

THESIS: TRUE RELIGION, IN GREAT PART, CONSISTS IN HOLY AFFECTIONS
PART I – CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE AFFECTIONS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN RELIGION
PART II – SIGNS WHICH NEITHER PROVE NOR DISPROVE GENUINE EXPERIENCE

PART III – SHOWING WHAT ARE DISTINGUISHING SIGNS OF TRULY GRACIOUS AND HOLY AFFECTIONS

Section 1 – Affections that arise from spiritual, supernatural, and divine influences.

- spiritual = God's Spirit; His nature of holiness
- Rom8:16 the "witness of the Spirit" (from last week), not as an immediately supernatural revelation, but the fruit of His work in us giving us a co-witness with our own spirit that we are children of God

Section 2 – Affections which have as their ultimate foundation the love of God's excellence.

- excellence = of the highest, finest, or superior quality
- Illustration: a citizen of a kingdom in which a king rules; two ways to love the king – (1.) merely for what he DOES for one's benefit (2.) for what he IS in himself (i.e. his character or attributes)

- It is possible to love God for the first reason absent of the second – this is a natural affection or gratitude; this is not saving
 - o Scriptural examples – Israel, Pharisees (Luke6:43)
 - o This can be no more than a mercenary love, for what I get out of it by way of benefits apart from God
 - o If one's love for God is ONLY this, then Edwards says that they are not a true Christian

- True affections for God have as their ultimate foundation, and then that gratitude flows out of the realization that, even despite what we deserve, He has love us

What chiefly makes a man, or any creature lovely, is his excellency; and so what chiefly renders God lovely, and must undoubtedly be the chief ground of true love, is his excellency. God's nature, or the divinity, is infinitely excellent; yea it is infinite beauty, brightness, and glory itself.

A natural principle of self-love may be the foundation of great affections towards God and Christ, without seeing anything of the beauty and glory of the divine nature. There is a certain gratitude that is a mere natural thing.

- True worship is not only for what God does, but who He is in Himself; true conversion is not merely acceptance of what God has done for our good (in creation/provision/redemption), but a spiritual life that begins to delight in HIM

Illustration: a political leader that does things for the benefit of a people may invoke gratitude (which is right), while at the same time they despise his character because he is immoral

- Edwards makes a point that ingratitude is a great wickedness, because it is part of our nature to be thankful to someone who does good to us

Gratitude being thus a natural principle, it renders ingratitude so much the more vile and heinous; because it shows a dreadful prevalence of wickedness, when it even overbears and suppresses the better principles of human nature.

- Nevertheless, mere honor and gratitude to God is not the same as worship for His being

How is this most tested?

1.) When only parts of God's character are chosen to adore, to the neglect of others

- His mercy, goodness, graciousness, love to the neglect of holiness, justice, anger against sin

Men on such grounds as these, may love a God of their own forming in their imaginations, when they are far from loving such a God as reigns in heaven...they may like [the god of their own making] very well, and feel a sort of love to him, when they are far from loving the true God.

...they allow God to be lovely in himself, no otherwise than that he has forgiven them, and accepted them, and loves them above most in the world, and has engaged to improve all his infinite power and wisdom in preferring, dignifying, and exalting them, and will do for them just as they would have him.

2.) When the benefits are not seen, when things are difficult, when things don't go our way and it doesn't seem like God is giving us as we would like

- Will we serve God for nothing (Job1:9, 10)?
- At this point, when things seem to go better with God, their love increases as they get their "Best Life Now"
- The reality of their faith will be most tested not by what they get, but when they lose

They do not first see that God loves them, and then see that he is lovely, but they first see that God is lovely, and that 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 hypocrite sees himself (and God's doing for him) at the bottom of it all, not God – they delight that God makes much of them, not that they live to make much of God
- Be clear that it doesn't mean that if one is grateful that it is false, but rather this is the outflow of this more fundamental element
- Not only is this true of our love for God, but also our joy and spiritual delight, sorrow for sin, humility
As the love and joy of hypocrites are all from the source of self love, so it is with their other affections, their sorrow for sin, their humiliation and submission, their religious desires and zeal.
- What happens then when a false Christian begins to see their sin and what it deserves?
If they only saw a little of the sinfulness and vileness of their own hearts, and their deformity, in the midst of their best duties and their best affections, it would knock their affections on the head; because their affections are built upon self, therefore self-knowledge would destroy them.
- God gives us all things richly to enjoy and delight in, but only secondarily; this is most tested in their absence, as well as our willingness to forego them for the good of others

Section 3 – Affections for God's excellence, particularly His moral excellency.

- This is an expansion of the previous point
- By moral excellency Edwards explains the difference between moral good/evil (related to sin) and natural good/evil (related to the comfort of nature) – i.e. punishment (a moral good) is painful (a natural evil) or sexual immorality (a natural good) is breaking God's law (a moral evil)
- Theologians sometimes break down God's attributes into moral and natural categories
- **Natural attributes** include power, knowledge, eternity, omnipresence
- **Moral attributes** include justice, goodness, faithfulness, truth – all summarized by “holiness”
- A way of thinking about the difference of these categories to think about how if a sinful person had the natural attributes, how bad it would be – a tyrant could have the degrees of the natural ones, and yet be very evil
- Holiness then is this moral dimension, and a person who has the Holy Spirit has the influence of this holiness, in the above areas
- The righteous love God's moral attributes; the wicked do not
- So God's true beauty, and the foundation of a true love for God, is a love for these moral attributes
- It is God's holiness (the only 3x call) is the unifying factor, and makes all the other attributes beautiful
A true love to God must begin with a delight in his holiness, and not with a delight in any other attribute; for no other attribute is truly lovely without this, and no otherwise than as (according to our way of conceiving of God) it derives its loveliness from this; and therefore it is impossible that other attributes should appear lovely, in their true loveliness, until this is seen.
...they that do not see the glory of God's holiness, cannot see anything of the true glory of his mercy and grace.
- Holiness adorns His house ([Ps93:5](#)), His City ([Rev22:19](#)), the Scriptures ([Rom1:2](#)), the Spirit ([Ps51:11](#)), Jesus ([Act3:14](#)), is what we pursue ([Heb12:14](#)), and God Himself ([Rev15:4](#))
- What follows then is the realization that we are not – this is where **the Gospel** comes in and gives astounding help

It is this that captivates their hearts, and delights them above all things; it is the most amiable and sweet thing to the heart of a true saint, that is to be found in heaven or earth; that which above all others attracts and engages his soul; and that whereby above all things, he places his happiness, and which he lobs upon for solace and entertainment to his mind, in this world, and full satisfaction and blessedness in another. 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.