

“The Importance of Holy Affections”
(1 Peter 1:8)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation. This evening, we’re resuming our study on the marks of grace by considering one of the greatest works ever written on the subject by Jonathan Edwards called *The Religious Affections*.

1. Understanding God’s grace is important for two reasons.

- a. First, as we’ve seen, it’s important for our own welfare, as well as those we might be able to help with this information, to know that we are genuinely converted and not simply deceiving ourselves: we need to know ultimately whether we’re going to go to heaven or not.
- b. But second, it’s vitally important that we understand the nature of the Spirit’s work so that we can cooperate with God when we see Him working and not find ourselves either promoting something He doesn’t approve, or fighting against something He does.
- c. One of Edwards main reasons for writing the book was so that the church would not end up fighting against God.

2. Consider what he writes in his preface.

a. First, with regard to our own salvation, Edwards writes,

- (i) “There is no question 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 lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness that is acceptable in the sight of God?* But though it be of such importance, and though we have clear and abundant light in the Word of God to direct us in this matter, yet there is no one point, wherein professing Christians do more differ one from another. It would be endless to reckon up the variety of opinions, in this point, that divide the Christian world; making manifest the truth of that declaration of our Savior, “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, that leads to life, and few there be that find it.”
- (ii) We don’t want to find out at the end of our lives when on our death beds that we still are on the broad road to destruction after all.

b. Second, with regard to knowing the difference between a work of God and a work of Satan.

- (i) *The Religious Affections* was written during a time of revival, during an outpouring of God’s Spirit.
- (ii) At times like this, both kingdoms are very active; their differences are more pronounced.
 - (a) With the advancing of Christ’s kingdom, the kingdom of darkness rises up to resist it, and so there was a great deal of both true and false religion.

- (b) Edwards' purpose was to examine what was going on, commend the good he saw from God's Spirit and condemn the evil that was also present from Satan's counterfeits.
 - (c) Both had to be done in order to promote the work of God's kingdom.
- (iii) The same obligation lies on us – to promote what we see of God's work in the church, and to condemn what isn't of God.
- (a) We need to remember that the church is a mixture of good and evil, of converted and unconverted, of grace and corruption – the Lord has ordained it would be as long as it's in the world.
 - (b) It shouldn't surprise us then that it would be this way during times of revival.
 - (1) This explains why after the great revival in Josiah's day, the people fell so quickly away (Jer. 3:10; 4:3-4).
 - (2) This explains why they fell away so quickly after the great outpouring of the Spirit in John the Baptist's day. Jesus said, "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light" (John 5:35).
 - (3) Or why at the end of Christ's ministry, at the end of such a great work of the Spirit, they put Him to death.
- (vi) Both grace and sins are always present; there is always a mixture of counterfeit with the true, and if we can't distinguish them, we will give the devil an advantage against us. We might even end up opposing the work of God.
- (a) This is what Satan did when he deceived the Jews into rejecting the work of God in the time of John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles.
 - (b) This is what he did when he turned the Roman church against the truth proclaimed by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin.
 - (c) This is what he was attempting to do at the time of the Great Awakening, when Edwards wrote his *Religious Affections*.
 - (d) He deceived Adam and Eve into thinking he was their friend, while he was trying to bring their happiness to an end.
 - (e) He will do the same to us, if we're not on our guard against him.
- (vii) The enemy causes many to think they're doing things God approves of which are entirely unacceptable to Him.
- (a) He deceives them into thinking they're safe, when they're really hypocrites in danger of hell at every moment.
 - (b) He deceives the saints into doing things the Lord hates, while they believe they're doing God's will.
 - (c) He turns saints out of the way and against one another in the name of God.
- (viii) When we are unclear as to what God's will is, it gives the devil an opportunity to deceive us, to advance his own cause and to destroy God's work.
- (a) That's why we need to know the nature of God's work, so we might encourage it and not fight against it.

- (b) Until this is done, there probably won't be much in the way of revival, since Christians will put out its fire as soon as it begins.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we're just going to begin breaking ground on this subject.
2. We'll look at two things:
 - a. First, the fact that true grace is mainly revealed by the affections.
 - b. Second, what affections really are.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider that true grace is mainly revealed by the affections.

1. Consider how Peter characterized the persecuted Christians to whom he was writing: "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8).
 - a. In the two preceding verses, we see that these believers were under trial: "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (vv. 6-7).
 - b. Trials are useful to Christians for three reasons:
 - (i) First, they, more than anything else, have the ability to distinguish true grace/faith from false. That's why they are called trials (v. 7).
 - (ii) Second, they not only reveal true faith, but they also reveal its beauty in the way true believers respond to trials. Its true nature is seen under trial, revealing it to be much more precious than gold.
 - (iii) Finally, trials purify, refine and strengthen faith. It helps burn off the dross of corruption and unbelief, leaving only pure gold. Trials establish and confirm faith, and they make it stronger and more active.
2. Peter tells us how these Christians responded under their trials, and how it showed they had true faith. These trials revealed two things:
 - a. That they loved Christ, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him."
 - (i) This became clear to everyone who saw them suffering for Christ: Why would they endure these things unless they loved this One they professed?
 - (ii) The world couldn't see the One for whom these Christians suffered. Even the Christians couldn't see Him. But though they couldn't, they had a supernatural principle of love in their hearts that compelled them to hold onto Him no matter what they had to face.
 - (iii) They couldn't see Him with their physical eyes, but they could see Him savingly with their spiritual eyes.
 - b. They also had joy in Christ: "And though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (v. 8).
 - (i) In their suffering, they had an inward spiritual joy that was greater, that enabled them to face their suffering cheerfully.

- (ii) They had this joy through faith in the One they could not see.
- (iii) And it wasn't barely noticeable, but powerful: "inexpressible and full of glory."
 - (a) It was a different kind of joy than what the world offers – a much stronger joy words could not fully express.
 - (b) The only thing that can be said is that it filled their souls with this overwhelmingly wonderful sense of glory.
 - (c) And it was a sanctifying joy – instead of corrupting their minds, as the joys of the world do, it actually purified and sanctified them. It was a foretaste of heavenly glory.
 - (d) This is what they had in their sufferings for Christ.
- (iv) Peter said that trials would refine their faith and purify it. When it was purified through trial, this is how it expressed itself – *in two holy affections*: love for Christ and joy inexpressible and full of glory. This is what true grace produces.

B. Second, let's consider the nature of the affections.

1. What are they? "The affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul."
 - a. God has endowed our souls with two faculties, two powers or abilities:
 - (i) The first is the understanding – the power to view facts, gather information, put ideas together or distinguish them, build theories, or judge things.
 - (ii) The second is known by many names, and is one by which we not only view things, but by which we either are inclined or disinclined towards them, by which we either like or dislike them, are pleased or displeased with them, approve or reject them. Sometimes we call it our inclination. When it has to do with our choices, we call it the will. And when it has reference to our mind or soul, we call it the heart.
 - b. This second faculty is used in two different ways: it either approves, accepts and so inclines us towards something, or opposes, rejects and so inclines us away from something.
 - (i) These inclinations towards or away from things can also differ in degree – they may be strong or weak, sometimes moving us a little beyond indifference, or other times being so strong that it affects our heart and internal organs, especially the bowels.
 - (ii) When the inclinations of our heart are strong, we call this affection.
 - (a) The heart/will and affections are not two different things, two different faculties of the soul; they are the same and differ only in degree.
 - (b) The will only acts when it is affected by something. But every time the will acts, this is not necessarily affection.
 - (1) Just because we incline towards something, or make a choice of some kind, this doesn't mean our affections are exercised.
 - (2) Affections are similar – they are the same inclinations, only stronger.

- (3) When we like something, we incline towards it; when we love that things, we strongly incline towards it – this strong inclination is affection.
- (iii) Affection also needs to be distinguished from passion.
- (i) Affection is a broader term that refers to all the strong inclinations of the will.
- (ii) Passion refers to those acts of the will that are more sudden and violent, when the mind is overpowered and less in control of itself.
2. Finally, we need to understand that the affections are part of the soul and not of the body.
- a. It's true that affections have an affect on the body, even as the body can affect our affections.
- (i) The Lord has constituted a union between our body and our soul so what affects one affects the other.
- (ii) When we're very afraid of something, our gut can feel wrenched or our knees knock together.
- (iii) On the other hand, if we get sick and run down, we can fall into a deep depression.
- b. But even though this is true, the affections are not in the body, but in the soul or mind.
- (i) It's not our bodies that have love or hate, joy or sorrow. They don't think or understand.
- (ii) The soul alone can have ideas, and so it alone is capable of being pleased or displeased with them.
- (iii) The effects on our bodies might heighten our experience of these affections, but these affections don't originate in our bodies.
- (iv) This simply means that when our souls are separated from our bodies –during the intermediate state – we will still be able to experience affection – we will still be able to love God.
- c. In closing, let me ask two questions:
- (i) Do the trials the Lord brings you through reveal that you love Christ and a joy in Him that is inexpressible and full of glory?
- (ii) Are the inclinations you experience towards Him strong enough to qualify as affections?
- (a) You might be inclined towards Him, but not as strongly as you should.
- (b) You might have joy, but not so full of glory.
- (c) You should experience them if you are a believer tonight. If they're not as strong as they should be, you are probably not spending the time you need in communion with the Lord.
- (d) If you're not a believer, then you must turn from your sins and trust in Christ, before you will begin to experience what only Christians know.
- (e) May the Lord engender and nurture within each one of us this evening these holy affections. Amen.