

“Defense of the Revival: The Religious Affections”
(Reformation 2012)

I. Opposition to the revival.

A. At first, there was silent opposition against the revival.

1. Was the revival sent by God? Was it an answer to prayer? Yes, and the ministers of New England should have known it.
 - a. Edwards wrote in 1742, “I suppose there is scarcely a minister in this land but from Sabbath to Sabbath is used to pray that God would pour out his Spirit and work a reformation and revival in religion in the country” (1.375).
 - b. And yet when it came, many didn’t see it as such. Murray writes, “The previous September, in a sermon at the Yale Commencement at New Haven, while upholding the revival as, in the main, a glorious work of God’s Spirit, [Edwards] had referred to the fact that ‘in many places people see plainly that their ministers have an ill opinion of the work.’ Such anti-revival opinion was not, indeed, openly expressed, rather it was the ‘long-continued silence’ of some, in the midst of the blessing, which showed their ‘secret kind of opposition’ (2.271-2).
 - (i) This sermon Edwards preached in 1741 was one of the first titles printed with regard to revival.
 - (ii) William Cooper of Boston wrote a lengthy preface, and it was entitled, *The Distinguishing Marks of a work of the Spirit of God, Applied to that uncommon operation that has lately appeared on the Minds of many of the People of New England*.
 - (iii) But this wasn’t all he would write.
 - (a) The fact that Edwards was aware of this opposition led him during 1742 to write a defense of the Awakening and of the kind of Christian experience it had revived.
 - (b) In the middle of his many engagements, he wrote a 378 page book, entitled, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England in 1742*.
 - (c) He also began to lay the foundation of a second work entitled, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in a series of sermons which he started that year.
2. Long before the first book was published, the opposition ceased to be silent.
 - a. First, an anonymous letter of about 89 pages was printed in Boston, January 10, 1742.
 - (i) In it, the author explained “to a friend,” also in Boston, the history of the French Prophets (Murray writes, “a Protestant group whose delusions had been much spoken of in Europe towards the end of the seventeenth century”) and other fanatics.
 - (ii) This “friend” added a 15 page introduction applying this history to the Awakening, and published it with the title, *The Wonderful Narrative: Or, A*

Faithful Account of the French Prophets, Their Agitations, Extasies, and Inspirations.

- (iii) Though he said he had no intention of discrediting the revival, he signed the introduction, *Anti-Enthusiasticus*.
 - (a) He writes, “I am not against allowing that a good number of sinners have (probably) been converted into saints; and as great a number of saints enlivened in their Christian Work.”
 - (b) But he refused to believe that there could be any connection between the “bodily effects” seen in the revival and the Holy Spirit.
 - (c) Charles Chauncy, who was 37 at the time and the junior pastor of Boston’s First church, was most likely the author.

- b. There was another anonymous work, dated August 4, 1742, attributed to Chauncy, entitled *A Letter from a Gentleman in Boston to Mr George Wishart, one of the Ministers of Edinburgh*.
 - (i) If he did in fact write it, it confirms Chauncy’s opposition to the revival by the middle of 1742.
 - (ii) Among other things in the letter, he criticizes George Whitefield in his reply to one who thought Whitefield had been used by God to do a great deal of good.
 - (a) “You will doubtless be disposed to enquire, what was the *great good* this gentleman was the instrument of? In answer whereto, I freely acknowledge, wherever he went he generally moved the passions, especially of the younger people, and the females among them; the effect whereof was, a great Talk about religion, together with a disposition to be perpetually hearing sermons, to neglect of all other business, especially, as preached by those who were sticklers for the *new Way*, as it was called. And in these things *chiefly* consisted the *Goodness* so much spoken of. I deny not, but there might be here and there a person stopped from going on in a course of sin; and some might be made really better: But so far as I could judge upon the nicest observation, the town, in general, was not much mended in those things wherein a reformation was greatly needed....
 - (b) “Various are the sentiments of persons about this *unusual Appearance* among us. Some think it is a *most wonderful Work of God’s Grace*; others a *most wonderful Spirit of Enthusiasm*; some think there is a *great deal of Religion*, with some *small Mixture* of Extravagances; others, a *great deal of Extravagance* with some *small Mixture* of that which may be called *good*; some think the *Country* was never in such a *happy* state on a *religious* account, others that it was never in a worse.
 - (c) “For myself; I am among those who are clearly in the Opinion, that there never was such a *Spirit of Superstition* and *Enthusiasm* reigning in the Land before....
 - (d) “A good Number, I hope, have settled into a truly *Christian* temper: Tho’ I must add, at the same time, that I am far from thinking, that the Appearance, in general, is any other than the effect of *enthusiastick Heat*. The goodness that has been so much talked of; ‘tis plain to me, is nothing more, in general, than a *Commotion in the Passions*.”

- (iii) He was even more hostile in a letter dated May 24, 1742, entitled, *The State of Religion in New England since the Rev. Mr George Whitefield's Arrival there, In a letter from a Gentleman in New England to his Friend in Glasgow*, written under the pseudonym A.M. In it he claims that the only persons who continue to support the revival were “men of narrow minds and great bigotry. . . . Almost everyone of but tolerable sense and understanding in religious matters, in great measure changed their opinions of the spirit that prevailed here.”
- c. There were two things that characterized this attack on the revival.
- (i) The first was that the attackers were hesitant. Tennent wrote in 1743, “A work of conviction and conversion spread not long since in many places of these provinces, with such power and progress as even silenced, for a time, the most malignant opposers: they were then either afraid or ashamed openly to contradict such astonishing displays of the Divine almightiness.”
- (ii) The second was that they didn't want others to know who they were.
- (a) Why were they concerned about revealing their identity?
- (b) Because they were clearly still in the minority.
- (1) In answering regarding the revival, “‘Whether it be a work of God, and how far it is so?’ seven of the leading Boston ministers wrote in August 1742: ‘The most serious and judicious, both ministers and Christians, have looked upon it to be, *in the main*, a genuine work of God, and the effect of that effusion of the Spirit of grace which the faithful have been praying, hoping, longing, and waiting for.’”
- (2) One of the signers was Thomas Foxcraft, the senior pastor of the church where Chauncy ministered.
- (c) The first direct answer to Edwards' *Distinguishing Marks*, entitled, *The Late Religious Commotions in New England considered, An Answer to the Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards's Sermon Entitled, The distinguishing Marks...*, was also written anonymously.
- (1) Its author was thought to be William Rand, a minister and friend of Chauncy.
- (2) The book had just been published when Edwards' larger work, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival* appeared on the shelves in 1743.
- (3) Chauncy wrote to his cousin, the Rev. Nathanael Chauncy, on March 1743, “Mr Edwards' book of 378 pages upon the *good work* is at last come forth; And I believe will do much hurt; and I am the rather inclined to think so, because there are some good things in it. Error is much more likely to be propagated, when it is mixed with truth. This hides its deformity and makes it go down the more easily. I may again trouble myself and the world upon the appearance of this book. I am preparing an antidote....”
- (4) His antidote was entitled *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*.
- (A) In it, he focuses on the alleged extravagances as caricaturing the whole revival.

- (B) Only in the last thirty pages did he attempt to answer Edwards' *Thoughts*, which he dismissed as a repetition of his *Distinguishing Marks*.
- (C) Murray writes, "Trumbull in his *History of Connecticut* speaks strongly against the dependability of Chauncy's work: 'The great body of those who were subjects of the divine operations at that time, were humble, prayerful, sober christians; loved and adhered to their ministers, and were strict in their morals.' Chauncy 'took up reports against his brethren, not at the mouth of two or three witnesses, and without inquiring whether they were friends or enemies.'"

- d. Before Chauncy's book could be published, opposition had come out into the open.
 - (i) Murray writes, "A Convention of ministers of 'the Province of Massachusetts Bay,' meeting in Boston in May 1743, published a full list of errors and disorders 'which have of late obtained in various Parts of the Land,' and refrained from any positive assertion on the existence of a true revival. Attention was drawn solely to chaff."
 - (ii) "Edwards was present at this Convention and he may have been among those ministers who attempted to speak against the procedure which was adopted: 'They were,' says Joshua Gee, of Boston's Second Church, 'interrupted in a rude way and treated with open contempt.... Many earnest pleas for their being heard were stifled in clamor and opposition.'"
 - (iii) "Believing that the Convention's 'Testimony' misrepresented the position, Gee and others called a counter-Convention for July 7 which exceeded (by twenty) the ministerial attendance at the first Convention, and in its own Testimony professed the belief that an extraordinary work of the Spirit had been seen in many parts of the land 'after a long time of great decay and deadness.' 'The present work,' some sixty-eight ministers declared, 'appears to be remarkable and extraordinary, *On account of the numbers wrought upon*. We never before saw so many brought under soul concern.... *With regard to the suddenness and quick progress of it*. Many persons and places were surprised with the gracious visit together, or near about the same time.... *Also in respect of the degree of operation*, both in a way of terror and in a way of consolation.'"
 - (iv) "This Testimony was supported by attestations received from a further forty-five ministers, and among their names is 'Jonathan Edwards of Northampton.'"
 - (v) "By the summer of 1743 the clergy of New England were thus openly divided, and opposition and defence reached their crescendo in a welter of publications which continued to appear well into the following year."

3. What were the issues that divided them?

- a. There were various opinions on the revival.
 - (i) Some were opposed to just some elements of the revival.
 - (ii) Others opposed the whole.

- (iii) Of the four hundred ministers in New England, it appears that 130 fell into this latter category.
 - (iv) Why was this the case?
- b. First, they found the new kind of preaching that became common in the awakening offensive.
- (i) It was too different to avoid appearing as a challenge to the established ways.
 - (ii) Those who preached this way were called “New-Light” preachers – including Whitefield, Tennent, Edwards and their associates.
 - (iii) Edwards’ describes this kind of preaching in his *Some Thoughts concerning the Present Revival*: “They ought indeed to be thorough in preaching the word of God, without mincing the matter at all; in handling the sword of the Spirit, as the ministers of the Lord of hosts, they ought not to be mild and gentle; they are not to be gentle and moderate in searching and awakening the conscience, but should be sons of thunder. The word of God, which is in itself sharper than any two-edged sword, ought not to be sheathed by its ministers, but so used that its sharp edges may have their full effect, even to the dividing asunder soul and spirit, joints and marrow” (1.401).
 - (iv) Whitefield and Tennent criticized those who stood against the revival and this way of preaching, stating that they were unconverted.
 - (1) Tennent said, “‘The body of the clergy’ . . . were ‘as great strangers to the feeling experience’ of the new birth as Nicodemus ‘who talked like a fool about it.’ ‘Isn’t this the reason’, he asked, ‘why a work of conviction and conversion has been so rarely heard of; for a long time, in the churches, till of late, viz. That the bulk of her spiritual guides were stone-blind and stone-dead.’”
 - (2) Whitefield said something similar in his published journals, “On many accounts, it certainly excels all other provinces in America; and, for the establishment of religion, perhaps all other parts of the world. The towns all through Connecticut, and eastward towards York, are well peopled. Every five miles or perhaps less, you have a meetinghouse; and, I believe, there is no such thing as a pluralist or non-resident minister in both provinces. Many, nay most that preach, I fear, do not experimentally know Christ; yet I cannot see much worldly advantage to tempt them to take up the sacred function.”
 - (3) Needless to say, many who read these words never forgot them.
- c. Second, there was opposition to experimental Christianity itself.
- (i) Edwards writes, “There is naturally a great enmity in the heart of man against vital religion, and I believe there would have been a great deal of opposition against this glorious work of God in New England if the subjects and promoters of it had behaved themselves never so agreeably to Christian rules” (1.408).
 - (ii) Murray writes, “It was this ‘vital religion’ which, after years of much formal Christianity, the Awakening revived, and it was bound to distinguish those who preferred the former state of things from those who now rejoiced in the

change. The words of Thomas Boston, another eighteenth-century pastor, are apposite [appropriate]: ‘When winter has stripped the trees of their verdure [greenness] it is hard to distinguish those that have life from those that have not; but when the spring approaches, then they are easily known by their spreading leaves, while those that are dead still continue the same; thus when religion is in decay, the saint can scarcely be distinguished from the sinner; but when a time of refreshing comes, then will they blossom and bring forth fruit abundantly.’

- (iii) “Archibald Alexander, after considering the differences that emerged as the result of the revival, concluded, “I cannot doubt that, in a good degree, the contest between the parties was between the friends and the enemies of true religion.”
- d. A third reason for the opposition was that the Awakening tended to revive historic Calvinism, which many didn’t like.
- (i) At the beginning of the 18th Century, Calvinism began to wane in New England.
 - (ii) By 1740, it was no longer being taught at Harvard, and even though Thomas Clap, Rector at Yale, adhered to it, the majority of the Yale trustees were Arminian.
 - (iii) Murray writes that the Calvinists, “asserted that the revival was a glorious manifestation of the sovereignty of divine grace: the large number of converts of varying ages and backgrounds, the contrast in the response between one place and another, the differing results attending the same sermons – all these they traced back to God himself. Any other divinity, they claimed, was helpless in explaining the phenomenon. ‘Now is a good time,’ said Edwards, ‘for Arminians to change their principles’ (1.423).”
 - (iv) The Calvinists not only claimed a place for their beliefs, they “blamed Arminianism for the carelessness and superficiality which resulted from the belief that conversion is a matter which can be determined by the human will. Arminianism had encouraged the common opinion of the unregenerate man that it is in his own power to decide upon his salvation.”
 - (v) What is it that Arminians didn’t like about the Calvinistic preaching? Thomas Prince summarizes their reactions against Tennent’s preaching in Boston:
 - (1) “It was not merely, nor so much his laying open the terrors of the law, and wrath of God, or damnation of hell (for this they could pretty well bear, as long as they hoped these belonged not to them, or they could easily avoid them) as his laying open their many vain and secret shifts and refuges, counterfeit resemblances of grace, delusive and damning hopes, their utter impotence, and impending danger of destruction; whereby they found all their hopes and refuges of lies to fail them, and themselves exposed to eternal ruin, unable to help themselves, and in a lost condition. This searching preaching was both the suitable and principal means of their conviction.”

- (2) Murray writes, “The author of *A Letter from a Gentleman in Boston to Mr George Wishart* complained bitterly of Tennent and especially his view that ‘all were Pharisees, hypocrites, carnal unregenerate wretches, both ministers and people, who did not think just as he did, particularly as to the Doctrines of Calvinism.’ Timothy Cutler – unlike Chauncy, the probable author of that letter – was ready to dismiss that theology and abominated what he called Tennent’s ‘impudent and noisy’ preaching, but, after all, it might have been expected from a Presbyterian whose only training was a ‘log college!’ What was utterly unexpected was a priest in holy orders from Oxford, who could gather an estimated 20,000 on Boston Common and tell the Harvard faculty, ‘Gentlemen, I profess myself a Calvinist as to principle, and preach no other doctrines than those which your pious ancestors, and the founders of Harvard College, preached long before I was born!’ And Whitefield’s Calvinism was just as practical in effect as Tennent’s.”
- (3) Last week, we read Nathan Cole’s account of the people rushing to hear Whitefield speak at Middleton. As further evidence of the power of preaching the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, here were the results on the author of that account: “When I saw Mr. Whitefield come upon the scaffold he looked almost angelic, a young, slim, slender youth, before some thousands of people and with a bold, undaunted countenance... it solemnized my mind and put me in a trembling fear before he began to preach for he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the Great God. Hearing him preach gave me a heart wound [so that], by God’s blessing, my old foundation was broken up and I saw that my righteousness would not save me, then I was convinced of the doctrine of election and went right to quarrelling with God about it because all that I could do would not save me....”
- (vi) These revival preachers were nicknamed “New-Lights” or “New-Side” by their opponents.
- (a) Some complained, “How comes it to pass that we hear so much of these things of late, which former times and ages knew so little about?”
- (b) It wasn’t hard at all for the preachers to show that this wasn’t a new thing, but a return to the old paths.
- (c) Samuel Blair writes about the spiritual recovery brought about by the Awakening in the Middle Colonies:
- (1) “Excellent books that had lain by much neglected, were then much perused, and lent from one to another: and it was a peculiar satisfaction to people to find how exactly the doctrines they heard daily preached, harmonized with the doctrines maintained and taught by great and godly men in other parts and former times.”
- (2) Thomas Prince said the same thing happened in Boston, “The people seemed to have a renewed taste for those old pious and experimental writers, Mr Hooker, Shepard, Gurnall, William Guthrie, Joseph Alleine, Isaac Ambrose, Dr Owen and others. The evangelical writings of these

deceased authors... were now read with singular pleasure; some of them reprinted, and in great number quickly bought and studied.”

- (d) Murray writes, “Speaking of the origin of the term ‘New Lights’, Lyman Atwater believed that it was used principally because of the new kind of preaching which characterized the revival leaders. He quotes Professor Fisher who says, ‘The boldness with which they declared in the pulpit the terror of the gospel, and the force of their appeals to the conscience, in contrast with what had been usual, made their sermons exciting and effective.’ ‘This was more especially true,’ comments Atwater, ‘of the elder Edwards and Bellamy, who gave emphasis to the terrors of the Lord at a time when a prevalent reticence in regard to them, into which preaching in quiet times is always apt to subside, rendered such emphasis startling and potent. But this is no peculiarity of any new system of theology, in contrast with the old; it simply pertains to ministerial prudence and fidelity.’”
- e. But objections to the revival by the ministers wasn’t the only problem.
- (i) Some have asked the question, Why didn’t the revival continue?
 - (ii) One modern writer suggests that “it declined simply because it had to, because society could not maintain itself in so great a disequilibrium.”
 - (iii) Edwards believed that it was because the friends of the revival allowed what was genuinely a work of God to become mixed with so much wildfire and carnal enthusiasm that it grieved the Spirit of God and gave Satan an advantage.
 - (a) Edwards writes, “Satan will keep men secure as long as he can; but when he can do that no longer, he often endeavours to drive them to extremes, and so to dishonour God, and wound religion in that way” (2.271).
 - (b) Eleazer Wheelock wrote in his diary, after attending a service at Voluntown, Connecticut, October 21, 1741, “There is a great work in this town, but more of the footsteps of Satan than in any place I have yet been in: the zeal of some too furious: they tell of many visions, revelations, and many strong impressions upon the imagination.”
 - (c) Edwards, reflecting on the revival, wrote, “With respect to the late revival of religion amongst us for three or four years past, it has been observable, that in the former part of it, in the years 1740 and 1741, the work seemed to be much more pure, having less of a corrupt mixture than in the former great outpouring of the Spirit in 1735 and 1736. Persons seemed to be sensible of their former errors, and had learned more of the tendency and consequences of things. They were now better guarded, and their affections were not only stronger, but attended with greater solemnity, and greater humility and self-distrust, and greater engagedness after holy living and perseverance: and there were fewer errors in conduct. But in the latter part of it, in the year 1742, it was otherwise: the work continued more pure till we were infected from abroad: our people hearing of, and some of them seeing, the work in other places, where there was a greater visible commotion than here, and the outward appearances were more

extraordinary, were ready to think that the work in those places far excelled what was amongst us, and their eyes were dazzled with the high profession and great show that some made, who came hither from other places.

- (d) “That those people went so far beyond them in raptures and violent emotions of the affections, and a vehement zeal, and what they called *boldness for Christ*, our people were ready to think was owing to far greater attainments in grace, and intimacy with heaven: they looked little in their own eyes in comparison with them, and were ready to submit themselves to them, and yield themselves up to their conduct, taking it for granted that every thing was right that they said and did. These things had a strange influence on the people, and gave many of them a deep and unhappy tincture from which it was a hard and long labour to deliver them, and from which some of them are not fully delivered to this day (1.lxi).

- (iv) Some spoke out against this emotionalism to restrain it and lost many members.

- (a) Murray writes, “David Hall, Edwards’ close friend, having seen ninety-eight added to his church, later lost many of his people when he tried to restrain wild-fire. The case of Joseph Fish, another friend of the revival, who ministered at North Stonington, was even worse. Seeing a number in his quickened congregation laying emphasis upon ‘violent agitations and outcries, ecstasies, visions, trances, and inward impressions, he greatly feared that many would be deceived as to the nature of true religion and in consequence perish.’ But when he began to speak on the subject, so strong was the false zeal, that the majority of the congregation left him and he ‘with grief and anxiety saw his church gradually dwindling away.’”
- (b) These separations became common in 1742-1743, and as a result, nearly one hundred separatist churches were formed.
- (c) Some of these separations were justified, but not all – the people had become too judgmental against their ministers.
- (d) Sadly, the precedent that Tennent and Whitefield set in this area is what caused this damage.
- (1) It’s not that they were necessarily wrong about those they denounced, but the fact that they had spoken so authoritatively about so many made others believe it was an easy thing to tell the difference.
- (2) Whitefield later wrote, “Alas, alas! how can I be too severe against myself, who, Peter like, have cut off so many ears, and by imprudencies mixed with my zeal, have dishonoured the cause of Jesus?”
- (e) New ministers were needed for these new congregations, and in many cases, they could only be found among the self-appointed lay-preachers or exhorters, who often believed that a man didn’t need “book-learning” provided he could preach in the Spirit.
- (1) Murray writes, “Benjamin Coleman of Boston speaks of these ‘many poor and miserable exhorters who have sprung up like mushrooms in a night, and in the morning thought themselves accomplished teachers and

called of God to be so.’ And he prays that they might ‘awake at length out of their dream, or rather delirium.’”

- (2) Gilbert Tennent, replying to Edwards on this subject, expresses a similar concern: “As to the subject you mention, *of laymen being sent out to exhort and to teach*, supposing them to be real converts, I cannot but think, if it be encouraged and continued, it will be of dreadful consequence to the church’s peace and soundness in the faith. I will not gainsay but that private persons may be of service to the church of God by private, humble, fraternal reproof, and exhortations; and no doubt it is their duty to be faithful in these things. But in the meantime if christian prudence and humility do not attend their essays, they are like to be prejudicial to the church’s real well-being. But for ignorant young converts to take upon them authoritatively to instruct and exhort publicly, tends to introduce the greatest errors and the grossest anarchy and confusion. The ministers of Christ should be apt to teach and able to convince gainsayers, and it is dangerous to the pure church of God, when those are novices, whose lips should preserve knowledge.
- (3) “I know most young zealots are apt, through ignorance, inconsideration, and pride of heart, to undertake what they have no proper qualifications for: and, through their imprudences and enthusiasm, the church of God suffers. I think all that fear God, should rise up and crush the enthusiastic creature in the egg. Dear brother, the times we live in are dangerous. The churches in America and elsewhere are in great hazard of enthusiasm: we have need to think of the maxim, *principus obsta* [resist the beginnings]. May Zion’s King protect his church! I add no more, but love, and beg a remembrance in your prayers” (1.liv-v).
- (v) Edwards was of the same mind. Sadly, not everyone was.
- (a) One notable example was the Rev. James Davenport, who “believed that the Holy Spirit can give such direct guidance to Christians by ‘impressions’ made upon their minds that they may be infallibly sure of the will of God.”
- (b) Murray writes, “The strength of an ‘impression’ was enough to prove its authenticity. The effect of this error, in the high tide of emotion accompanying the Great Awakening, was to encourage Christians (and others) to accept any powerful subjective impulse as the ‘special leading’ of the Spirit.”
- (c) Needless to say, Davenport created a great deal of difficulty in the present climate. Once it gained momentum, it became uncontrollable.
- (d) Davenport eventually withdrew from public to reemerge later a humbled and wiser man. He published his retractions in July 1744. But the spirit he had exemplified continued in many places.
- (vi) The rise of this fanaticism coincided with the decline of the Awakening.
- (a) Murray writes, “Those who spoke most loudly of being led by the Spirit were the very persons responsible for quenching the Spirit’s work. As Edwards puts it,

(b) “The cry was, ‘O, there is no danger, if we are but lively in religion, and full of God’s Spirit, and live by faith, of being misled! If we do but follow God, there is no danger of being led wrong! ’Tis the cold, carnal, and lifeless, that are most likely to be blind, and walk in darkness. Let us press forward, and not stay and hinder the good work, by standing and spending time in these criticisms and carnal reasonings! etc., etc. This was the language of many, till they ran on deep into the wilderness, and were taught by the briers and thorns of the wilderness” (1.cl).

(vii) How did Edwards believe one could tell whether something was a work of the Spirit or not?

(a) He tells us in his *Distinguishing Marks* (1741), based on 1 John 4:1 “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”

(b) The only safe means is by the Word, taking what Scripture says as to the marks of the Spirit’s work.

(c) What are those marks in general?

(1) “The Spirit’s true work can be distinguished from that which is false because we know that he always (1) causes a greater esteem for Christ (2) operates against the interest of Satan’s kingdom ‘which lies in encouraging and establishing sin’ (3) promotes greater regard for the truth and the divinity of the Holy Scriptures (4) brings men to the light of truth (5) excites love to God and man, making the attributes of God, manifested in Christ, ‘delightful objects of contemplation.’”

(2) How did he believe the Awakening measured up? “We must throw by our Bibles and give up revealed religion if this be not in general the work of God.”

(3) With regard to the critics of the revival, he writes, “When the Spirit of God came to be poured out so wonderfully in the apostles’ days, many who had been in reputation for religion and piety had a great spite against the work because they saw it tended to diminish their honour and to reproach their formality and lukewarmness.”

(4) Yes, there were “imprudences and irregularities,” but these were found in the New Testament churches as well.

(5) Edwards writes that waiting to see a work of God without any fault is like a fool “waiting at the river side to have the water all run by. . . . A work of God without stumbling-blocks is never to be expected.”

B. What is the nature of saving grace? How can one tell whether the Spirit has done a gracious work on your own heart?

1. Edwards answered this question as well in His *Religious Affections*.

a. Murray writes, “As he anticipated in 1742, the minority view represented by Chauncy that religion lies in ‘reason and judgment’ and in dutiful behaviour, had now become more widely credited because of the uncritical praise of everything which had recently gone under the name of experience and emotion. The pendulum had indeed swung back so that in 1746 he could speak of ‘the prevailing prejudices against religious affections at this day in the land.’”

b. Edwards writes, “Because many who, in the late extraordinary season, appeared to have great religious affections did not manifest a right temper of mind, and ran into many errors, in the time of their affection and the heat of their zeal... religious affections in general are grown out of credit with great numbers, as though true religion did not at all consist in them. Thus we easily and naturally run from one extreme to another. A little while ago we were in the other extreme; there was a prevalent disposition to look upon all high religious affections as eminent exercises of true grace, without much inquiring into the nature and source of those affections and the manner in which they arose; if persons did but appear to be indeed very much moved and raised, so as to be full of religious talk, and express themselves with great warmth and earnestness, and to be filled, or to be very full, as the phrases were; it was too much the manner, without further examination, to conclude such persons were full of the Spirit of God, and had eminent experience of his gracious influences. This was the extreme which was prevailing three or four years ago. But of late, instead of esteeming and admiring all religious affections without distinction, it is a thing much more prevalent to reject and discard all without distinction. Herein appears the subtlety of Satan.... This he knows is the way to bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality, and effectually shut out the power of godliness, and every thing which is spiritual, and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors.”

2. What part do the affections play in true religion?

a. He writes,

- (i) “Holy affections do not only necessarily belong to true religion but are a very great part of it.”
- (ii) “If we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing.”
- (iii) “He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.... The holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affections: such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal.”
- (iv) He has only to point to Jesus, our great Example, for He is “the greatest instance of ardency, vigour and strength of love, both to God and man, that ever was.”

b. The greatest of the affections is love.

- (i) “The Scriptures do represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in *love*, the chief of the affections, and fountain of all other affections” (2:106).
- (ii) “The great commandment is, You shall love God, and the second is like it, And your neighbor as yourself. On these depend the whole law and prophets (Matt. 22:37-40). Cf. Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; 1 Tim. 1:5. Without it, everything we do in religion is worthless, and it is the fountain from which everything good comes (1 Cor. 13)” (2:106-7).

c. How can you know that you have this gracious love?

- (i) Edwards begins by showing what isn't enough.
 - (a) It's not enough that your affections are strong.
 - (1) It's true that Jesus, His disciples and the saints had very strong affections.
 - (2) But on the other hand, "The Israelites sang the praises of God at the Red Sea, but they soon forgot His works. They greatly feared at Mount Sinai and promised to do all that the Lord had commanded them, but they quickly turned aside to follow other gods (i.e., the golden calf). Many were affected by the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, the same who shouted for joy at the entrance of the Savior into Jerusalem just before His passion (John 12:18), but in just a few days they cried out for His crucifixion" (2:130-31).
 - (b) It's not enough that they affect your body.
 - (1) Anything you feel strongly will affect your body.
 - (2) And it will as long as your soul is connected to your body.
 - (c) It's not enough that they make you talk a great deal about religion.
 - (1) When your heart is full of love for the Lord, you will talk about Him often.
 - (2) But there were those who were strongly affected by John the Baptist's preaching, and that of Jesus, who followed Him, night and day, even into the wilderness, who fasted, and who spoke a great deal about Him, who were never converted.
 - (d) It's not enough that you really don't know how you got them.
 - (1) Just because you don't know where they came from doesn't mean that they came from God.
 - (2) They could have come from another spirit: "There are many false spirits, exceeding busy with men, who often transform themselves into angels of light, and do in many wonderful ways, with great subtlety and power, mimic the operations of the Spirit of God" (2:141).
 - (e) It's not enough that they come with Scripture texts brought to your mind.
 - (1) The devil can do this.
 - (2) So can your flesh.
 - (f) It's not enough that these affections also appear to contain love.
 - (1) "Christ speaks of many professing Christians that have such love, whose love will not continue, and so shall fail of salvation" (Matt. 24:12-13). (2:146-47).
 - (2) There were many Jews who followed Christ for a time and who seemed to have strong affection for Him, but had no grace (2:147).
 - (g) By the same token, it doesn't matter whether there are many kinds of affections.

- (1) There is a counterfeit for every gracious affection.
 - (2) “Godly sorrow for sin, as in Pharaoh, Saul, and Ahab, and the children of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 9:27; cf. 1 Sam. 24:16-17 and 26:21; 1 Kgs. 21:27; Num. 14:39-40); and of the fear of God, as in the Samaritans, who feared the Lord, and served their own gods at the same time (2 Kgs. 17:32-33); and those enemies of God we read of Ps. 66:3 who through the greatness of God’s power, submit themselves to him, or, as it is in the Hebrew, lie unto him, i.e. yield a counterfeit reverence and submission: so of a gracious gratitude, as in the children of Israel, who sang God’s praise at the Red Sea (Ps. 106:12), and Naaman the Syrian, after his miraculous cure of his leprousy (2 Kgs. 5:15, etc.)” (2:148).
- (h) It doesn’t matter if you have comfort and joy.
- (1) If you believe you are under God’s wrath, and then that you have been delivered, you will feel relief and joy.
 - (2) But you could be deceived.
- (i) It’s not enough that you spend a great deal of time in worship or that you praise God.
- (1) True believers will seek to do all they do for God’s glory and honor.
 - (2) The Israelites attended new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, they spread forth their hands and made many prayers (Is. 1:2-15). The Pharisees made long prayers and fasted twice a week.
- (j) And it’s not enough that they give you confidence that what you’re experiencing is from God.
- (1) The Pharisees never doubted they were saints, believing themselves to be the greatest among them.
 - (2) If we only consider the deceitfulness of the unconverted heart it is no wonder they had such a high opinion of themselves. Their conscience was blinded, their convictions killed. Satan also had them deceived. (2:172).
- (ii) If these things aren’t enough, then how can you know? Edwards gives these principle ways:
- (a) True religious affections come from the Spirit.
 - (b) You can know they are from the Spirit if your love for God goes beyond what He has done for you to God Himself.
 - (c) You must love God and the things of the Lord primarily for their moral excellency or holiness.
 - (d) They bring with them the certainty that God and the things of the Lord are real.
 - (e) True spiritual affections humble you – they don’t feed pride.
 - (f) Spiritual affections change your nature – you are no longer the person you were before.
 - (g) They give you the meek and gentle character of Jesus.

- (h) They give you a tender heart towards others.
 - (i) They are balanced and proportionate.
 - (j) The stronger they are, the more you want.
 - (k) They produce obedience to the whole will of God.
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- (iii) Since true religion isn't just head knowledge and it must reach to the heart, these things must be true of you if you are a true believer.
 - (iv) This is perhaps the most important contribution that came from the Great Awakening.
 - (v) Any questions?

Resources: Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*.

Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*.

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