 74, p. 117, emphasis added]. But once we realize that holy affections have to do with perceiving and appreciating (that is, *delighting* in) the beauty of God (see page 201 below), and that the affections are the very *foundation* for all understanding (to which *instruction* speaks) and will (to which *motivation* appeals), we see that Edwards is profoundly Augustinian.

3. “If true religion lies much in the affections, hence we may learn, what great cause we have to be ashamed and confounded before God, that we are no more affected with the great things of religion. It appears from what has been said, that this arises from our having so little true religion.” (p. 122)

Affections should serve “man’s chief end.” (p. 122) Cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Compare also Augustine’s statement that there is one proper object of our enjoyment, and that is God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [*On Christian Teaching*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) Book One, section 10, p. 10].

PART TWO. SHEWING WHAT ARE NO CERTAIN SIGNS THAT RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS ARE TRULY GRACIOUS, OR THAT THEY ARE NOT (p. 125)

I. Things which are no signs one way or the other, either that affections are such as true religion consists in, or that they are otherwise; that we may be guarded against judging affections by false signs. (p. 127) [This Roman numeral I makes up all of Part Two.]

1. “’Tis not sign one way or the other, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high.” (p. 127)
2. “’Tis no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they have great effects on the body.” (p. 131)
3. “’Tis no sign that affections are truly gracious affections, or that they are not, that they cause those who have them, to be fluent, fervent and abundant, in talking of the things of religion.” (p. 135)
4. “’Tis no sign that affections are gracious, or that they are otherwise, that persons did not make ’em themselves, or excite ’em of their own contrivance, and by their own strength.” (p. 138)
5. “’Tis no sign that affections are truly holy and spiritual, or that they are not, that they come with texts of Scripture, remarkably brought to the mind.” (p. 142)
6. “’Tis no evidence that religious affections are saving, or that they are otherwise, that there is an appearance of love in them.” (p. 146)
7. “Persons having religious affections of many kinds, accompanying one another, is not sufficient to determine whether they have any gracious affections or no.” (p. 147)

“Though false religion is wont to be maimed and monstrous, and not to have that entireness and symmetry of parts, which is to be seen in true religion; yet there may be a great variety of false affections together, that may resemble gracious affections.” (p. 147)

This assertion that true religion is marked with wholeness and symmetry relates to Edwards's appreciation of *beauty*. See page 365 below.

8. "Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections by this, that comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convictions of conscience, in a *certain order*." (p. 151)

"First, as the devil can counterfeit all the saving operations and graces of the Spirit of God, so he can counterfeit those operations that are preparatory to grace." (p. 158)

"Secondly, if the operations and effects of the Spirit of God, in the convictions and comforts of true converts may be sophisticated, then the order of them may be imitated." (p. 159)

"Thirdly, we have no certain rule to determine how far God's own spirit may go in those operations and convictions which in themselves are not spiritual and saving, and yet the person that is the subject of them, never be converted, but fall short of salvation at last." (pp. 159-160)

"Fourthly, experience does greatly confirm, that persons seeming to have convictions and comforts following one another in such a method and order, as is frequently observable in true converts, is no certain sign of grace." (p. 160)

9. "'Tis no certain sign that the religious affections which persons have are such as have in them the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they dispose persons to spend much time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship." (p. 163)
10. "Nothing can be certainly known of the nature of religious affections by this, that they much dispose persons with their mouths to praise and glorify God. (p. 165)
11. "'Tis no sign that affections are right, or that they are wrong, that they make persons that have them, exceeding confident that what they experience is divine, and that they are in a good estate." (p. 167)

"There are two sorts of hypocrites: one that are deceived with their outward morality and external religion; many of which are professed Arminians, in the doctrine of justification: and the other, are those that are deceived with false discoveries and elevations; which often cry down works, and men's own righteousness, and talk much of free grace; but at the same time make a righteousness of their discoveries, of their humiliation, and exalt themselves to heaven with them." (p. 173)

12. “Nothing can be certainly concluded concerning the nature of religious affections, that any are the subjects of, from this, that the outward manifestations of them, and the relation persons give of them, are very affecting and pleasing to the truly godly, and such as greatly gain their charity, and win their hearts.” (p. 181)

“Men not only can’t exercise faith without some spiritual light, but they can exercise faith only just in such proportion as they have spiritual light. Men will trust in God no further than they *know* him: and they can’t be in the exercise of faith in him one ace further than they can have a sight of his fulness and faithfulness in exercise.” (p. 176, emphasis added)

Cf. John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. from the 1559 Latin ed. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), cited by book, chapter, section, and, in parentheses, volume and page:

“Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain *knowledge* of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” 3.2.7 (1:551, emphasis added)

- II. Things wherein those affections which are spiritual and gracious, differ from those which are not so, and may be distinguished and known. (p. 127) [This Roman numeral II makes up all of Part Three.]

PART THREE. SHEWING WHAT ARE DISTINGUISHING SIGNS OF TRULY GRACIOUS AND HOLY AFFECTIONS (p. 191)

Things to be observed concerning the marks to be laid down:

1. “That I am far from undertaking to give such signs of gracious affections, as shall be sufficient to enable any certainly to distinguish true affection from false in others; or to determine positively which of their neighbors are true professors, and which are hypocrites.” (p. 193)
2. “No signs are to be expected, that shall be sufficient to enable those saints certainly to discern their own good estate, who are very low in grace, or are such as have much departed from God, and are fallen into a dead, carnal and unchristian frame.” (p. 193)
3. “Nor is there much encouragement, in the experience of present or past times, to lay down rules or marks to distinguish between true and false affections, in hopes of convincing any considerable number of that sort of hypocrites, who have been deceived with great false discoveries and affections, and are once settled in a false

confidence, and high conceit of their own supposed great experiences and privileges.” (p. 196)

Twelve Signs:

I. “Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are *spiritual, supernatural* and *divine*.” (p. 197)

1. “The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of line and action.” (p. 200)

2. “Another reason why the saints and their virtues are called spiritual (which is the principal thing), is that the Spirit of God, dwelling as a vital principle in their souls, there produces those effects wherein he exerts and communicates himself in his own proper nature.” (p. 201)

“The Spirit of God so dwells in the hearts of the saints, that he there, as a seed or spring of life, exerts and communicates himself, in this his sweet and divine nature, making the soul a partaker of God’s beauty and Christ’s joy, so that the saint has truly fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, in thus having the communion or participation of the Holy Spirit.” (p. 201)

“This new spiritual sense, and the new dispositions that attend it, are no new faculties, but are new principles of nature. I use the word “principles,” for want of a word of a more determinate signification. By a principle of nature in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or a natural habit or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties exercises of such a certain kind; so that to exert the faculties in that kind of exercises, may be said to be his nature. So this new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of understanding. So that a new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will.” (p. 206, emphasis added)

II. “The first objective ground of gracious affections, is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest.” (p. 240)

“It was before observed, that the affection of love is as it were the fountain of all affection; and particularly, that Christian love is the fountain of all gracious affections.” (p. 240)

“Whereas the exercises of true and holy love in the saints arise in another way. They don’t first see that God loves them, and then see that he is lovely; but they first see that God is lovely, and the Christ is excellent and glorious, and their hearts are first captivated with this view, and the exercises of their love are wont from time to time to begin here, and to arise primarily from these views; and then, consequentially, they see God’s love; and great favor to them. The saint’s affections begin with God; and self-love has a hand in these affections consequentially, and secondarily only. On the contrary, those false affections begin with self, and an acknowledgment of an excellency in God, and an affectedness with it, is only consequential and dependent. In the love of the true saint God is the lowest foundation; the love of the excellency of his nature is the foundation of all the affections which come afterwards, wherein self-love is concerned as an handmaid: on the contrary, the hypocrite lays himself at the bottom of all, as the first foundation, and lays on God as the superstructure; and even his acknowledgment of God’s glory itself, depends on his regard to his private interest.” (p. 246)

III. “Those affections that are truly holy, are primarily founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things. Or (to express it otherwise), a love to divine things for the beauty and sweetness of their moral excellency, is the first beginning and spring of all holy affections.” (p. 253)

“The moral excellency of an intelligent voluntary being, is more immediately seated in the heart or will of moral agents. That intelligent being whose will is truly right and lovely, he is morally good or excellent.” (p. 255)

“A holy love as a holy object: the holiness of love consists especially in this that it is the love of that which is holy, as holy, or for its holiness; so that ’tis the holiness of the object, which is the quality whereon it fixes and terminates.” (p. 260)

“By this you may examine your love to God, and to Jesus Christ, and to the Word of God, and your joy in them, and also your love to the people of God, and your desires after heaven; whether they be from a supreme delight in this sort of beauty, without being primarily moved from your imagined interest in them, or expectations from ’em.” (p. 262, emphasis added)

IV. “Gracious affections do arise from the mind’s being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.” (p. 266)

“Spiritual understanding consists...in a sense of the heart, of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and knowledge of things of religion, that depends upon, and flows from such a sense.” (p. 272)

“God’s implanting that spiritual supernatural sense which has been spoken of, makes a great change in a man.” (p. 275)

V. “Truly gracious affections are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things.” (p. 291)

“All those who are truly gracious persons have a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel.” (p. 291)

“The divine glory and beauty of divine things is in itself, real evidence of their divinity.” (p. 298)

VI. “Gracious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation.” (p. 311)

VII. “Another thing, wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others, is, that they are attended with a change of nature.” (p. 340)

VIII. “Truly gracious affections differ from those affections that are false and delusive, in that they tend to, and are attended with the lamblike, dovelike spirit and temper of Jesus Christ; or in other words, they naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy, as appeared in Christ.” (p. 345)

IX. “Gracious affections soften the heart, and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.” (p. 357)

X. “Another thing wherein those affections that are truly gracious and holy, differ from those that are false, is beautiful symmetry and proportion.” (p. 365; see p. 147 above)

XI. “Another great and very distinguishing difference between gracious affections and others is, that gracious affections, the higher they are raised, the more is a spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments, increased. On the contrary, false affections rest satisfied in themselves.” (p. 376)

XII. “Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice. I mean, they have that influence and power upon him who is the subject of ’em, that they cause that a practice, which is universally conformed to, and directed by Christian rules, should be the practice and business of his life.” (p. 383)

“Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs.” (p. 443)

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, *Executive Director*
Foundation for Reformed Theology
4103 Monument Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23230-3818

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