

Summit Woods Baptist Church
First Corinthians Sermon Study Equipping Class

Religious Affections

The following material will be used for the Equipping Class discussions on both December 24th and 31st. Please bring this handout **both** weeks.

The writers of the Bible consistently use passionate and emotional language in describing their relationship to God and how the knowledge and experience of God's grace has affected them. For example, Peter speaks of the love and inexpressible joy that flow from faith (1 Peter 1:8), David tells us how earnestly his soul thirsts for God (Psalm 63:1), and Paul says that we are nothing if we have not love (1 Corinthians 13:2).

For the next two Sundays, Pastor Bret will be preaching on Religious Affections. He will be anchored in the Bible but will also lean on the wisdom of Jonathan Edwards, an 18th-century theologian whom more than one scholar has declared the greatest intellect the United States has ever produced. Edwards' *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* is still the most thorough, thoughtful, and helpful resource in understanding what the Bible has to say about true and false conversion and how the soul's affections relate to salvation. In order to prepare to hear these sermons, we will look through Edward's observations back to the Bible and prayerfully discern if what Edwards wrote is true to the Scriptures.

The article printed below provides a *very* brief introduction to Edwards' key observations in *Religious Affections*.

Instructions:

1. Read the synopsis of *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* printed below to become acquainted with Edwards's outline and basic ideas.
2. For each of Edwards's false and true marks, provide a passage from the Scriptures that supports or illustrates the point. (If you find a Scripture that contradicts it, note that as well and bring it up in class.) Space for recording your notes is provided on the last two pages of the handout.
3. If you are unsure about the summary on a particular point or can't think of a passage that corresponds to it, look up that point in this online version of the entire work:
http://www.covenantofgrace.com/religious_affections.htm
(It has a hyper-linked table of contents to jump you to the correct section.)
4. We will discuss the unreliable affections (the first twelve) on Dec 24th and the genuine affections (the second twelve) on Dec 31st.
5. Have a very Merry Christmas!!

Jonathan Edwards and Religious Affection

By P. Wilkins

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was an outstanding American preacher. He lived during times of great revival, but the reality of this revival was questioned by many. In connection with this Edwards was forced to think about what he called the most important question of all – how can we judge whether our religion is true or false? His most important contribution to answering this question came in his 1754 work on Religious Affections. This review is intended to give an overview of Edwards' teaching in this work.

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Edwards starts by saying that, ‘True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections’. But by ‘affections’ Edwards does not just mean feelings – he is saying that true religion is really demonstrated by the attitude of the heart. As Edwards says: ‘The holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affection; such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal.’ Edwards is saying that true religion will always influence or ‘affect’ every part of a man – and that a religion that does not affect us is not worth having.

But Edwards recognises that a man may have what could be called ‘religious’ affections, and yet actually be unconverted. And so he attempts to give some hints as to how we should view certain ‘affections’. He gives first 12 ‘symptoms’ that do not prove affections to be gracious (although it is very important to remember that these signs also do not prove the opposite), and then 12 ‘distinguishing signs of truly gracious affections’.

12 signs that do not prove (or disprove) that affections are gracious:

1. *That the affections are very powerful is no proof that they are gracious.* There are religious affections which are very powerful, that are not spiritual and saving. When Christ rode into Jerusalem, the people, affected by the miracle of Lazarus’ resurrection, praised and worshipped – yet before long they were crying out for him to be crucified.
2. *That the affections have great effects on the body is no proof that they are gracious.* Such effects often arise from great affections about non-spiritual things. On the other hand, we ought not to dismiss religious affections because they do have great physical effects.
3. *That the affections cause a man to be fluent and fervent in talking of the things of religion, is no proof that they are gracious.* Once again, we must be careful not to mistrust a person just because they are fluent and fervent in talking about religion. It is no proof one way or the other.
4. *It is no proof that the affections are gracious that a man did not make them himself, or excite them by his own efforts.* There are other spirits who have influence on the minds of men, besides the Holy Ghost. Satan can influence a man into feelings of false security or false love.
5. *That the affections come with texts of Scripture, remarkably brought to the mind, is no proof that they are gracious.* Some people say things like, ‘There were such and such sweet promises brought to my mind: they came suddenly, as if they were spoken to me’, or ‘the Word came with power’, and they suppose that this means their experience must have been from God. But there is no evidence that the devil cannot bring texts of Scripture to the mind, and misapply them to deceive persons, even ‘with power’.
6. *That there is an appearance of love in the affections is no proof that they are gracious.* Persons may seem to have love to God and to Christ and yet have no grace.
7. *A person may have religious affections of many kinds, accompanying one another, but this is no proof that these affections are gracious.* Men, while in a state of nature, are capable of a resemblance of all kinds of religious affections; and so they may have many of them together.
8. *That comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convictions of conscience, in a certain order, is no proof that the affections are gracious.* It is no evidence that comforts and joys are gracious, just because they succeed great terrors, and intense fears of hell.

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9. *That they dispose persons to spend much time in 'religion', is no proof that the affections are gracious.* See, for example, Martin Luther before his conversion.
10. *That a person is frequently inclined to praise and glorify God with his mouth, is no proof that the affections are gracious.* It is foretold that false professors should show a forwardness to glorify God: Isaiah 66:5.
11. *That the affections make a man very confident that he is saved, is no proof that the affections are gracious.* There is such a thing as true assurance, and we should pray for it – but a man may be sure that he is saved, and yet not be.
12. *That a man can talk about and display his affections in a way that makes other Christians think he is converted, is no proof that his affections are gracious.* The true saints are not able to know for sure who is godly, and who is not. Bright professors, who had been received as eminent saints, have often been known to fall away and come to nothing.

Edwards now moves on to give 12 signs of truly gracious affections. Edwards did not aim to allow us to discern for certain whether another person is truly saved. Nor did he intend to give signs that would enable a true Christian to know that he is saved if he is very low in grace, or has much departed from God, or is fallen into a 'dead, carnal, and unchristian frame.'

12 signs of truly gracious and holy affections:

1. *Gracious affections always arise from divine influences and operations on the heart.* These divine influences are entirely above nature, or supernatural. Edwards' explanation of this point is lengthy and not really possible to summarise here – read the book!
2. *Gracious affections are always primarily founded on the excellent nature of divine things, not self-interest.* A man who truly loves God does so primarily because God himself is lovely and worthy to be loved; not because of God's mercy to him. The true saint delights in God primarily because of God's own perfection; and he delights in Christ because of Christ's own beauty; the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.
3. *Gracious affections are always founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things.* A true love to God begins with a delight in his holiness; for no other attribute is truly lovely without this. His holiness must be loved before any other of his attributes can be loved. True saints love the grace of God not just because this grace serves their interest (and so suits their self-love), but because this grace is beautiful in itself.
4. *Gracious affections always arise from the mind being enlightened to understand or apprehend divine things.* There are affections which do not arise from any spiritual understanding; and these affections are not spiritual. For example, affections arising from texts of Scripture coming to the mind are vain, if the affection flows from the manner in which the text came, rather than on the teaching contained in it.
5. *Gracious affections are always attended with a conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things.* 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. They no longer halt between two opinions; the great doctrines of the gospel cease to be any longer doubtful things, or matters of opinion.

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6. *Gracious affections are always attended with evangelical humiliation.* The Christian has a sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness. The Christians that are really the most eminent saints are ashamed of the low degrees of their love and thankfulness, and their little knowledge of God.
7. *Gracious affections are always accompanied by a change of nature.* If there has been no great and remarkable abiding change in a man, all his imaginations are vain, however he has been affected.
8. *Gracious affections are always attended with the lamb-like, dove-like spirit and temper of Jesus Christ.* This is not to say that true Christians have no remains of a contrary spirit, and can never be guilty of behaviour disagreeable to such a spirit.
9. *Gracious affections always soften the heart, and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.* False affections have a tendency in the end to harden the heart.
10. *Gracious affections always display beautiful symmetry and proportion.* For example, the saints' joy and comfort is balanced with godly sorrow and mourning for sin.
11. *The higher gracious affections are raised, the greater the spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments.* Those with false affections rest satisfied in them. But for a Christian, the more he loves God with a gracious love, the more he desires to love him, and the more uneasy he is that he doesn't love him more; the more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and is upset that he loves it so much; the more his heart is broken, the more he desires it should be broken; the more he longs after God and holiness, the more he longs to long.
12. *Gracious and holy affections always have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.* This implies three things in the case of a true Christian:
 - a. That his behaviour or practice in the world will be conformed to, and directed by, Christian rules.
 - b. That he will make a business of such a holy practice above all things; that it be a business which he is chiefly engaged in, and devoted to, and pursues with highest earnestness and diligence: so that he may be said to make this practice of religion eminently his work and business.
 - c. That he will persist in it to the end of life: so that it may be said, not only to be his business at certain seasons, but the business of his life; it is the business which he perseveres in through all changes, and under all trials, as long as he lives. True saints may be guilty of some kinds and degrees of backsliding, and may be foiled by particular temptations, and may fall into sin, yea great sins; but they never can fall away so as to grow weary of religion, and the service of God, and habitually dislike and neglect it.

Some of Edwards' words may seem blunt and appear not to take into account that even the best Christians are very far from perfect. However this is because I have reduced the c. 170,000 words of the original book into only c. 1,700 words, so 99% of what Edwards said is missing. Really the only way to fully appreciate his teaching is to read the book. It is worth the effort that it requires!

Article copied from Banner of Truth Trust: <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/book-review-resources/2012/jonathan-edwards-and-religious-affection/>

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Scriptures that support or illustrate the 12 signs that do not prove (or disprove) that affections are gracious:

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Scriptures that support or illustrate the 12 signs of truly gracious and holy affections:

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