

PART THREE  
EXPOSITIONS OF  
EDWARDS'S MAJOR  
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

# THE GREAT CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE (ORIGINAL SIN)

*Paul Helm*

*Edwards was not conscious of differing essentially from the reformed tradition with respect to the entrance of sin into the world. He simply went deeper into the matter and got into deeper difficulty thereby. His problems were not different from others, but the others tended to let sleeping dogs lie.*

JOHN GERSTNER

## INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Edwards was a tense, highly focused, and very intelligent man, a person of many parts. Ambitious too, while reserved and austere, as he himself recognized. Not just a preacher and revivalist, as he has come to be known to us through evangelical tradition,<sup>1</sup> but a theologian, a philosopher, and a scientist. Part of the romance—or tragedy—of Edwards's life is that he took it upon himself to play radically different roles at one and the same time. But he seems to have played each of these roles with characteristic thoroughness and commitment.

So it was at Stockbridge (where he moved in 1751) during the years in which he composed *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to his study of Samuel Rutherford, John Coffey notes how the Rutherford of evangelical piety of the nineteenth century, the Rutherford of the *Letters*, and the Rutherford of a few quaint sermons offers a highly selective and even distorted picture of Rutherford the man. See John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The same could be said of Jonathan Edwards, who to generations was known only as the author of the *Life of David Brainerd*, of the *Religious Affections*, and of two sermons, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and "God Glorified in Man's Dependence."

<sup>2</sup> Its full title is *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended, Evidences of Its Truth Produced, and Arguments to the Contrary Answered* (1758). Page references provided in the main text are to volume 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970).

At the same time that he was still feuding with people from the Northampton church from which he had recently (in 1750) been dismissed, he was preaching to the Indians and fearfully preparing for war with other Indians (for a time Stockbridge became a stockade), while at the same time attempting to gain their confidence.<sup>3</sup> More significantly for us, Edwards—who at that time endured an illness that “exceedingly wasted my flesh and strength, so that I became like a skeleton”<sup>4</sup>—was also composing two of the three great treatises for which he will ever be remembered as a theologian. The first of the three, *The Religious Affections*, appeared in 1746, while the second, *The Freedom of the Will*, was published in 1754, followed by *Original Sin*, published posthumously in 1758.

Another way of saying that Edwards was a man of many parts is to say that he addressed diverse audiences. While he was preaching to the Indians and attempting to have them taught English, and continuing to recriminate with people connected with the Northampton pastorate, Edwards was endeavoring to address a wider audience—not merely his fellow ministers in New England, nor even the Reformed constituency that included his English and Scottish correspondents and the churches that they represented, but (as he hoped and believed) the wider intellectual world of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

For Edwards was nothing if not confident in his own God-given abilities to address the deepest currents of thought of his century. It has become a commonplace of contemporary Edwards scholarship to stress that he used many of the tendencies of the “advanced” thought of his time, the “late improvements in philosophy” as he called them (385)—John Locke’s philosophy, Sir Isaac Newton’s science—to reinforce the conservative theological position of his Puritan and Reformed forebears. The very ideas that in the minds of others strengthened latitudinarian

<sup>3</sup> The mixture of emotions felt by the Edwards family during this period is vividly portrayed by George M. Marsden in chapter 24 (“Frontier Struggles”) of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 395–413.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards in a letter to John Erskine, in “The Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (1834; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:clxv.

<sup>5</sup> One of the great merits of Gerald McDermott’s *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) is that it makes plausible the view that Edwards’s basic intellectual concern, in his various polemical works, was with the Unitarian outlook of deism and with the presuppositions that gave rise to it. The book is somewhat spoiled, however, by the overly rosy picture it paints of Edwards’s view of non-Christian religions.

tendencies, in the mind of Edwards were put to work to reinforce his own Puritan heritage not only against its obvious opponents, but even in the face of the writings of those, such as Thomas Ridgeley and Isaac Watts, whom Edwards recognized as valued members of his own tradition, but whom he thought of as waverers (410).

However, what he did have in common with his radical opponents—men such as John Taylor of Norwich, whom we shall meet a little later on—was a confidence in human reason. Not because he believed that it was the only reliable source of human knowledge, but because he believed that it was God-given, and that properly used it corroborated and undergirded the teaching of God's special revelation, the Bible. On Edwards's view, as we shall see in more detail later, in the Fall God had not so much disabled reason as isolated it from mankind's original "supernatural" endowment. Reason was capable of functioning properly, and in the right hands it was capable of confirming the teaching of Scripture or at least providing data that were consistent with it. It is entirely in keeping with this outlook that Edwards should devote a chapter of *Original Sin* (OS in what follows) to considering objections against the *reasonableness* of the doctrine of original sin (394). Such an approach was characteristic of the eighteenth century.

But in endeavoring to carry out such a program it was never Edwards's intention to leave everything as it was in the world of Reformed and Calvinistic theology. To say that he was an innovator is too strong. But he was a re-formulator of those ways of expressing Reformed theology that he thought were outdated (outdated by the latest thought, that is) or unhelpful in other ways. We shall consider some of his innovations later.

We can see Edwards's confidence in reason in the very structure of OS. It is a three-part defense of the doctrine of original sin: from the empirical evidence of human evil (most of Part One), from Scripture (Parts Two and Three), and from reason (most of Part Four and some of Part One). I suppose that if Edwards had been asked to rank Scripture, reason, and experience in order of importance for theology, he would undoubtedly have ranked Scripture first. But he would have thought that the choice that we were offering him was rather unnecessary, and indeed superficial. For it is evident from his patterns of thought elsewhere—for example, in his earlier treatise on free will—that he saw each of the three as complementing each other. For if the doctrine of

original sin (or his particular understanding of human action) is God's truth, then we might expect to see evidence of its consequences in personal and social life, and perhaps even to demonstrate the incoherence of rival doctrines. If mankind is made in the image of God, and reason is a divine gift, then we should be able to show that some doctrine about the human will or about the propagation of sin, understood from Scripture, is in accordance with human reason, or that it is at least not *repugnant* to reason, as Edwards might himself have put it. (It is important to note that at no point does Edwards think that reason can independently prove the truth of the doctrine of original sin. But it can, he thinks, corroborate it by appealing to human experience and by answering objections to it devised from human reason.)

We must not allow ourselves to paint too romantic a picture of Edwards in Stockbridge. As we have noted, he wrote OS while feuding with the Northamptonites, helping to defend Stockbridge against attack (by having soldiers billeted in the Edwards home, for example), and trying to teach and preach to the Indians there. One can imagine the distractions and interruptions, though it would be wrong to conclude that these necessarily frustrated him. After all, Edwards believed that Stockbridge was the place where he ought to be, for following the troubles in the pastorate at Northampton he had waited for the chance to go there. And so we must suppose that though often waylaid by the goings-on at the frontier and diverted by the machinations of the Williams clan—the family that had played a major part in having Edwards ousted from Northampton—he believed that what he was doing with the Indians mattered every bit as much as fine-tuning his thoughts on original sin.

It would also be inaccurate to think that Edwards wrote OS from scratch in a few months amidst the cares of Stockbridge. Readers of Edwards's writings have for years been aware of his *Miscellanies*, the continuous, on-the-hoof notebook entries of his own thought, records of what he read, speculative asides, and the like.<sup>6</sup> Recent scholarship, notably the outstanding work of Professor Thomas Schafer, has confirmed not only the voluminous, lifelong extent of these *Miscellanies*,

<sup>6</sup> In the Yale edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, see, for example: *The "Miscellanies,"* a-500, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (1994); *The "Miscellanies,"* 501-832, ed. Ava Chamberlain (2000); *The "Miscellanies,"* 833-1152, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (2002); *The "Miscellanies,"* 1153-1360, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney (2004).

but also the fact that Edwards composed many of his later writings by incorporating chunks of them, as well as passages from his sermons (and also material from what he called his “Book of Controversies”<sup>7</sup>), directly into the text of whatever work was in progress. So it would be misleading to suppose that Edwards sat down in Stockbridge one evening with a blank page before him having decided to write a book on sin. Rather, we must see *OS* as the accumulation of a life’s work of reflection on this and on kindred topics and see Edwards composing the work by actively incorporating his voluminous notes and jottings.

However, it does seem that in the case of *OS* Edwards was galvanized into action by what he feared the impact of John Taylor of Norwich’s view on sin might be.<sup>8</sup> John Taylor was an example of “radical Dissent” of the sort that became increasingly common when, under the influence of Locke and others, Puritan orthodoxy quickly waned. What Edwards feared was the importing of Taylorian ideas from old England into New England. So *OS* is a polemical work in which from start to finish Edwards critically engages with Taylor (and to a lesser extent with another eighteenth-century challenger, George Turnbull<sup>9</sup>). Further, unlike *Religious Affections*, but very much like *The Freedom of the Will*, *OS* contains little or no references to Puritan writers, and only a few to continental Reformed theologians. Rather Edwards appeals to thinkers, such as the philosophers Francis Hutcheson and John Locke, whom his opponents Taylor and Turnbull respected. This reinforces the view that in both these works Edwards was endeavoring to be read and respected beyond the confines of New England Puritanism.

In what follows we shall try to distill Edwards’s positive position by reengaging with what is necessarily a dated controversy. We shall draw out Edwards’s views by briefly reviewing the most significant sections of each of the first three parts of *OS*. But since the distinctiveness of what he thought largely emerges in the course of the objections he considers in Part Four, we shall pay particular attention, later on, to that part.

<sup>7</sup> For details of the sources of the work and the manner of its composition, see Clyde Holbrook’s Introduction to the Yale edition of *OS* (1-101).

<sup>8</sup> John Taylor (1694-1761), a Lancastrian by birth, was a Presbyterian minister in Norwich, England, 1733-57. He became a teacher at Warrington Academy until his death. His *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* was published in 1738.

<sup>9</sup> George Turnbull (1698-1748) taught for a time at Marischal College, Aberdeen. His *Principles of Moral Philosophy* was published in 1741, and *Christian Philosophy* the following year.

## THE ARGUMENT OF PART ONE

The form of the argument of Part One is as follows. Edwards notes that all men and women without exception “run into” moral evil. Furthermore this evil is very evil, it occurs immediately, it is continuous and progressive, and its effects remain even in the best of men, those who enjoy the benefits of God’s regenerating grace. Humanity is depraved, and the means adopted for the reformation and regeneration of human evil have had comparatively little effect. (One may wonder whether Edwards’s estimate of the relatively small impact of the gospel on human evil was affected by his own disillusionment with the revivals of the Great Awakening, and particularly by what had happened so recently in Northampton, which in the revivals had been a “a city set on a hill.”)

Edwards intends this survey of evidence to have a cumulative effect on the mind of the reader. One line of evidence reinforces each of the other lines in turn. So what is the best explanation of the evidence? Could it be that all human beings of all ages and cultures turn out this way simply as a matter of fact? That each individual case of human evil has its own separate explanation? Is it not more plausible to suppose that there is one underlying explanation of this exceptionless universality?<sup>10</sup> Edwards offers this analogy:

If it be observed, that those trees, and all other trees of the kind, wherever planted, and in all soils, countries, climates and seasons, and how-ever cultivated and managed, still bear ill fruit, from year to year, and in all ages, it is a good evidence of the evil nature of the tree: and if the fruit, at all these times, and in all these cases, be very bad, it proves the nature of the tree to be very bad. And if we argue in like manner from what appears among men, ’tis easy to determine, whether the universal sinfulness of mankind, and their all sinning immediately, as soon as capable of it, and all sinning continually, and generally being of a

<sup>10</sup> According to Douglas Moo, this is precisely the question that the interpreter of Romans 5:12 is faced with, the sense to be given to, “and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (NIV). What is the connection between Adam’s sin and the sin and death of all? Is the latter in imitation of Adam? Or is it through the sinful nature that comes from Adam and that caused all people to sin (the so-called mediate theory of imputation)? Or rather is the sinning in question sinning in and with Adam? This is the view that Moo “tentatively” opts for. “The point is rather that the sin here attributed to the ‘all’ is to be understood, in the light of vv. 12 a-c and 15-19, as a sin in some manner identical to the sin committed by Adam. Paul can therefore say both ‘all die because all sin’ and ‘all die because Adam sinned’ with no hint of conflict because the sin of Adam is the sin of all.” Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 338.

wicked character, at all times, in all ages, and all places, and under all possible circumstances, against means and motives inexpressibly manifold and great, and in the utmost conceivable variety, be from a permanent internal great cause. (191)

Of particular interest in this section is Edwards's consideration of several evasions, which in some cases anticipate the objections that he will consider in Part Four. These evasions have the status of counter-hypotheses, of other ways of accounting for the universal and deep sinfulness of the human race. The first is this. Scripture teaches that sin entered a world that was "very good." There was a first sin. What is the explanation for that? By definition, that sin cannot have been inherited. So if one sin may not have been inherited, may not all sins not have been? May not the sin of each one of us be like the sin of Adam in this respect, that we are the originators of it? To which Edwards replies that the first sin of Adam did not come about from a fixed disposition but was "transient" (193). For Edwards an action is transient if it is not the expression of a settled habit. Edwards argues that Adam's first sin was transient in this sense, but that it produced fixed dispositions to evil in himself and those "in" him. This appeal to the transient source of Adam's first sin will return to haunt Edwards later on in the argument.

But may not the cause of the sin in each human being be that person's free will (Evasion 2) (194)? To which Edwards replies: If the free will in question is the power to choose either good or evil as the chooser sees fit (a position that he had vehemently argued against in his treatise on the freedom of the will, but that he now allows for the sake of the argument), how is it that the result of this exercise of freedom is not something like a 50-50 incidence of good and evil?

But (Evasion 3) why may not the universality of sin be the result of the influence on the race of bad examples (196)? But, Edwards asks, how does it come about that there are so many, uniformly many, bad examples? Why were the children of Noah, who had a good example to follow, so wretchedly disappointing? How is it that efforts at the reforming of manners, or of the reviving of religion are so soon and so deeply dissipated?

When England grew very corrupt, God brought over a number of pious persons, and planted 'em in New England, and this land was planted



with a noble vine. But how is the gold become dim! How greatly have we forsaken the pious examples of our fathers! (198)

And look at how the example of supreme goodness, Jesus Christ, was treated.

But (Evasion 4) may not the prevalence of sin be accounted for by the influence of the “animal passions” (201)? The trouble with this suggestion, Edwards says, is that it proves too much, since it looks to make God, who created us with a sensual nature, the author of evil. (Throughout OS Edwards is particularly exercised over the question of God’s authorship of evil: discussion of the problem recurs a number of times, and Edwards devotes a chapter of Part Four to rebutting the idea.) And what about Adam at the first, and what about Jesus? How do we then account for Christ’s sinlessness?

The final evasion is that human nature is in a state of permanent probation or trial, and it is of the nature of a trial that we combat vice in order to promote and solidify virtue. Hence, it is argued, the presence of vice is needed for the development of virtue in the human race.<sup>11</sup> Edwards replies with his characteristic acuteness: Either the presence of temptation accounts for sin and evil, in which case the temptation is itself sinful and evil, or it does not, in which case how does it account for evil at all?

Edwards has not quite finished. In the concluding chapter of this part he argues that original sin is proved by the fact that we all, including many infants, die. In the light of the current theological preoccupation, if not obsession, with the Holocaust, leading to the development of “Holocaust theologies,” the following words of Edwards are, to say the least, cautionary:

How inconsiderable a thing is the additional or hastened destruction, that is sometimes brought on a particular city or country by war, compared with that universal havoc which death makes of the whole race of mankind, from generation to generation, without distinction of sex, age, quality or condition, with all the infinitely dismal circumstances, torments and agonies which attend the death of old and young, adult persons and little infants? (208)

<sup>11</sup> Such a view is the source of modern evolutionary, “soul-making” theodicies such as that of John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (London: Harper & Row, 1978).

In this part Edwards is chiefly rejecting the views of his two principal adversaries, Taylor and Turnbull, quoting them in their own words, at length, and then rebutting them. He is meeting them on their own territory and answering them with their own weapons, with general observations and rational argument. Although the discussion is dated, Edwards has the advantage that his opponents both held, with him, to the historicity of the biblical account of the Fall. Had Edwards been arguing today, he would have had to start further back, so to speak, but there is no reason to think that his argument would not have been similar in structure.<sup>12</sup> The debate is also dated by the fact that there is no reference to later theories, to the unconscious, or to the place of the economic or social order in promoting evil. Yet it is not hard to imagine how Edwards could have transposed his argument that the universality and depth of human sin is due to the presence in us all of original sin to meet these later views.

## THE HEART OF THE WORK

Parts Two and Three of the work are the heart of Edwards's positive exposition. Here he deals with Scripture in his usual trenchant way. In Part Two he chiefly has in view two main passages, the first three chapters of the book of Genesis (chapter 1) and Romans 5:12ff. (chapter 4). Sandwiched in between are sets of observations on relevant passages of the Old Testament (chapter 2) and on similarly relevant passages of the New Testament (chapter 3). Part Three has two chapters offering evidence of original sin from the accomplishment and application of redemption. We shall look at what Edwards has to say in chapters 1 and 4 of Part Two and both chapters of Part Three.

### 1. *Genesis 1—3*

As in *The Freedom of the Will*, so here Edwards denies that virtue arises from choice. Rather he maintains that virtuous actions arise from prior virtuous dispositions. Adam must have had an original God-given endowment of virtue—that is, original righteousness. How could he otherwise have been righteous? So Adam's sin of taking the fruit must have occurred in the life of a man who was "perfectly righ-

<sup>12</sup> Note, in this connection, Edwards's interesting remarks on "human nature" and "mankind" (231-232).

teous, righteous from the first moment of his existence; and consequently, created or brought into existence righteous”<sup>13</sup> (228). More generally:

Human nature must be created with some dispositions; a disposition to relish some things as good or amiable, and to be averse to other things as odious and disagreeable. Otherwise, it must be without any such thing as inclination or will. It must be perfectly indifferent, without preference, without choice or aversion towards anything, as agreeable or disagreeable. (231)

This, Edwards thinks, is borne out by the Genesis narrative. Until Adam sinned, he was both happy and good. Had he been left alone, without virtue, in a position of neutrality, then (as Edwards puts it) “the curse was before the fall” (233). The Garden would not have been prepared as a fit environment for a virtuous man but would have acted as bait to lure the morally “neutral” Adam into sin. Edwards’s concern to protect God from the charge that he is the author of sin surfaces once again.

Section 2 discusses the “eternal death” with which Adam was threatened. Section 3 takes us to the heart of Edwards’s treatment, for here he considers whether what Genesis teaches implies that Adam was not to be considered a mere individual but was the “first father . . . of mankind in general” (245). He maintains that the language of Genesis 1—3 is replete with references to Adam as “father,” father of the race. Taylor had claimed that the threat to Adam was of “mere” mortality as an individual (246). Some of Edwards’s reasoning here is weak, as he himself seems to acknowledge, as when he rather lamely states (251) that the sentence to Adam (“unto dust thou shalt return,” KJV) includes his posterity, “as is confessed on all hands.” But of course Taylor himself was not willing to confess this. Is not Edwards trying to get out of these passages more than is in them? For a corporate view of Adam, would he not have been better simply to rely on Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15?

<sup>13</sup> It is instructive to compare this with John Calvin’s description of unfallen Adam as “weak, frail and liable to fall.” *A Defence of the Secret Providence of God*, trans. Henry Cole, in *Calvin’s Calvinism* (London: Sovereign Grace Union, 1927), 274. Compare *Institutes* I.15.8.

## 2. *Romans 5:12ff.*

Edwards is certainly on stronger ground when he turns, in chapter 3 and especially chapter 4 of Part Two, to the New Testament, particularly (of course) to Romans 5:12 and the following verses. He holds strongly to the parallel between Adam and Christ (344ff.). For the present-day reader one drawback of Edwards's exposition is that it is a series of reactions to Taylor's views. For example, Taylor held that the death threatened to Adam was mere physical death. Edwards responds by arguing that Paul means by "death" here what he means by "death" throughout Romans. Taylor claims that the apostle merely taught that Adam was the first transgressor, while Edwards argues, surely correctly, that Paul has in view a much more "corporatist" view of the relation between Adam and his posterity and insists strongly on the parallel between Adam as the head of the race and Christ as the head of the church. In his interpretation of Paul's words in Romans 5, Edwards is particularly strong in his emphasis on what he calls the "causal particles." When Paul says that it is "*through* the offense of one," "*by* one that sinned," "*by* one man's offense," "*by* the offense of one" (KJV), these expressions "signify some connection and dependence, by some sort of influence of that sin of one man, or some tendency to that effect which is so often said to come *by* it" (310). The expressions call for some explanation, which Taylor purposely evades.

Throughout this discussion it is Edwards's aim to counter Taylor's individualistic interpretation of the fall of Adam with one that stresses the solidarity of the race in Adam. In my view this is one of the strongest parts of Edwards's overall case in OS.

So Edwards holds that Scripture teaches that there is solidarity between Adam and the human race, so that when Adam—created, as Edwards claims, in original righteousness (223)—fell, he sinned not simply as an individual, setting a bad example for the race, nor was the effect of his sin simply to infect his progeny with sin, as a person may infect her unborn child with HIV, but in sinning Adam was punished and the race was punished because in some sense the race was "in" Adam. In so saying Edwards is simply echoing the teaching of the church, and particularly that of the Augustinian tradition that he inherited through the Puritans. For the Christian church has always held and explicitly taught since the time of St. Augustine (who drew on what Paul wrote in Romans 5) that when infants are born, they do not arrive holding a posi-

tion of ethical or spiritual neutrality.<sup>14</sup> Rather they are born as children of Adam, sinning because Adam sinned and also bearing the guilt that Adam bore through his disobedience to the Lord when placed in the Garden of Eden. And they are innately sinful and guilty because they fell “in” Adam.

Edwards lived in a strongly individualistic century (as he came increasingly to see and to deplore). Both socially and morally, emphasis was placed on the individual person, on his powers to accept or reject God’s grace and in these ways to possess the power to distance himself from God. So there came to be less and less recognition of original sin and of the corporate view of the human race that it implied. As we have seen, Edwards argued that boys and girls did not become sinful by the actions of their parents. (This, after all, evaded the question of why their parents behaved in that way.) Rather, sinful actions occur because of what happened to the race when Adam fell. Adam’s “first disobedience” had an effect not only upon Adam, but also upon all who were “in” Adam, as Paul put it. He “brought death into the world and all our woe.”<sup>15</sup> That is, when boys and girls knowingly do wrong things, from wrong motives, they do so not only or simply on their own account but because they are in some way implicated in Adam’s first sin.

How are they implicated? Not simply because they are the biological offspring of Adam and so inherit his bad character. (For no one holds that Scripture teaches that the Fall resulted in a genetic change in Adam.) Rather, they are implicated because they are “in” Adam not merely in a biological sense, Adam being their first father, but in a more immediate and direct sense. Adam was not simply their first father, bearing a more distant but essentially similar position to their father and grandfather, but he was a unique figure. He was the head of the race. Evidence of this is provided by the fact that although Eve was the first person to sin, according to Paul it is “in Adam” that “all die” (1 Cor. 15:22).

How is the headship of Adam to be understood? Edwards was faced

<sup>14</sup> Augustine’s views can be found, for example, in his work *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*. “All then sinned in Adam, when in his nature, by virtue of that innate power whereby he was able to produce them, they were all as yet the one Adam” (3:14) (St. Augustine, *Writings Against the Pelagians*, in *Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff [reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971], 5:74). It was Augustine who first coined the expression *original sin*. For a sympathetic account of Augustine and a defense of his view, see W. G. T. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872), 2:77ff.

<sup>15</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book i, line 1.

with two competing accounts. One, going back to Augustine, laid stress on the oneness of the human race in its first father Adam. He encapsulated the race. When he was created, the race was created, and so all the subsequent members of the race, including you and me, were “in” him. Just as, according to the letter to the Hebrews, Levi was in the loins of his father Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:9), and so in effect he himself paid those tithes, so we were all in the loins of our father Adam and so were one with Adam. This was because Adam was not just an individual person but was in himself the whole race in essence. Put rather more drastically, on this view you and I were Adam, and so in virtue of that oneness with him, when he sinned we sinned because there is an inescapable unity between Adam and the race of which he was the first father.

On this view it does not matter that we do not think or feel or remember that we were in or with Adam. The idea of the solidarity of the race in Adam is not propounded as a social or psychological theory but as a metaphysical reality, as that reality which was at the first constituted by God.<sup>16</sup> This is the so-called *realist interpretation* of the Fall, championed by Augustine, by Anselm, by some of the Reformers and Puritans, by one or two moderns since (notably W. G. T. Shedd<sup>17</sup> and A. H. Strong<sup>18</sup>), but not, as we shall see, by Jonathan Edwards himself.

The alternative view, which came into prominence with the rise of Reformed theology, and especially of the so-called Federal or Covenant theology, sees the relation between Adam and the race not as a real one (the race being in Adam and acting in him and so, with him, responsible for what he did) but as a *representative relation*. Adam is viewed as an individual just as you and I are individuals, but (as it happens) he was the first individual. And he was appointed by the Lord to be the representative of each member of the race, just as a Member of Parliament is taken to represent his constituents, even those constituents who have not voted for him in a General Election. Adam represents the race not because it is in his very nature to do so (the realist view), but because he was given this representative role by his Lord. So when he sinned, he did

<sup>16</sup> So it is not a case of the shame that a son may feel at the actions of his father and may “take responsibility” for them, nor of “corporate responsibility” in the sense in which a firm can be held accountable for the actions of its officials.

<sup>17</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (1881; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1969), 2:42-44.

<sup>18</sup> A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), Part V, Section V.

so not only as an individual but also on behalf of those whom he represented; and when he fell, they fell too, in virtue of that representative arrangement.

I think it is fair to say that Edwards also rejected or repudiated this view.<sup>19</sup> So what position did he take? In order to find an answer to this question we must turn to Part Four of OS, where he considers objections to the doctrine of original sin. Here we find what many have regarded as Edwards's innovations.

### EDWARDS'S INNOVATIONS

Edwards's distinctive position is drawn out in answer to objections (381ff.). We shall consider two of these answers.

#### 1. *The Occurrence of the First Sin*

Here Edwards's concern is dominated by the charge to which (as we have already noted) he seems especially sensitive, that the orthodox view of original sin makes God the author of sin. We have already seen how he approaches this question of Adam's first sin by stressing its "transience." Sin did not arise from a "settled principle," since Adam was created good.

In creating Adam, God not only made him a man but endowed him with virtue.

The case with man was plainly this: when God made man at first, he implanted in him two kinds of principles. There was an *inferior* kind, which may be called *natural*, being the principles of mere human nature; such as self-love, with those natural appetites and passions, which belong to the nature of man, in which his love to his own liberty, honor and pleasure, were exercised: these when alone, and left to themselves, are what the Scriptures sometimes call *flesh*. Besides these, there were *superior* principles, that were spiritual, holy and divine, summarily comprehended in divine love; wherein consisted the spiritual image of God, and man's righteousness and true holiness; which are called in Scripture the *divine nature*. These principles may, in some sense, be called *supernatural*, being (however concreated or connate),<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> References by Edwards to "federal heads" (e.g., 259-260) must not mislead us into thinking otherwise. The expression as used here simply refers to the covenant role of Adam and by itself has no implications for the relation of Adam to his posterity.

<sup>20</sup> That is, given at birth, though not strictly speaking an essential part of human nature.

yet) such as are above those principles that are essentially implied in, or necessarily resulting from, and inseparably connected with, *mere human nature*. (381-382)<sup>21</sup>

For Edwards, a person could be essentially a human being, lack the Holy Spirit, and so not possess the image of God. Holiness and true righteousness, the image of God, are not part of man's essential nature. Adam was "naturally" a "mere" man, he had all the properties of human nature, but he was, in addition, "supernaturally" a virtuous person, because of this original endowment of righteousness and true holiness (381-382). But when he sinned, his supernatural endowment was (penally) removed, and he reverted to "natural" manhood, a prey to selfish desires, etc. Edwards sees the answer to the charge that original sin makes God the author of sin to lie in this "two tier" view of Adam's original condition. Mankind's nature would (were it to be left to its own resources) inevitably be corrupted by becoming selfish and God-defying. But the "supernatural" influences with which the pre-Fall pair were endowed (the image of God in them) preserved them in holiness. These superior principles were removed (by divine judgment) when man sinned.

These divine principles thus reigning, were the dignity, life, happiness, and glory of man's nature. When man sinned, and broke God's Covenant, and fell under his curse, these superior principles left his heart: for indeed God then left him; that communion with God, on which these principles depended, entirely ceased; the Holy Spirit, that divine inhabitant, forsook his house. (382)<sup>22</sup>

As a consequence, left to his own unsupported nature, the course of man's life immediately became sinful, a condition that was both natural (i.e., universal, and a consequence of the possession of human nature) and penal (386). As a result, so Edwards concludes, God is not the author of sin even though he is responsible for continuing the sinful race in being after the Fall (387). God permits sin by withdrawing the super-

<sup>21</sup> Holding these views, it becomes easier to see how Edwards could retain confidence in fallen human reason. For the Fall was for him essentially moral and spiritual. From what he says, it seems that human reason escapes fairly unscathed. This also has a bearing on his distinction between "moral" and "natural" ability and inability in *Freedom of the Will*.

<sup>22</sup> Does Edwards believe that the Holy Spirit left the house *after* the sin of Adam or *before* it? His language in the passage just quoted seems deliberately to avoid answering this question.



natural virtues; he does not positively cause Adam to sin; and so he is not the author of Adam's sin, and so not the author of sin. Edwards claims that since in other theological systems (such as Taylor's) God permits Adam's sin, his own system is in no worse case than theirs.

Whether or not this argument of Edwards in fact succeeded in rebutting Taylor's charge about the divine authorship of sin, it leaves him with a major problem. It is hard to see how he could have been satisfied with this theory or have been confident that it would convince opponents such as Taylor that God is not the author of sin. For either mankind sinned while still in possession of these supernatural principles, with all the virtuous influence they afforded, in which case it is hard to make the occurrence of the Fall plausible, or alternatively, if the Fall could occur while Adam had such principles and was under their influence, then they were hardly "supernatural" in the sense that Edwards intends, for they did not succeed in preserving him. In any case, Edwards is stuck with his earlier claim that the first sin was "transient." How, if it was transient, did it arise in the mind and heart of a person endowed with supernatural virtue so as to turn him from the path of obedience? John Gerstner avers that since in Edwards's view this supernatural addition was none other than the Holy Spirit himself—the presence of whom must keep man from falling, and whose influence could not be overpowered by a mere human decision, since Adam in fact fell—"this divine super-added 'gift' must have been a mere offer."<sup>23</sup> But this is pure surmise. Edwards does not say it is an offer, and the powerful language he uses regarding the actual presence of the Spirit strongly suggests otherwise.

If at this point Edwards were to stress the transience of the first sin (which he does not) and also to stress that Adam was created in such a condition as to turn his back on these supernatural principles, so making the Fall certain, then it is hard to see how this arrangement safeguards God from being the author of sin. Either way, Edwards has done little by this innovation to cast light on the mystery of the entrance of sin into a world made good by God.<sup>24</sup>

Whether or not Edwards's theory could account for the Fall, or at least be seen to be consistent with it, it does have one advantage. It offers

<sup>23</sup> John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Powhatan, Va.: Berean/Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier, 1992), 2:273.

<sup>24</sup> As Clyde Holbrook notes, Edwards's account leaves him "mired in difficulty" (51), and John Gerstner refers to his inability to extricate himself "from the pit he has dug" (*The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:314).

an account of how it is that fallen, humankind possesses a settled disposition to do evil. That disposition immediately arises from the dominant effects of the “lower” nature that asserts itself in wicked ways once the supernatural virtues have departed.

## 2. *The One-ness of the Race in Adam*<sup>25</sup>

We need now to give more detailed attention to the account that Edwards provided of the oneness of the race in Adam. It was suggested earlier that he was not satisfied either with the “realist” Augustinian position on the relation of Adam to his posterity, nor with the “representative” view beloved of classical Covenant theology. So what was his own view?

As a result of his deep conviction about the immediate dependence of the creation upon the Creator, Edwards developed a unique account of the relation between Adam and his progeny as part of his overall defense of the reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of original sin in Part Four of OS. In chapter 3 of this Part he offers what can best be described as a daring (if not rather rash) metaphysical excursus in an attempt to answer “that great objection against the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity . . . that such imputation is unjust and unreasonable, inasmuch as Adam and his posterity are not one and the same” (389). How, if Adam is distinct from his progeny, can it be fair to impute his sin and its consequences to them? It is at this point that Edwards appeals to the philosophy of John Locke. Edwards was a lifelong devotee of Locke’s philosophy, but no doubt he hoped that by citing Locke here he was appealing to an authority whom Taylor respected.

He replies to the objection by offering a “metaphysical” explanation of the nature of things, including their identity through time. According to this alternative, rather radical explanation, there is no such thing as strict or numerical identity through time. I am no more nor less strictly identical to Adam than I am to an earlier phase of myself. For both Adam and I are dependent things, and such unity as I have with an earlier phase of myself, or with Adam, is a unity constituted solely by the will of God.

<sup>25</sup> Some of the material in this section is adapted from “A Forensic Dilemma: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Personal Identity,” in *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Aldershot, Hants/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 45–49.

A father, according to the course of nature, begets a child; an oak, according to the course of nature, produces an acorn, or a bud; so according to the course of nature, the former existence of the trunk of the tree is followed by its new or present existence. In the one case, and the other, the new effect is consequent on the former, only by the established laws, and settled course of nature; which is allowed to be nothing but the continued immediate efficiency of God, according to a constitution that he has been pleased to establish. (401)

A thing's "new and present existence" is therefore an existence that is numerically distinct from its immediate past existence. Nothing can exist for more than a moment; the fact that nature, the temporally continuous order of things, is as orderly as it is, is due solely to the wisdom and power of God, not to the inherent natures of things that he has created. Not only was I (i.e., the present "me") not around when Adam existed, I was not around yesterday or a moment ago. So if I'm to be held responsible for some of what went on yesterday (as seems reasonable), why may I not also be implicated in what Adam did?

It is in connection with this defense of the reasonableness of the doctrine of original sin that Edwards utilizes what Locke had written on identity in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He begins by adopting a Lockean approach to what he calls sameness or oneness among created things, as for example, in the following:

A tree, grown great, and an hundred years old, is one plant with the little sprout, that first came out of the ground, from whence it grew, and has been continued in constant succession; though it is now so exceeding diverse, many thousand times bigger, and of a very different form, and perhaps not one atom the very same. . . . So the body of man at forty years of age, is one with the infant body which first came into the world, from whence it grew; though now constituted of different substance, and the greater part of the substance probably changed scores (if not hundreds) of times. . . .

And if we come even to the *personal identity* of created intelligent beings, though this be not allowed to consist wholly in that which Mr. Locke supposes, i.e. *same consciousness*; yet I think it can't be denied, that this is one thing essential to it. (397-398)

Turning from plants to people, Edwards starts with the Lockean

account of personal identity through time, according to which same consciousness is necessary for personal identity. That is, persisting personal identity requires having the same enduring consciousness. But this cannot be the whole story for Edwards because it is obvious that you and I do not have the same consciousness that Adam had. As we shall shortly see, although he followed Locke in general, Edwards understands this sameness in a rather different way from Locke. For it is here that Edwards's idea of creaturely dependence upon God, mentioned earlier, comes to play a crucial role in his argument.

Both in his account of plants and of people Locke had argued that their identity through time consists in a succession of overlapping parts, generated by the growth of a plant or (in the case of people) by temporally continuous mental organization, memories, trains of thought, and the like. From this it is a short step—but perhaps for Edwards a fatal step—to argue that (since, as he believed, nothing exists for more than a moment) identity is a succession of *non*-overlapping parts, a view particularly attractive to him given his strong view of creaturely dependence. Since according to Edwards nothing creaturely can exist for more than a moment, nothing can overlap or be overlapped. However, according to Edwards a succession of momentary parts, qualitatively similar in important respects, is treated both by ourselves and (more importantly) by God as if it were numerically one thing. That's all the identity through time that there is and can be.

Edwards was concerned to stress, against the deists, for whom God's power was mediated through the law-like dispositions given to created things, that God's power was *immediately* exercised upon his creation, on all aspects of it equally. Here is Edwards in full cry against Deism:

That God does, by his immediate power, *uphold* every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider, that their present existence is a *dependent* existence, and therefore is an *effect*, and must have some *cause*: and the cause must be one of these two: either the *antecedent existence* of the same substance, or else the *power of the Creator*. But it can't be the antecedent existence of the same substance. For instance, the existence of the body of the moon at this present moment, can't be the effect of its existence at the last foregoing moment. For not only was what existed the last moment, no active cause, but

wholly a passive thing; but this also is to be considered, that no cause can produce effects in a *time* and *place* in which itself is *not*. . . . From these things, I suppose, it will certainly follow, that the present existence, either of this, or any other created substance, cannot be an effect of its past existence. The existences (so to speak) of an effect, or thing dependent, in different parts of space or duration, though ever so *near* one to another, don't at all coexist one with the other; and therefore are as truly different effects, as if those parts of space and duration were ever so far asunder: and the prior existence can no more be the proper cause of the new existence, in the next moment, or next part of space, than if it had been in an age before, or at a thousand miles distance, without any existence to fill up the intermediate time or space. Therefore the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of God.

. . . God's *preserving* created things in being is perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence. If the continued existence of created things be wholly dependent on God's preservation, then those things would drop into nothing, upon the ceasing of the present moment, without a new exertion of the divine power to cause them to exist in the following moment. (400-402)

So God can constitute the race as one individual, extended through time and space by his re-creating, upholding power.<sup>26</sup> Adam is not a representative of the rest of us. But nor was Augustine correct in surmising that the race is "seminally" present in Adam and so one in him. According to Augustine the oneness of the race in Adam arises from the nature of things. But for Edwards the unity in question does not come from the nature of things but is one arranged by God, by his "arbitrary constitution."<sup>27</sup>

There has been some difference of opinion regarding Edwards and what he thought was the relation of Adam's sin to the sins of his posterity. The main line of Reformed theologians have favored a doctrine of immediate imputation: that in view of the representative relation with which Adam stood to his posterity, the guilt of his first sin was imme-

<sup>26</sup> It is because of his emphasis on the progression of the race through time that Edwards's view of the unity of the race does not commit him either to the view that each of us is strictly identical with each other, nor that our sin is imputed to Adam.

<sup>27</sup> As Shedd notes, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:32. Nevertheless Shedd held that Edwards's view tends to that of Augustine (80).

diately imputed to them. It was reckoned to them, and they were judged guilty because of it. But others have favored a less direct view of imputation—namely, that the posterity of Adam is judged guilty, not on account of Adam’s sin, but on account of the sinfulness that they have inherited through Adam. This is a derived imputation, so-called mediate imputation.

Some, such as Charles Hodge,<sup>28</sup> have reckoned that from some of the things that Edwards says in OS he must have favored mediate imputation. For instance, from these words:

Therefore I am humbly of opinion, that if any have supposed the children of Adam to come into the world with a *double guilt*, one the guilt of Adam’s sin, another the guilt arising from their having a corrupt heart, they have not well conceived of the matter. The guilt a man has upon his soul at his first existence, is one and simple: viz. the guilt of the original apostacy, the guilt of the sin by which the species first rebelled against God. This, and the guilt arising from the first corruption or depraved disposition of the heart, are not to be looked upon as two things, distinctly imputed and charged upon men in the sight of God. Indeed the guilt, that arises from the corruption of the heart, as it remains a confirmed principle, and appears in its consequent operations, is a distinct and additional guilt: but the guilt arising from the first existing of a depraved disposition in Adam’s posterity, I apprehend, is not distinct from their guilt of Adam’s first sin. (390)

Others, such as B. B. Warfield<sup>29</sup> and John Murray,<sup>30</sup> have believed, on the basis of other evidence from OS, that Edwards was in the Reformed mainstream, favoring immediate imputation.

But this difference of opinion and the way in which some theologians have tried to resolve it, by paying detailed attention to certain phrases that Edwards uses,<sup>31</sup> is based upon a somewhat odd procedure. For given Edwards’s unique position on the unity of the race, on God’s reckoning the myriad members of the human race to be one with Adam, it should be clear that he must be committed to the strictest form of immediate imputation, since according to Edwards you and I and every-

<sup>28</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1871), 2:207ff.

<sup>29</sup> B. B. Warfield, “Edwards and the New England Theology,” in *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 530.

<sup>30</sup> John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1959), 56ff.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 57ff.

one else are each constituted one with Adam. And so his guilt must be ours. Indeed "immediate imputation" is perhaps too *weak* an expression to convey Edwards's view accurately. For according to him there is no question of guilt being reckoned from one person (Adam) to another (for example, to you and me) since we are each one with Adam. We are one with him and so are guilty of his sin, since his sin is our sin. As B. B. Warfield put it, since Edwards thinks that "all mankind are one as truly as and by the same kind of divine constitution that an individual life is one in its consecutive moments," Adam and his posterity are one "in the strictest sense" possible in the case of things that persist through time, a sense in which that unity is conferred by God's arbitrary will.<sup>32</sup>

It ought to be borne in mind that on Edwards's view, though each of us is constituted one with Adam, God has not in the same sense constituted us one with each other, with either our progenitors or our contemporaries. This is because we can be constituted one with Adam in a way in which we cannot with each other, not even with our own parents. They bear exactly the same relation to Adam as we do. They are constituted one with Adam, as we are, but we are not constituted one with each other. Nor, though we are one with Adam, is our guilt imputed to him. Why is this? The short answer is: because of the arbitrary constitution of God. A longer answer may be: because Adam is the original phase of the human race, and we are later phases, like later branches from the original stock of a tree. So any later phase is related in the same fundamental way to the original phase. And all the arrangements that we have just mentioned are constituted so by a supremely wise fiat. Despite our earlier claim that Edwards distanced himself from the Augustinian view of Adam's relation to his posterity, perhaps the rather selective way in which, according to Edwards, divine wisdom has chosen to configure the unity of the race suggests a vestigial attraction to that position. Or is Edwards simply making an appeal to the arbitrary will of God at each such point? It is not easy to tell.

Edwards's view of personal identity through time and of the unity and identity of the race through time is undoubtedly extravagant. His idea that each thing exists only for a moment seems bizarre, to say the

<sup>32</sup> Warfield, "Edwards and the New England Theology," 530. See also Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:328 ("It is not a doctrine of imputation, mediate or immediate"), and especially Oliver Crisp, "On the Theological Pedigree of Jonathan Edwards' Doctrine of Imputation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003):1-20.

least, though it would be wrong to deduce from this doctrine alone that Edwards thought that God is the only true cause in the entire universe. Presumably even things that exist for a moment may exercise their causal powers for that moment. Yet Edwards has one charming (if rather long-winded) aside that suggests that he thinks of his remarks on the oneness of the race more as a hypothesis than as a settled truth. He says:

On the whole, if any don't like the philosophy, or the metaphysics (as some perhaps may choose to call it) made use of in the foregoing reasonings; yet I cannot doubt, but that a proper consideration of what is apparent and undeniable in fact, with respect to the dependence of the state and course of things in this universe on the sovereign constitution of the supreme Author and Lord of all, "who gives none account of any of his matters, and whose ways are past finding out," will be sufficient, with persons of common modesty and sobriety, to stop their mouths from making peremptory decisions against the justice of God, respecting what is so plainly and fully taught in his Holy Word, concerning the derivation of a depravity and guilt from Adam to his posterity; a thing so abundantly confirmed by what is found in the experience of all mankind in all ages. (409)

In other words, if you object to Edwards's philosophical reasoning here, and if you are a sufficiently modest and sober person, you will be content to take refuge in the sovereignty of God. We can be sure that this sentiment, while perfectly consistent with Edwards's own theological outlook, would hardly have satisfied Taylor of Norwich! Unless Taylor favors Edwards's "metaphysics," then this response to his objections will hardly convince him.

#### SUMMING UP

We have seen that Edwards presents the case for the "great Christian doctrine" of original sin by drawing on the evidence from experience (including that provided by Bible history), from the biblical teaching about the human race's relation to Adam, and from the weakness of many of the arguments of opponents of the doctrine. These strands of inquiry, when drawn together, combine to provide a powerful cumulative case for the solidarity of the race in the sin of Adam and of their guiltiness in him.



The Christian doctrine of original sin, and Edwards's defense of it, invites us to think of human sin in a way that cuts across much contemporary Christianity where the focus is on the individual, not on the human race, and where sin, in order to be sin, must be consciously identified as such by the sinner. But on Paul's or Augustine's or Edwards's view, sin is race-deep, arising in historical circumstances different from our own, from Adam with whom we are "one." Human wickedness arises from depths that are beyond conscious awareness. For such human wickedness there is no natural cure—certainly not from efforts made to repent and reform of conscious sin—but only a God-given cure through union with the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

We have also seen that for Edwards the writing of OS in the trying and testing circumstances of Stockbridge in the 1750s was not an academic exercise. He was engaged in sustained polemic against the individualistic and moralistic interpretation of the gospel propounded by John Taylor and others, whose writings in his view embodied the worst features revealed in the dawning of a new age. In this situation Edwards was faced with a classic dilemma. He could simply restate the doctrine of original sin in a formulaic way, or he could attempt to take the argument into the enemy's territory by offering arguments that are intended to convince him of the truth of this "great Christian doctrine."

Being both a creative and courageous person Edwards inevitably chose the latter strategy, the one adopted by all the great apologists of the Church from Athanasius onwards. It is the program of faith seeking understanding, of endeavoring to gain a better grasp of revealed truth by drawing out the "good and necessary" consequences of Scripture in the light of some opposed view or other, often by using the language of the opposition, and doing so in the heat of argument.<sup>33</sup> This project has proved invaluable in the development of theological understanding across the centuries. But it has its dangers, especially when it is practiced, as Edwards practiced it, in an "age of reason." The danger is that the taunts of the opposers will tempt the defender of the faith not only to express and epitomize the teaching of Scripture in language familiar to the opposition, but to be seduced into thinking that it is the job of the Christian theologian to offer explanations of biblical doctrine like a sci-

---

<sup>33</sup> For further discussion, see Paul Helm, *Faith and Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1997).

entist offering an explanation of experimental data or like a detective clearing up a crime.

There is reason to think that Edwards did not altogether escape this danger. It seems that by his extravagant idea of the unity and identity of the human race through time, as well as his distinctions between transient and abiding principles of human character, and between natural and supernatural features of human nature, he endeavored to offer explanations of deeply mysterious features of the human condition: the solidarity of the human race in sin and the entrance of sin into a world created good by God. I think that he thought he could lessen the mystery.

There is a fine line to be drawn between true theological creativity and theological rationalism. Such was his concern to safeguard the deposit of the faith against its detractors that Edwards stretched his great intellectual gifts almost to the breaking point, but his failure to provide an increased understanding of these aspects of the faith serves only to underline their deeply mysterious character. The faith is mysterious at such points not because it is intrinsically incoherent or paradoxical, but because a comprehensive understanding of it is beyond the grasp of finite minds. In Jonathan Edwards's endeavor to push theological understanding to the limits, and perhaps beyond the limits, there are, as in other aspects of his life, both heroic and tragic features.<sup>34</sup>

#### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Crisp, Oliver D. *The Metaphysics of Sin*. Aldershot, Hants/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, forthcoming.

A book-length treatment of Edwards's understanding of sin.

Gerstner, John. *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. 3 vols. Powhatan, Va.: Berean/Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier, 1992.

A massive and massively sympathetic treatment of Edwards's theology.

Helm, Paul. *Faith and Understanding*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

A discussion of the place of reason in the development of theologi-

<sup>34</sup> Thanks are due to Oliver Crisp for his helpful comments on an earlier draft.

cal understanding. It contains a number of “case studies,” including one on Edwards’s views of personal identity.

— —. “A Forensic Dilemma: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Personal Identity.” In *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, edited by Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp, 45-49. Aldershot, Hants/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003.

A comparison between the views of John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on personal identity and personal responsibility.

McDermott, Gerald. *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Valuable particularly for its treatment of Edwards’s relation to Deism.

Quinn, Philip. “Disputing the Augustinian Legacy: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Romans 5:12-19.” In *The Augustinian Tradition*, edited by Gareth B. Matthews, 233-250. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999.

An interesting comparison between Locke’s and Edwards’s understanding of the Pauline parallel between Adam and Christ.

Storms, Sam. “Is Imputation Unjust? Jonathan Edwards on the Problem of Original Sin.” *Reformation & Revival Journal* 12 (Summer 2003): 61-69.

A short, punchy account of Edwards’s view treading much of the ground of the present essay.

Warfield, B. B. “Edwards and the New England Theology.” In *Studies in Theology*, 515-538. New York: Oxford University Press, 1931.

An invaluable brief introduction to Edwards’s theological thought and its immediate influence in New England.

# THE WILL: FETTERED YET FREE (*FREEDOM OF THE WILL*)

*Sam Storms*

Jonathan Edwards was right. If the concept of libertarian freedom can be established, Calvinist theologians (he called them “reformed divines”) will have lost all hope of defending their view of “original sin, the sovereignty of grace, election, redemption, conversion, the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, the nature of saving faith, perseverance of the saints, and other principles of . . . like kind.”<sup>1</sup>

To understand “libertarian” freedom and the threat it poses to evangelical orthodoxy, we must look closely at the title to Edwards’s treatise. *Freedom of the Will* is merely shorthand for the more cumbersome, *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of the Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*.<sup>2</sup> Edwards’s purpose was clearly to address a “prevailing” concept of human freedom that was thought to be foundational to moral accountability. Stephen Holmes is correct in reminding us that “Edwards’ fundamental question in this book is ethical: what conditions must obtain for an action to be worthy of praise or blame? . . . He is concerned to establish those things that must be the case concerning human decision for such decision to be meaningfully analyzable ethically.”<sup>3</sup> In other

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 376.

<sup>2</sup> All citations from Edwards’s treatise will be from *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973 [fourth printing]), originally published in 1957 as the first in the projected twenty-seven-volume edition of Edwards’s works, and hereafter cited within the text by page number only. Edwards began the actual drafting of the treatise in August 1752; it was ready for publication in 1753. This is somewhat misleading, however, in that Edwards had written extensively on the will in the *Miscellanies*, his private theological notebook, beginning as early as 1723.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, “Strange Voices: Edwards on the Will,” in *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002), 87-88.

words, it is “that freedom of the will which is supposed to be essential to moral agency,” i.e., libertarian freedom, against which Edwards launches his considerable theological and philosophical skills.<sup>4</sup>

Sad to say, though, notwithstanding Edwards’s efforts, the understanding of human freedom that he “sought to stop in its tracks is now so pervasive as to be axiomatic everywhere except amongst philosophers, who are aware there is an argument to be had, and those theologians who are prepared to risk incomprehension and dismissal as anachronistic by daring to mention such offensive (but traditional) notions as predestination, special providence and the sovereignty of God.”<sup>5</sup> I have made a similar point in an article that addresses the use of libertarian freedom among so-called contemporary “open theists.”<sup>6</sup> Clark Pinnock is representative of the latter and defines libertarian freedom or the power of contrary choice as follows:

What I call “real freedom” is also called libertarian or contra-causal freedom. It views a free action as one in which a person is free to perform an action or refrain from performing it and is not completely determined in the matter by prior forces—nature, nurture or even God. Libertarian freedom recognizes the power of contrary choice. One acts freely in a situation if, and only if, one could have done otherwise. Free choices are choices that are not causally determined by conditions preceding them. It is the freedom of self-determination, in which the various motives and influences informing the choice are not the sufficient cause of the choice itself. The person makes the choice in a self-determined way. A person has options and there are different factors influencing us in deciding among them but the decision one takes involves making one of the reasons one’s own, which is anything but random.<sup>7</sup>

My purpose in this essay is threefold. First, I will briefly unpack Edwards’s devastating critique of libertarianism,<sup>8</sup> one that I am con-

<sup>4</sup> One cannot help but think of Paul Ramsey’s comment in his editorial introduction to the volume on freedom of will: “This book alone is sufficient to establish its author as the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene” (2).

<sup>5</sup> Holmes, “Strange Voices,” 88.

<sup>6</sup> C. Samuel Storms, “Prayer and the Power of Contrary Choice: Who Can and Cannot Pray for God to Save the Lost?” *Reformation & Revival Journal* 12 (Spring 2003): 53-67.

<sup>7</sup> Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2001), 127.

<sup>8</sup> For a more extensive interaction with Edwards’s arguments against libertarianism, see my *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 176-206.

vinced has yet to be successfully refuted. Second, I will reconstruct Edwards's concept of the will. Although some have found it to be intolerably complex,<sup>9</sup> it is actually quite simple and forthright once one grasps the meaning of several important terms he employs. Third, and finally, I want to address the most problematic element in Edwards's theology of the will—the fall of Adam and the entrance of evil into the human race. For all the biblical cogency of his concept of the will, Edwards argues himself into a philosophical predicament that gives all the appearance, his protests notwithstanding, of making God the author of sin. More on this below.

### EDWARDS AND LIBERTARIANISM

The libertarians<sup>10</sup> whom Edwards encountered insisted that the will must exercise a certain sovereignty over itself whereby it determines or causes itself to act and choose. Whereas the will may be influenced by antecedent impulses or desires, it always retains an independent power to choose contrary to them. The will is free from any necessary causal connection to anything antecedent to the moment of choice.

Edwards finds this argument both incoherent and subject to an infinite regress. He points out that for the will to determine itself is for the will to act. Thus the act of will whereby it determines a subsequent act must itself be determined by a preceding act of will or the will cannot properly be said to be *self*-determined. If libertarianism is to be maintained, every act of will that determines a consequent act is itself preceded by an act of will, and so on until one comes to a *first* act of will. But if this first act is determined by a preceding one, it is not itself the first act. If, on the other hand, this act is *not* determined by a previous act, it cannot be free since it is not *self*-determined. If the first act of voli-

<sup>9</sup> Conrad Wright ("Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," *Harvard Theological Review* 35 [October 1942]) contends that "whatever else its publication may have done, it produced a state of incredible intellectual confusion. Edwards's followers part of the time did not understand him; his opponents often found themselves in a maze of contradictions; and the historian is fortunate if he can finish a reading of the documents with a confident understanding of the arguments and a clear picture of the real issues involved" (241). Mark Twain called Edwards's treatise an "insane debauch" marked by "the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad" (*Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. A. B. Paine, 2 vols. [New York, 1917], 2:719-720, as cited in Henry F. May, "Jonathan Edwards and America," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 23).

<sup>10</sup> Those whom Edwards chose as representative of the libertarian position were Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), an Anglican divine; Thomas Chubb (1679-1747), a deist; and Isaac Watts (1674-1748), a hymn-writer who more closely approached Edwards's general theological position than the other two.

tion is not itself determined by a preceding act of will, that so-called first act is not determined by the will and is thus not free.

Edwards's point is that if the will chooses its choice or determines its own acts, it must be supposed to choose to choose this choice, and before that it would have to choose to choose to choose that choice, and so on *ad infinitum*. Therefore, the concept of freedom as self-determination either contradicts itself by positing an unchosen (i.e., non-self-determined) choice or shuts itself wholly out of the world by an infinite regress.

To avoid this conundrum, some libertarians argue that acts of will come to pass of themselves without any cause of any sort. They simply happen, spontaneously and inexplicably. But nothing is causeless, except the uncaused First Cause, God. To argue for volitional spontaneity would render all human choice random and haphazard, with no reason, intent, or motive accounting for its existence. If human acts of will are not causally tethered to human character, on what grounds does one establish their ethical value? How may one be blamed or praised for an act of will in the causation of which neither he nor anything else had a part? Furthermore, how can one explain a diversity of effects from a monolithic no-cause? If there is no ground or cause for the existence of an effect, what accounts for the diversity of one effect from another? Why is an entity what it is and not otherwise if not because of the specific nature of the cause that produced it?

Yet another option for the libertarian is to argue that one chooses in the absence of a prevailing motive. The will chooses between two or more things that are allegedly perfectly equal as perceived by the mind. The will is altogether indifferent to either (or any) of the objects of choice, yet determines itself toward one without being moved by any preponderating inducement.

But this is to say that the will chooses something instead of another at the same time it is wholly indifferent to both. But to choose is, by definition, to prefer. Whatever is preferred thus exerts a preponderate influence on the will. How can the will *prefer* A over B unless A appears *preferable*? Says Edwards:

How ridiculous would it be for anybody to insist, that the soul chooses one thing before another, when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent with respect to each! This is the same thing as to say, the

soul prefers one thing to another, at the very same time that it has no preference. Choice and preference can no more be in a state of indifference, than motion can be in a state of rest, or than the preponderation of the scale of a balance can be in a state of equilibrium. (207)

How could a man be praised for preferring charity to stinginess, for example, if both deeds were equally preferable to him, or more accurately, lacking any preferability at all? Do we not praise a man for giving generously to the poor because we assume he is of such an antecedent character that such a deed appears more preferable to him than withholding his money? If there is nothing about the man that inclines him to prefer generosity, if the act of giving money is no more preferable to him than the act of withholding it, is he worthy of praise for giving?

Neither will it do to contend that freedom consists not in the act of the will itself but in a determining so to act. The operative sphere of freedom, on this suggestion, is simply removed one step farther back and is said to consist in causing or determining the change or transition from a state of indifference to a certain preference. "What is asserted," said Edwards, "is, that the will, while it yet remains in perfect equilibrium, without preference, determines to change itself from that state, and excite in itself a certain choice or preference" (208). But this determination of the will, supposedly indifferent, is open to the same objection noted above. Neither is it feasible to locate the sphere of freedom in a power to suspend the act of will and to keep it in indifference until there has been opportunity for proper deliberation. For is not the suspending of volition itself an *act* of volition, subject to the same strictures already stated? And if it is not an act of volition, how can liberty of will be present in it? I concur with Edwards that the idea of freedom consisting in indifference is "to the highest degree absurd and contradictory" (208).

Finally, Edwards's opponents would often assert that all acts of will are contingent events. They are not in any sense necessary. They could as easily not happen as happen. Nothing necessitates their occurrence. This argument is driven by the belief that if an event is necessary, it is morally vacuous. Only an act of will that could as easily have not occurred as occurred is an act worthy of the predicate "free" and subject to praise or blame. Edwards's response to this argument is multifaceted and beyond the scope of this essay. Be it noted that I have



elsewhere addressed his argument from divine foreknowledge and the necessity the latter imposes on all events.<sup>11</sup> But Edwards's most important response to the argument from contingency is found in the distinction he makes between *natural* necessity and *moral* necessity. More on this below.

#### EDWARDS ON AUTHENTIC FREEDOM

If all events, including acts of will, have a cause or are determined by something, what is it that determines the will? Edwards argues that "it is that *motive*, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will" (141, emphasis mine). By motive Edwards means the whole of that which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing alone or several in conjunction. Motive is not itself desire, "but rather the totality of whatever awakens desire in us when apprehended."<sup>12</sup> Thus volition or choice is never contrary to the greatest apparent good. "The choice of the mind never departs from that which, at that time, and with respect to the direct and immediate objects of that decision of the mind, appears most agreeable and pleasing, all things considered."<sup>13</sup>

But if the choice of the mind, to use Edwards's terms, "never departs" from that motive that appears strongest, does not this impose a *necessity* on all acts of will? Yes, but it is a necessity that arises within and proceeds from the will, rather than one that is imposed from without and is contrary to it. The former Edwards calls "moral necessity" and the latter "natural necessity." I will return to this critical distinction momentarily.

If it is assumed that the will, to use Edwards's language, always is as the strongest motive, what is it that constitutes any supposed motive *to be* the strongest in the mind's eye? What is the cause of the state or condition of the mind that results in one motive being strong and another weak in the moment of perception? The answer to this question

<sup>11</sup> See my chapter "Open Theists in the Hands of an Angry Puritan: Jonathan Edwards on Divine Foreknowledge," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 114-130.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh J. McCann, "Edwards on Free Will," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Aldershot, Hants/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

leads us to Edwards's doctrine of constitutional depravity, or the doctrine of original sin.

Given a constitutional bias (i.e., inborn disposition or inclination) toward evil and unbelief, every motive that confronts the mind will appear good, agreeable, and strong only so far as it corresponds to (or tends to invite) an evil and vicious inclination. Likewise, every motive that has no strength or tendency to incite or induce an evil mind will be weak and hence ineffective to the will or any supposed consequent external action. Thus, given the reality of constitutional depravity, or a fixed bias of mind, only that which appears agreeable to that quality of mind will issue in external action, and every external action will simply be the effect of said bias. This is merely to say that Edwards's concept of the will is a function of his doctrine of original sin. Conrad Wright is surely correct in the following:

The whole controversy would have been vastly simplified if the Arminians had recognized clearly that Edwards' treatise was not wrong, but irrelevant [or perhaps a better word would be, secondary]. They should have dismissed the Freedom of the Will, and concentrated on the treatise on Original Sin which complemented it. Moral necessity without total depravity loses all its sting.<sup>14</sup>

I will return to this point in the last section of this essay.

In the above citation, Wright referred to *moral necessity*, an idea without which Edwards's concept of the will is incoherent. Moral necessity refers to "that necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from such *moral causes*, as the strength of inclination, or motives, and the connection which there is in many cases between these and such volitions and actions" (156). By way of contrast, *natural* necessity is that which "men are under through the force of natural causes" (156), such as physical compulsion or torture or threat of pain or lack of opportunity. The "moral causes" noted by Edwards are

<sup>14</sup> Conrad Wright, "Edwards and the Arminians on the Freedom of the Will," 252. See the discussion by Allen C. Guelzo in his *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 47-50, as well as his article, "The Return of the Will: Jonathan Edwards and the Possibilities of Free Will," in *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 87-110.

internal to the person choosing—a like or dislike; a moral imperative that is held in high esteem; a sense of some advantage to be gained by moving one way or the other. Natural causes are external—a gun held to my head or a locked prison door. . . . Edwards can insist that a free choice is one which is caused only by moral causes, a constrained choice [i.e., one lacking authentic freedom] is one caused, in part at least, by natural causes.<sup>15</sup>

If a person should choose evil in consequence of that necessity which is external to his will and imposed upon him by constraint of natural forces, he is absolved from moral responsibility. But if he behaves unlawfully because of a necessity that is *in* his will and consistent with it, he is surely to blame. Far from undermining moral accountability, this is foundational to it, for do we not highly praise that person whose compassion arises from a deep-seated disposition or propensity for the welfare of others, and do we not condemn that person whose cruelty is the fruit of an entrenched and malicious character? Hugh McCann's explanation is lucid and to the point. Freedom, he notes,

concerns the relation between willing and its consequences, with whether decision and volition are able to issue in the behavior chosen. Where we are able to do as we please, so that a choice to do A would result in our A-ing, we have free will. The opposite of this is not causation, which Edwards holds operates throughout, but rather *constraint* or *restraint*, whereby we are either forced to do what we do not will, or prevented from doing what we do or might will. This kind of necessity—Edwards sometimes calls it “natural necessity,” to distinguish it from the moral variety—excuses. A prisoner in a locked cell can neither be praised nor blamed for not leaving. But moral necessity does not. However determined his will may have been in committing the crime that brought him to his cell, the prisoner deserves to be there.<sup>16</sup>

Or to illustrate yet again, if a man confined to a wheelchair by paralysis does not *move* to deliver a woman from attack, he is not morally culpable. But if he does not *care* that she is attacked, he is. Or if he is *not*

<sup>15</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 153.

<sup>16</sup> McCann, “Edwards on the Will,” 36.

confined and is physically capable of saving her but chooses to look the other way, he is deserving of contempt.

An odd incident that illustrates this distinction occurred not long ago in the state of Pennsylvania. A man who robbed a bank by telling an employee that he had a bomb strapped to his body was later apprehended by police. He pleaded with them for help, insisting that the bomb had been placed there by someone else who threatened to detonate it if he did not comply. Sure enough, at the precise moment the “robber” said the bomb would explode, it did—on national television, no less. Assuming this man was in no way inclined to theft, his choice to “rob” the bank was constrained. His will was subject to a natural necessity by factors over which he had no control. Had he survived and his claim substantiated, a court of law would most certainly have declared him not guilty. On the other hand, had it been proven that he lied about the bomb and that his decision to rob the bank was his own, arising from the greed or anger or rebellion of his heart, he would be fully deserving of whatever penal sanctions attach to such a crime.

Edwards’s point is that there is a natural inability, arising from a natural necessity, that exonerates a person from praise or blame. But there is also a moral inability, arising from a moral necessity, that actually establishes culpability. If I fail to save a drowning child because I cannot swim (a natural inability), I am subject to a natural necessity and thus blameless. If I refuse to save a drowning child because I don’t care (a moral inability), I am subject to a moral necessity and deserving of condemnation. When Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms in 1521 and declared, “Here I stand. I can do no other,” it wasn’t because his legs were incapable of carrying him out of the presence of his accusers. His “inability” to do anything other was the “necessary” product of a will that “freely” defied the Roman Catholic Church.

This is the same understanding that we find in Calvin, who chides those who fail to distinguish between necessity and compulsion. He points, as does Edwards, to the necessity that God always does what is good. “But suppose,” says Calvin, “some blasphemer sneers that God deserves little praise for His own goodness, constrained as He is to preserve it. Will this not be a ready answer to him: not from violent impulsion [or what Edwards would call natural necessity], but from His

boundless goodness [i.e., moral necessity] comes God's inability to do evil?"<sup>17</sup> He concludes that "if the fact that he *must* do good [emphasis mine] does not hinder God's free will in doing good; if the devil, who can do only evil, yet sins with his will—who shall say that man therefore sins less willingly because he is subject to the [moral] necessity of sinning?"<sup>18</sup> The point of this distinction between necessity and compulsion, then, is that

man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the [moral] necessity of sinning.<sup>19</sup>

So let me summarize. Foundational to Edwards's theory is that nothing comes to pass without a cause, including all acts of the will. The cause of an act of will is that motive which appears most agreeable to the mind. The will, therefore, is determined by or finds its cause and ground of existence in the strongest motive as perceived by the mind. The will, therefore, always is as the greatest apparent good is. The will is neither self-determined nor undetermined but always follows the last and prevailing dictate of the understanding. The act of will is necessarily connected in a cause/effect relationship with the strongest motive as perceived by the mind and cannot but be as the motive is. This type of necessity is moral, lies within the will, and is one with it. It is a necessity wholly compatible with praise and/or blame. If, on the other hand, the will is acted upon by external factors contrary to its desires, the individual is exempted from responsibility. Freedom is simply the opportunity one has to act according to one's will or in the pursuit of one's desires. This notion of freedom, contends Edwards, is not only compatible with but absolutely essential to moral responsibility.

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), II.3.5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## EDWARDS AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

As I briefly noted earlier, the fundamental issue is not whether the strongest motive has a causal influence on the will, but what it is that causes any supposed motive *to be* highest in the mind's view. What is the cause of the state or temper of mind that results in one motive being strong and another weak in the moment of perception? Since every effect must have a cause, either man or God is the uncaused initial cause of the disposition or state of mind from which issue evil actions. If the will is not self-determined, it must be determined by God. But this would appear to make God the direct and efficient cause of moral evil. Edwards explicitly denies the latter and accounts for the existence of evil by appealing to the notion of divine *permission*:

There is a great difference between God's being concerned thus, by his *permission*, in an event and act, which in the inherent subject and agent of it, is sin (though the event will certainly follow on his permission), and his being concerned in it by *producing* it and exerting the act of sin; or between his being the *orderer* of its certain existence, by *not hindering* it, under certain circumstances, and his being the proper *actor* or *author* of it, by a *positive agency* or *efficiency*. (403)

But if Edwards is to exonerate God, he must define divine permission as the absence of any causal influence in the inception of a sinful disposition. But to do so results in either asserting no cause for the evil disposition of the mind (spontaneity) or allowing the person to be his own cause (self-determination), both of which are contrary to his entire treatise.

We are left with this question: Why and how did Adam sin? The first transgression was either self-caused, spontaneous, or caused by some act of God. James Dana, Edwards's chief critic,<sup>20</sup> insists that Edwards "must either maintain the positive energy and action of the deity in the introduction of sin into the world, or else admit that it arose from a cause in the mind of the sinner—in other words, that he was self-determined."<sup>21</sup>

To understand Edwards's response to this criticism we must consider his view of the nature of Adam and his will as created antecedent

<sup>20</sup> James Dana, *An Examination of the Late Reverend Edwards' 'Enquiry on Freedom of Will'* (Boston: Daniel Kneeland, 1770); and *The "Examination of the Late Rev'd President Edwards' Enquiry on Freedom of the Will," Continued* (New Haven, Conn.: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773), hereafter cited as *Examination Continued*.

<sup>21</sup> Dana, *Examination Continued*, 59.

to the Fall. Edwards articulated his view in response to John Taylor,<sup>22</sup> who argued that the Reformed doctrine of original sin demanded that human nature at some time be corrupted by a positive influence or infusion of evil, either from God or the individual. Edwards countered by insisting that

the absence of positive good principles, and so the withholding of a special divine influence to impart and maintain those good principles, leaving the common natural principles of self-love, natural appetite, etc. (which were in man in innocence) leaving these, I say, to themselves, without the government of superior divine principles, will certainly be followed with corruption, yea, and total corruption of the heart, without occasion for any positive influence at all.<sup>23</sup>

Edwards conceived of the creation of Adam as follows:

When God made man at first, he implanted in him two kinds of principles. There was an *inferior* kind, which may be called *natural*, being the principles of mere human nature; such as self-love, with those natural appetites and passions, which belong to the nature of man, in which his love to his own liberty, honor and pleasure were exercised.<sup>24</sup>

Besides these, he continues,

there were *superior* principles, that were spiritual, holy and divine, summarily comprehended in divine love; wherein consisted the spiritual image of God, and man's righteousness and true holiness; which are called in Scripture the *divine nature*.<sup>25</sup>

The superior principle was designed by God to rule the natural and thus maintain psychical and physical harmony in the being of Adam. However, "when man sinned, and broke God's Covenant, and fell under his curse, these superior principles left his heart: for indeed God then left him."<sup>26</sup> But if these principles did not leave *until* Adam sinned,

<sup>22</sup> For a thorough analysis of Taylor's treatise, see my *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 31-70. Much of what follows has been adapted from that book.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 381.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 382.

their absence cannot be the cause of sin. Communion with God, on which the existence of the superior principles in Adam and their domination of the lower principles depended, ceased only *after* he had transgressed.

Edwards says, "it was of necessity, when once man had sinned, that original righteousness should be taken away; . . . It was impossible therefore, but that original righteousness must be taken away *upon man's sinning*."<sup>27</sup> The consequence for Adam was this:

The inferior principles of self-love and natural appetite, which were given only to serve, being alone, and left to themselves, of course became reigning principles; having no superior principles to regulate or control them, they became absolute masters of the heart. The immediate consequence of which was a *fatal catastrophe*, a turning of all things upside down, and the succession of a state of the most odious and dreadful confusion.<sup>28</sup>

Were it necessary, Edwards believes it an easy task to demonstrate

how every lust and depraved disposition of man's heart would naturally arise from this *privative* original, . . . Thus 'tis easy to give an account, how total corruption of heart should follow on man's eating the forbidden fruit, though that was but one act of sin, *without God's putting* any evil into his heart, or *implanting* any bad principle, or *infusing* any corrupt taint and so becoming the *author* of depravity.<sup>29</sup>

Here is the problem: If total corruption of heart *followed* the initial transgression, and was therefore not its cause but its consequence, how did Adam sin? Edwards insists that "only God's *withdrawing*, as it was highly proper and necessary that he should, from rebel-man, being as it were driven away by his abominable wickedness, and men's *natural* principles being *left to themselves*, this is sufficient to account for his being entirely corrupt, and bent on sinning against God."<sup>30</sup>

But since Adam's fall preceded and resulted in the withdrawal by God of the superior principle in his soul, thereby assuring only that

<sup>27</sup> "Miscellanies," no. 374, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," a-500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 446 (emphasis mine).

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 382.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



Adam would persist in sin, but not explaining the cause of its initial appearance, and since Edwards has previously dismissed the suggestion that Adam's first act of volitional rebellion was self-determined or spontaneous, why did, or rather, *how could* Adam sin?

Edwards consistently affirms that the withdrawal from Adam of divine influence was *subsequent* to his transgression. The departure of God's sustaining grace was in consequence of something Adam, not God, did. Adam's nature became corrupt, says Edwards, prior to and therefore apart from any action on the part of the Deity. How then did Adam sin? Was it in consequence of some antecedent disposition in his nature as created? No, for Adam was created upright and inclined to righteousness. Edwards does suggest in one place that "it was meet [fitting], if sin did come into existence, and appear in the world, it should arise from the imperfection which properly belongs to a creature, as such, and should appear so to do, that it might appear not to be from God as the efficient or fountain" (413). But any imperfection in the creature, as such, can only reflect badly on the Creator.

Might not this evil disposition be the effect of a sinful act of will by Adam, rather than antecedent to it? But how could Adam have come by a wicked will if he was created holy? Such an act of will cannot be self-determined nor have emerged spontaneously. Is, then, Thomas Schafer correct in saying that "Edwards' doctrine of the will, required alike by his theology and his metaphysics, breaks on the impossible task of accounting for both original righteousness and the fall"?<sup>31</sup>

Once Edwards has exempted God from any direct causal influence in the initial transgression of Adam, he simply has no way of explaining how the first man, being righteous, could generate an act of rebellion, and this notwithstanding the positive presence and sustaining influence of divine grace! The only antecedent cause in Adam sufficient to a volitional effect is that upright and holy disposition with which he was endowed by God from the beginning of his existence. However, such a disposition could, by Edwards's own admission, yield only such acts that partake of the quality of the cause (or motive) whence they proceed. Thus Edwards's scheme is capable only of explaining how Adam might continue to sin but not how he might *begin* to sin.

If Adam's sin, like all events, demands a cause sufficient to the effect,

<sup>31</sup> Thomas A. Schafer, "The Concept of Being in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1951), 228.

either Adam by self-determination or God by direct interposition is the morally responsible efficient of that first transgression. A divine decree to permit the Fall merely asserts that God determined not to hinder it *should* it occur. It does not sufficiently explain why or how it did in fact occur. In several of his “Miscellanies” Edwards addresses this point. For example:

Adam had a sufficient assistance of God always present with him, to have enabled him to have obeyed, if he had used his natural abilities in endeavoring it; though the assistance was not such as it would have been after his confirmation, to render it impossible for him to sin.<sup>32</sup>

But why did he not use his natural abilities if they were created righteous? If they were not righteous, then they were either evil or indifferent. If evil, then God is the cause of sin for having directly created Adam in that condition. If indifferent, then how could they yield an ethically blamable action? Edwards has already argued that an indifferent cause cannot explain an immoral (or moral) effect.

In the same paragraph he contends that “man might be deceived, so that he should not be disposed to use his endeavors to persevere; but if he did use his endeavors, there was a sufficient assistance always with him to enable him to persevere.”<sup>33</sup> But to what in Adam, as created, would temptation have appealed? What in Adam was subject to being deceived to sin if, as argued, Adam was created righteous? And if righteous, how could any temptation have any strength to evoke a sinful response? By Edwards’s own reasoning, the will always is as the greatest apparent good. But by virtue of that original righteousness with which Adam was initially endowed, no evil motive could ever appear good or have any tendency to evoke or excite the mind. The mind, being by nature inclined to righteousness, will find suitable or pleasing only such motives as are morally compatible with it. Should it be suggested that God permitted Adam to be confronted with a temptation (motive) he knew Adam was too weak to resist in that condition in which God had created him, then it is God, not Adam, who is to blame for the sin that necessarily followed.

<sup>32</sup> “Miscellanies,” no. 501, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The “Miscellanies,”* 501-832, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Adam, says Edwards, was created upright and thus from the moment of his first existence preferred what is good and righteous. Consequently, to use Edwards's own terminology, for Adam, who presently prefers good, to at present prefer evil is for him to prefer at present what is at present not preferable. Edwards himself insisted that this is logically absurd. But to predicate of Adam a preference for evil at precisely the moment he prefers good is to affirm just that. On the basis of what Edwards himself has said, the only way for Adam at present to prefer the opposite (i.e., evil) of what is at present preferred (i.e., good) is for God to directly alter or influence his present preference. To admit this, however, is to concede the objection that Edwards's concept of causal determinism of the will makes God the author of sin.

Edwards is not unaware of this problem and addresses it this way:

If it be inquired how man came to sin, seeing he had no sinful inclinations in him, except God took away his grace from him that he had been wont to give him and so let him fall, I answer, there was no need of that; there was no need of taking away any that had been given him, but he sinned under that temptation because God did not give him more.<sup>34</sup>

But how did he sin even with what God *had* given him, if what he had was righteous? Edwards continues:

He did not take away that grace from him while he was perfectly innocent, which grace was his original righteousness; but he only withheld his confirming grace. . . . This was the grace Adam was to have had if he had stood, when he came to receive his reward. This grace God was not obliged to grant him . . . and so the sin *certainly* followed the temptation of the devil. So that, as to the sin of mankind, it came from the devil.<sup>35</sup>

By this Edwards means, as he says again in "Miscellany 436," that God gave Adam "sufficient" grace but not "efficacious" grace to resist temptation. But why does Edwards infer from the absence of efficacious grace that sin "certainly" followed from the temptation? As I have already argued, even in the absence of confirming or efficacious grace there is nothing in Adam causally sufficient to explain the effect (i.e., his

<sup>34</sup> "Miscellanies," no. 290, in *WJE*, 18:382.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis mine).

sin). If by creation he is in such a condition that, antecedent to God's withdrawal of divine influence, he necessarily sins, then God is most certainly the efficient and morally responsible cause of the transgression.

Neither will it do to say that Adam fell because his will was overpowered by the immoral and deceptive influence of Satan. This suggestion is problematic for two reasons. First, it would mean that Adam fell by a *natural* necessity, which Edwards has argued exempts one from moral responsibility. Second, this would only push the problem of evil back a step such that every question heretofore asked of Adam and his transgression would be asked of Satan and his.

This is the dilemma that prompted James Dana to conclude that, on the whole, Edwards's doctrine,

while it acquits the creature from all blame, impeacheth the Creator as the positive cause and source of the revolt of angels and mankind, and ultimately fixeth all the criminality in the universe on him. How infinitely reproachful must that scheme of doctrine be, which involveth so horrid and blasphemous an imputation on the supreme creator and governor of the universe.<sup>36</sup>

Dana's solution to the problem, however, is likewise plagued with an insurmountable difficulty. Nothing that the Arminian can say about the contingency or self-determining power of the will can serve to explain with any less difficulty how a sinful inclination could arise in the heart of him who was created holy and upright. Nor will it suffice to argue (as did Pelagius) that Adam was not created holy and upright but with an indifference or equilibrium of will, for the same objections Edwards raised earlier against indifference would apply here with equal force (414).

Dana merely asserts that how sin came to be permitted is more than one can comprehend. But if God knew (and all but contemporary open theists would affirm he did) that Adam would sin if left to himself, a condition Dana affirms came from the Creator and for which he, therefore, is ultimately responsible, and without that assistance which was absolutely necessary to the avoiding of sin (which assistance God surely could have provided had he so willed), then in the nature of the case God is as properly the reason why Adam sinned as if he (God) were the efficient

<sup>36</sup> Dana, *Examination Continued*, 68.

cause of it. Thus the mere existence of sin, and not just the question of its original cause, poses a problem that seems to defy explanation.

It would appear that Dana is unable and Edwards unwilling to explain how Adam fell. Dana is unable because spontaneity, self-determination, and indifference fail to account for the transition of Adam's will from obedience to rebellion. Edwards is unwilling in that his deterministic concept of human volition, if consistently applied, must trace every effect in the universe, and therefore every act of will, to the ultimate, all-sufficient, uncaused cause, the eternal Deity.

## CONCLUSION

I began this essay with Edwards's insistent claim that if libertarian freedom is embraced, one must relinquish any hold on a Calvinistic soteriology and those doctrines essential to it. I trust that whether or not the reader agrees with Edwards's conclusions, he will acknowledge the truth of that assertion. As mysterious and unsettling as Edwards's treatise so often proves, I for one remain convinced that he is correct in his reasoning and reading of Scripture. Perhaps, then, I should close by leaning heavily on that text with which Edwards himself concluded his most famous work:

*For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:19-20, 27-29)*

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fiering, Norman. *Jonathan Edwards' Moral Thought and Its British Context*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1981.

A wide-ranging treatment of Edwards's ethical theory with extensive discussion of his treatise on the will.

Guelzo, Allen C. *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989.

An encyclopedic treatment of the historical and theological context and aftermath of Edwards's treatise. One should also consult Guelzo's article, "The Return of the Will: Jonathan Edwards and the Possibilities of Free Will," in *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 87-110, where he address the relationship of Edwards's theory to contemporary open theism.

Holmes, Stephen. "Strange Voices: Edwards on the Will." In *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology*, 86-107. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2002.

A brief but insightful overview of Edwards on the will that goes beyond his comments in *God of Grace & God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

McCann, Hugh J. "Edwards on Free Will." In *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, edited by Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp, 27-43. Aldershot, Hants/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003.

A critical response to Edwards's treatise in which he affirms the truth of libertarian freedom.

McClymond, Michael J. *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Although somewhat brief (the text itself is only 112 pages), this is an excellent introduction to the theology of Edwards.

Storms, Sam. "Is Imputation Unjust? Jonathan Edwards on the Problem of Original Sin." *Reformation & Revival Journal* 12 (Summer 2003): 61-69.

In this article I argue that although ingenious, and perhaps correct, Edwards's view on personal identity and continuous creation does not solve the ethical problem posed by the imputation of Adam's sin.

— —. "Open Theism in the Hands of an Angry Puritan: Jonathan Edwards on Divine Foreknowledge." In *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, edited

by D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols, 114-130. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003.

Here I unpack Edwards on foreknowledge and the way in which he would, no doubt, have responded to contemporary open theism.

— —. *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985.

This is an abbreviated version of my Ph.D. dissertation in which I analyze Edwards on both free will and original sin.

Talbot, Mark R. "True Freedom: The Liberty That Scripture Portrays as Worth Having." In *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, 77-109. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003.

This is an excellent critique of libertarian free will and a biblical defense of the model found in Edwards's treatise.

Zakai, Avihu. *Jonathan Edwards' Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Although written in a somewhat repetitive style, this is an excellent analysis of Edwards's philosophy of history as found in his treatise, *A History of the Work of Redemption*.

## GODLY EMOTIONS (*RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS*)

*Mark R. Talbot*

One of Scripture's most arresting incidents occurs in the book of Numbers. Numbers records Israel's wilderness wanderings. In chapter 25, Israel was encamped at Shittim getting ready to cross over the River Jordan into Canaan. But even there, right on the verge of the Promised Land, Israelite men began to indulge in sexual immorality and Baal worship with foreign women. God reacted fiercely to this and commanded Moses to execute the guilty Israelites. Yet even as Moses was carrying this out, Zimri, the son of one of the Simeonite leaders, brought a Midianite woman, Cozbi, into the Israelite camp in front of everyone. Here the text becomes a bit unclear, but it seems that Zimri and Cozbi went into his tent to have sex.<sup>1</sup> In any case, when Phinehas, one of Aaron's grandsons, saw what was happening, he grabbed a spear and killed Zimri and Cozbi with a single thrust. God then declared to Moses, "Phinehas . . . has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel in that he was jealous with my jealousy" (vv. 10-11). God praised Phinehas's act because it arose from godly jealousy; and because of

---

<sup>1</sup> It may have been much worse. In his commentary on Numbers in *The Expositor's Biblical Commentary*, 5 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 1:918ff., Ronald B. Allen speculates that this passage's obscurity may have been prompted by the fact that "the scribes of Scripture found [the actions described here] to be quite repellant and that the precise nature of the offense was," consequently, "softened somewhat through time." He suggests that we understand verse 6 like this:

Then a certain Israelite man brought *the* Midianite woman to *the Tent [of God]* right before the eyes of Moses and the eyes of all the congregation of Israel; *and they were sporting* at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

In other words, what this couple did was "to engage in a sexual embrace in the manner of Baal worship—right at the entrance of the holy Tent of God," right in front of Moses. If Allen is right (and it is worth reading the whole of his commentary on vv. 6-9 to assess his case), then the contempt shown by Zimri and Cozbi "for the holy things and the word of the Lord . . . is unimaginable" and Phinehas's emotional reaction becomes even more intelligible.



Phinehas's jealousy, God made a special covenant of peace and perpetual priesthood with him and his descendants forever (see vv. 12-13).

Jealousy is an emotion—a particularly intense emotion, as Scripture sees it (see Prov. 27:4), and a negative one at that (see Deut. 29:20; Rom. 10:19). It is an emotion that arises from vigilance, when (rightly or wrongly) we prize something so much that we guard it and then feel fear when we think it is threatened, or resentment when we believe that it is being dishonored or eclipsed.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in everyday situations we often become jealous when we fear that our right to someone's exclusive attachment or loyalty is being threatened or when we resent someone else's advantages or success. Usually we think that jealousy is a bad thing and something to be avoided, as it often is (see Acts 5:12-18; Rom. 13:13; Jas. 3:13-16). Yet sometimes jealousy is a good thing (see 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Ezek. 36:1-7; Zech. 8:1-8). If I am not jealous of my wife's affections, then I don't love her as I should. And if God were not jealous for the exclusive affection of his people, then he would not be serious about his covenant with them (see Exod. 20:1-6; Deut. 4:23-24; Ezek. 16:35-43).<sup>3</sup>

In other words, jealousy can be a godly emotion—an emotion that Scripture either portrays God as having or as wanting his people to have in particular circumstances. In these circumstances, being jealous is a sign of true faith (see Ps. 106:28-31). It is, then, one of many emotions that can indicate whether our hearts are right with God, as Jonathan Edwards argues in his great book, *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*.

## THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND TO *RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS*

"Examine yourselves," the apostle Paul commanded the Corinthians, "to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). Part of Jonathan Edwards's reason for writing *Religious Affections* was to encourage professing Christians to obey this command.<sup>4</sup> Edwards published *Religious Affections* in 1746 as part of a prolonged analysis and qualified defense

<sup>2</sup> This way of describing jealousy applies especially to human jealousy and not to divine jealousy, since God's jealousy for his people certainly involves no fear and probably should not be described as involving any resentment. For one attempt to understand divine jealousy, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 458ff.

<sup>3</sup> Much of these first two paragraphs and a few sentences and paragraphs in what follows come from my article, "Godly Emotions," in *Modern Reformation* 10/6 (November/December 2001): 32-37, used with the permission of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. This article is also available on the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals website: [www.alliancenet.org](http://www.alliancenet.org).

of the first “Great Awakening” in America, which began in his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, around 1734.<sup>5</sup> Some historical and theological background here will help us to appreciate Edwards’s great book and understand why we should still study it today.

Contemporary observers described what was happening in New England after 1734 as a time of general “awakening”—that is, a time when significant numbers of people began to realize that they were under God’s judgment and thus needed his mercy and saving grace. Describing what was happening in New England after 1734 in this way involves some careful theological thinking.<sup>6</sup> The Puritans who landed at Massachusetts Bay in 1620 intended New England to be a great experiment, the experiment of Calvinistic Christians sojourning to a new country to set up a whole way of life that would glorify God—a “city set on a hill” that could not be hid (Matt. 5:14),<sup>7</sup> a holy commonwealth that would manifest God’s righteousness on earth and that might, by doing so, usher in the religious renewal of the whole world through God’s millennial reign.<sup>8</sup> They recognized, as all Christians should, that a person must do more than merely profess Christian belief to be saved. Merely saying, “Lord, Lord” to Jesus is not enough to insure that we will enter Christ’s kingdom (see Matt. 7:21). Conversion is necessary.<sup>9</sup> And they knew that true Christian conversion makes people active and

<sup>4</sup> See his *Religious Affections* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 169, where Edwards cites this passage in the midst of arguing that Christian assurance is available to all Christians and should indeed be sought by each. See also the prefatory material to Part Three, 193–197. I will be citing this edition of *Religious Affections*, since it is part of the authoritative Yale edition of Edwards’s works. Yet *Religious Affections* is available in many editions, including an inexpensive paperback edition from The Banner of Truth Trust.

<sup>5</sup> Usually the first Great Awakening is taken to start around 1740, with special reference to George Whitefield and the results of his preaching. But in reality the causes of what happened around that time include reports of and writings about—to say nothing of the continuing spiritual effects of—what had happened in Northampton around 1734. I think that proper hindsight should lead us, then, to see the Holy Spirit’s great visitation on America beginning then and there.

<sup>6</sup> There is biblical warrant for this use of “awakening.” See, e.g., Isaiah 26:19, 52:1; Joel 1:5; Ephesians 5:8–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8; and Revelation 3:1–4.

<sup>7</sup> This image recurs repeatedly in the writings of the New England Puritans. Edwards himself uses it to describe Northampton. See, for instance, his sermon of that title in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 19, *Sermons and Discourses 1734–1738*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 537–559, as well as his other references to the same idea as found in the index to that volume.

<sup>8</sup> For Edwards’s own hopes that the awakening that started in Northampton and that then spread much more broadly under the influence of itinerant preachers like George Whitefield would eventually result in God’s millennial reign, see C. C. Goen’s introduction to *The Great Awakening*, WJE, vol. 4 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), especially 71f. George Marsden also examines this aspect of Edwards’s thought in *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), especially 265–267, 315, 335–337.

<sup>9</sup> For a scriptural and theological exposition of the claims that I make here about conversion, saving faith, regeneration, and so on, please see my booklet, *The Signs of True Conversion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000).

fervent for Christ because it involves their deliberately and consciously repenting of all sin and wickedness as well as their turning decisively to the Triune God in saving faith.

Most of the Pilgrims who crossed the Atlantic to come to America in the 1600s had showed signs of true conversion; indeed, it was their religious fervency that brought them here. Yet that fervency had cooled as the earliest generations of settlers spread out and gave way to later generations who shared the form of their parents' faith but not necessarily the power thereof. New England's churches, even in Jonathan Edwards's grandfather's time,<sup>10</sup> were clearly becoming "mixed companies" of some who showed evidence of true Christian conversion and some who did not.

Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic had been convinced by Scripture that salvation is entirely from God; they knew that true conversion depends on God having regenerated a person's heart. They also knew that Scripture represents God as ordinarily working in regular ways. They knew, for instance, that God has ordained preaching as the ordinary means by which sinners come to call upon the name of Christ in saving faith (see Rom. 10:8-17; Mark 16:14-16; Acts 10:34-48). Gathering together all that they thought they had found in Scripture regarding the usual steps or stages that sinners will pass through on the way to true conversion, they developed a "morphology of conversion"—that is, a step-by-step analysis of what sinners would normally experience up to and through the moment when God regenerated their hearts.<sup>11</sup>

This morphology remained somewhat flexible and could include more or fewer steps. For instance, in Jonathan Edwards's father's hands, it can be taken to involve just three essential steps: conviction, humiliation, and regeneration.<sup>12</sup>

As Timothy Edwards saw it, the first essential step in the process involves "conviction" or a person's "awakening sense of [his or her] sad

<sup>10</sup> Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) was Edwards's grandfather and his immediate predecessor in the Northampton pulpit. He was a great churchman and sophisticated theological writer in his own right.

<sup>11</sup> For a careful description of the Puritan morphology of conversion with primary reference to Jonathan Edwards's own understanding of it, see again C. C. Goen's introduction in *WJE*, 4:25-32. I think the Puritan morphology, in the form in which I am about to give it, fails to acknowledge the full range of scriptural examples of true conversion. In particular, Timothy Edwards's second step of "humiliation"—which, Marsden informs us, he was particularly insistent about—seems to me to be a step or stage in Christian development that many Christians reach late or perhaps even never in their earthly lives and that is not clearly present in every case of conversion in the Scriptures.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Edwards (1669-1758) was himself a pastor who oversaw several local "awakenings" in his church in East Windsor, Connecticut. In my next paragraph, I am quoting from his 1695 sermon on Acts 16:29-30 as portions of it are found in Marsden's biography, *op. cit.*, 26-28, as are the points that I summarize from Marsden in that and the next paragraph.

estate with reference to eternity.” Because this step involves someone beginning to realize that he or she is breaking God’s law, it usually evokes some typical reactions, such as a sense of foreboding or fear at the prospect of angering God and then perhaps a resolution to change and do better. Of course, reactions like these are natural when anyone is starting to wake up to his or her wrongdoing or sinfulness<sup>13</sup>—for instance, children tend to react similarly to their parents when they realize that they have done what displeases them—and so they don’t in and of themselves guarantee that God has begun the process that will eventually in regeneration. Mere awakening, then, needs to be followed by something more, namely, these Puritans thought, by a sinner’s clearer sense of his or her true state.

Timothy Edwards called this second step or stage “humiliation,” when sinners recognize that, despite their best resolutions, they are bound to sin and fully deserve eternal damnation. At this stage, as George Marsden observes, the Puritan morphology required potential converts to “be ‘truly humbled’ by a total sense of their own unworthiness.” So it involves a lot of emotional disturbance, even though, once again, a non-Christian could have similar emotions, and thus having them is not itself a sure sign of true conversion.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as Marsden notes, the Puritans believed that it was only by going through this emotionally harrowing stage that a person became “sufficiently prepared to reach the third step” of receiving, by God’s grace, the radical change of heart that is known as regeneration. Ordinarily, regeneration then manifests itself in signs of true conversion—that is, with evidence of sincere, whole-hearted repentance and saving faith.<sup>15</sup> So it was only at this third step or stage that the Puritans looked for what they considered to be “satisfying evidences” that God was savingly at work in someone’s life.<sup>16</sup> Yet

<sup>13</sup> As James observes, even the demons can believe certain truths about God “and shudder” (James 2:19).

<sup>14</sup> The initial stage of this awakening in Northampton seemed to end with the suicide of Jonathan Edwards’s uncle, Joseph Hawley II, on June 1, 1735, who was mired in a terror-filled belief that he was bound for eternal damnation. Many of Hawley’s contemporaries seem to have assumed that his suicide showed that he never was truly converted, even though he seemed to have been “truly humbled.” So, for them at least, emotions that at least appeared very much like the emotions proper to Timothy Edwards’s second stage in his morphology of conversion might apparently not result in regeneration. I myself am cautious about drawing any conclusions about a person’s spiritual condition from the fact that he or she has committed suicide.

<sup>15</sup> “Ordinarily” because, for instance, God may mercifully regenerate an infant’s heart and yet that act will not immediately manifest itself in signs of true conversion.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire in New-England*, in WJE, 4:148.

even then they often remained more cautious than many modern evangelists about identifying who is truly saved because they knew that, since salvation depends on God's secretly regenerating our hearts, it is not itself directly observable and thus can only be surmised from the signs of true conversion that follow in our lives.<sup>17</sup>

Because the Puritans took awakening to be an essential if still insufficient first step on the way to regeneration, Puritan home and church life was geared toward producing it. Children died frequently, and so parents and primers drove home the point that life is precarious and, unless God showed mercy, a flame-filled eternity awaited each and every human being. The same lesson was often preached. And so the seeds were planted in Puritan New England for sporadic awakenings.

Early in the 1730s, people in Northampton began to awake. The primary earthly catalyst was the "very sudden and awful death of a young man in the bloom of his youth" in April 1734, "who," Jonathan Edwards relates, "being violently seized with a [lungs' infection] and taken immediately very delirious, died in about two days."<sup>18</sup> Edwards then preached the young man's funeral sermon on Psalm 90:5-6—

*You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
in the evening it fades and withers*

—with the design of convincing Northampton's young people of the utter unreasonableness of their not immediately and completely turning

<sup>17</sup> In line with the way that the Puritans thought about it, Wayne Grudem defines regeneration as "a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us" (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994], 699). His chapters on effectual calling, regeneration, and conversion cast a lot of useful light on these topics. See also Robert L. Reymond's *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), chapter 19, on "The Application of the Benefits of the Cross Work of Christ." Iain H. Murray, in *Evangelicalism Divided* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 51-57, argues that recent imprecision about when salvation has actually taken place—such as counting everyone who comes forward in a evangelistic meeting as saved—has damaged the Christian cause. (See also his *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994], 366-374.) In contrast, Edwards typically qualified what he thought was true because he knew that he could not be absolutely sure. So in his *Faithful Narrative* he writes, "there were, very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons who were to all appearance savingly converted" (149; my emphasis) and "it appeared to me that what she gave an account of was a glorious work of God's infinite power and sovereign grace" (*ibid.*, my emphasis).

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*, 147. Edwards notes that the young people in his congregation started to show "a very unusual flexibleness, and yielding to advice" at the end of 1733. Marsden gives a good account of all of this in *Jonathan Edwards*, 150-163.

from this world's fleeting pleasures to embrace by faith God's eternal pleasures as offered in Christ. This sermon seemed to precipitate a stream of conversions among Northampton's young people. "By March and April of 1735," Marsden observes, "the spiritual rains had turned the stream to a flood."<sup>19</sup>

This awakening, although it was somewhat similar to earlier ones in Puritan New England, was unique in its speed, depth, and extent. For instance, the news of the conversion of a frivolous young woman, Edwards reports,

seemed to be almost like a flash of lightning, upon the hearts of young people all over the town, and upon many others. Those persons amongst us who used to be farthest from seriousness, and that I most feared would make an ill improvement of [her change], seemed greatly to be awakened with it. . . .

And soon,

. . . a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages . . . . All other talk [except] about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people, carrying on their ordinary secular business.

Religion was, as Edwards continues,

with all sorts the great concern. . . . The only thing in their view was to get the kingdom of heaven, and everyone appeared pressing into it. The engagedness of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid; it appeared in their very countenances. It then was a dreadful thing amongst us to lie out of Christ [that is, not to have put one's faith in Christ] . . . and what persons' minds were intent upon was to escape for their lives, and to fly from the wrath to come. All would eagerly lay hold of opportunities for their souls; and were [accustomed] very often to meet together in private houses for religious pur-

---

<sup>19</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 159.

poses: and such meetings when appointed were [apt] greatly to be thronged.<sup>20</sup>

“There was scarcely a single person in the town, either young or old,” Edwards writes, that “was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world.”

Those that were [inclined] to be the vainest and loosest, and those that had been most disposed to think and speak slightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ.

In contrast with past patterns, about as many males as females seemed to have been saved, and God seemed to have extended his saving mercy not only to teens and early adults but also and much more unusually “both to elderly persons and also those that are very young.” This led Edwards to “hope that by far the greater part of persons in this town, above sixteen years of age, are such as have the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.” Northampton, as well as some neighboring towns, certainly seemed to have become “a city on a hill.” And even after the initial awakening ceased, Edwards saw so much spiritual good remain that he concluded, “we still remain a reformed people, and God has evidently made us a new people.”

Yet within a few years of writing these words in 1737, Edwards retracted this blanket endorsement of what had happened in Northampton, acknowledging that he had been unduly confident about his own ability to

<sup>20</sup> Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*, 149-150. The remaining quotations in this paragraph are from pp. 150, 158, and 209. It is worthwhile to read the whole of Edwards’s account of the initial awakening, which is found on pp. 147-159. Edwards notes, at the end of this account, some other ways in which it appeared to be extraordinary, and which no doubt led him to hope that it was the beginning of God’s great work that would usher in his millennial kingdom. He says, for instance, that

God has also seemed to have gone out of his usual way in the quickness of his work, and the swift progress of his Spirit has made in his operations on the hearts of many. ’Tis wonderful that persons should be so suddenly, and yet so greatly, changed. . . . God’s work has also appeared very extraordinary in the degrees of the influences of his Spirit, both in the degree of awakening and conviction, and also in the degree of saving light, and love, and joy, that many have experienced. (159)

Marsden casts some doubt on the accuracy of some of Edwards’s report by claiming that “Edwards was scrupulously honest, but he was also prone to hyperbole in his zeal to inspire others” (159). But others made essentially the same claims. See, for instance, Benjamin Trumbull’s assessment of later moments in the same revival as quoted in Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 167.

tell when someone had been truly converted. In times of great awakening, he came to understand, there are many fair blossoms that fail to produce mature fruit. We must be cautious, then, in declaring what God is doing with other human beings. As he writes at the end of his *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, published in 1741:

I know by experience that there is a great aptness in men, that think they have had some experience of the power of religion, to think themselves sufficient to discern and determine the state of others' souls by a little conversation with them; and experience has taught me that 'tis an error. I once did not imagine that the heart of man had been so unsearchable as I find it is. I am less charitable, and less uncharitable than once I was.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, by now Edwards was fully convinced that God alone has the ability and the right to determine the spiritual state of another person's heart. Regeneration, as the basis of true conversion, really is a secret act of God that none of us can perceive directly in another human being.

Yet, in agreement with the Scriptures, Edwards remained convinced that the unregenerate and the regenerate are fundamentally different, and that this difference normally manifests itself in ways that allow us to assess our own and others' spiritual states.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Edwards declares in the *Religious Affections*, Christ has given us rules that help us to assess others' spiritual states "so far as is necessary for [our] own safety, and to prevent [us from] being led into a snare by false teachers, and false pretenders to religion," even if "it was never God's design to give us any rules, by which we may certainly know, who of our fellow professors are his, and to make a full and clear separation between sheep and goats."<sup>23</sup> These rules, which specify the "marks" or

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, WJE, 4:285. For a page or so before and after this passage, Edwards develops scriptural arguments to show that God alone has the ability and the right to determine the spiritual state of human hearts.

<sup>22</sup> In the New Testament, the Greek term for "regeneration"—*palingenesis*—is used only once to refer to the spiritual renewal of individuals (see Titus 3:5), but the idea of spiritual renewal or rebirth or regeneration is often found in passages like John 3:1-8; Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; and throughout 1 John. As Grudem stresses (see his *Systematic Theology*, 699ff.), "Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious to us," yet we know that it is entirely God's work and that it involves his making a radical, instantaneous change in us that rescues us from spiritual death by making us spiritually alive. This change then manifests itself over time in the regenerated person's daily life.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 193. "Marks" and "signs" (mentioned next in the text) are taken from the same page. Edwards thought that the properly appointed officers of the visible church have a right and a duty to judge who are "visibly" saints—that is, who to all outward appearances "have a right to be received as [Christians or saints] in the eye of a public charity" (*Distinguishing Marks*, 286ff.; cf. 244f.). The final quotation in this paragraph is from page 84 of *Religious Affections*.



“signs” of true conversion, can guide ministers as they tend their flocks; and they can also assure individual Christians that they themselves are truly converted, provided they are not so far removed from a properly spiritual state of mind that it is impossible for them to tell, while they are in that poor state, whether they are regenerate. Knowing what these marks or signs of true conversion are may even help some non-Christians to stop fooling themselves about their standing with God. Everyone, then, should know them; and Edwards wrote *Religious Affections* to show that Scripture sheds “clear and abundant light” on them.

### EDWARDS’S THESIS: “TRUE RELIGION, IN GREAT PART, CONSISTS IN HOLY AFFECTIONS”

To that end, Edwards bases *Religious Affections* on these words from the apostle Peter’s first epistle: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). Peter’s words, Edwards observes, reveal the spiritual state of the Christians to whom he was writing. They were under persecution—“grieved by various trials,” as Peter puts it (1 Pet. 1:6)—and these trials tested the authenticity of their faith, which then manifested itself in the *love* and *joy* mentioned in verse 8. True faith, in other words, inevitably gives rise to godly desires and emotions.

Edwards’s antique way of putting this is to say that “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”<sup>24</sup> He then dedicates Part One of his book to explaining and defending this statement.

Edwards knows that we will not understand what he means when he says that true religion consists very largely in holy affections if we don’t understand what he means by *affections*. Modern dictionaries often take this term to refer merely to what we call the emotions—and

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 95. All other quotations from Edwards in this section of my chapter are from Part One of the *Religious Affections*, which is entitled, “Concerning the Nature of the Affections, and Their Importance in Religion.” In general, this section’s later quotations will be found later in that Part than earlier ones.

Reading Edwards can be discouraging because of his eighteenth-century vocabulary and grammar. We have to use dictionaries to look up the unfamiliar words and then learn how to construe his sentences by reading a lot of them. It often helps to read his more difficult sentences aloud. Yet what Edwards has to teach us is so valuable that it is clearly worth the effort. For further thought on reading Edwards, see Justin Taylor’s appendix, “Reading Jonathan Edwards: Objections and Recommendations.”

perhaps only to the more moderate emotions at that.<sup>25</sup> But for Edwards our *affections* involve a lot more than just our emotions. They have to do with the whole side of us that values and desires and chooses and wills as well as feels.

Edwards contrasts this side of our nature with another side that we can call our *cognitive* side. Our cognitive side includes our power to perceive and to speculate; it is what we use to discern and think about things. Conforming to the standard terminology of his day, Edwards sometimes calls the cognitive side of our nature our “faculty of understanding.” He claims that God has endued human nature with understanding and one other faculty, namely, the faculty “by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined [or disinclined] with respect to the things it views or considers”—that is, either likes or dislikes them, is pleased or displeased by them, or approves or disapproves of whatever it is perceiving or thinking about.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the first definition for *affection* in *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1971) is “a moderate feeling or emotion,” and the fourth definition is “the feeling aspect of consciousness” (15). It is not until the fifth definition that we are told that *affection* can mean a propensity or disposition. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., unabridged (New York: Random House, 1987) starts with a definition that involves something more than mere emotion—“fond attachment, devotion, or love: *the affection of a parent for an only child*” (33)—but then defines the affections as emotions, which are themselves defined as affective states of consciousness “in which joy, sorrow, fear, hate, or the like, [are] experienced, as distinguished from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness” (637).

Evidently this tendency to reduce the affections to the emotions was also present in Edwards's day, which is what leads him to say that “The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections . . . differ from the mere actings of the will and inclination of the soul . . . only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise.” In other words, affections are those inclinations that are lively enough to be felt as emotions.

<sup>26</sup> As Conrad Cherry notes in his *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1966), 15ff., Edwards is quite aware that traditional faculty psychology errs in considering the faculties of understanding and will to be “separate, self-activating entities” within the person rather than powers of the whole person. This, as Cherry goes on to show, affected how Edwards conceived of saving faith and led him to reject or at least deeply qualify the traditional Puritan analysis of it as consisting of three elements: *assent*, or believing what God claims is true; *consent*, or willfully accepting these truths; and *affiance*, or emotionally resting in these truths. Edwards, as Cherry stresses, understood that it is the whole person who is involved in each of these acts and consequently not some faculty of understanding that is involved in the first, some faculty of volition with the second, and some faculty of affection with the third. Edwards himself puts it this way:

The distinction of the several constituent parts or acts of faith, in assent, consent, and affiancement, if strictly considered and examined, will appear not to be proper and just, or strictly according to the truth and nature of things; because the parts are not all entirely distinct one from another, and so are in some measure confounded one with another. (“Concerning Faith,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman, 2 vols. [1884; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974], 2:587)

Elsewhere he says, “the Scriptures are ignorant of the philosophic distinction of the understanding and the will” (“The Mind,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 6, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980], 389). Ultimately, Edwards's refusal to accept a full-blown faculty psychology has tremendous ramifications for how we understand human knowledge. It can also keep us from believing, with many Roman Catholics, that original sin affects primarily our wills and not so much our reason.

In other words, this second faculty involves our taking some sort of stance toward what we are considering. In Edwards's time, this "choosy" side of human nature was usually called the *will* or the *faculty of volition*, but Edwards recognized that calling it that tended to narrow our conception of it too much because we are then really referring to only "the actions that are determined and governed by" this part of us. This leaves out the affective side's more fundamental motions of merely being inclined—or mentally (but not necessarily physically) "carried out towards"—various objects and being disinclined—or mentally repulsed by—others. These motions start in the secret recesses of our souls; and we may resolve—or *will*—never to act on them. This is one of the reasons why Scripture refers to this side of our natures as our *hearts* (see Ps. 36:1ff.; Prov. 4:20-23; Matt. 15:17-19) and declares that only God can know them (see 2 Chron. 6:30; Jer. 17:9ff.).

Of course, our inclinations can be weaker or stronger. Sometimes, Edwards observes, the soul, in considering something, "is carried out [just] a little beyond a state of perfect indifference." In such cases, our preferences are so weak that it would not be right even to call them desires. At other times, "the approbation or dislike, pleasedness or aversion, are stronger." And sometimes our heart's motions are so strong that "the soul comes to act vigorously and sensibly, and the actings of the soul are with that strength that (through the laws of the union which the Creator has fixed between soul and body) the motion of the blood and animal spirits begins to be sensibly altered," and then we feel our inclinations as emotions. Our affections, Edwards tells us, are these "more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul."<sup>27</sup>

In claiming, then, that true religion consists very largely in holy affections, Edwards means that those who have been truly converted will manifest the fact that God has regenerated their hearts by their having godly desires and emotions, such as the sort of Christian love and joy that Peter sees in his persecuted readers.

Edwards then argues, both from Scripture and by reason, that this

<sup>27</sup> Edwards admits that "language is here somewhat imperfect" and that in a sense "the affection of the soul differs nothing at all from the will and inclination" because insofar as we are moved at all in considering something, even if that movement is too weak to be sensed physiologically, it still involves our being "affected." But he wants, in accordance with more ordinary eighteenth-century English usage, to reserve the term "affection" for the stronger and more sensible movements that we experience as, e.g., love and hatred, joy and grief, delight and sorrow.

claim must be true. For instance, he asks, “who will deny that 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?” He answers this question by quoting biblical passages where God commands us to be “fervent in spirit” (Rom. 12:11) and to fear and love and serve him with our whole hearts and our whole souls (see Deut. 10:12; cf. 6:4-5 and Matt. 22:34-40). Such “a fervent, vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion . . . is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration,” he observes; and it is this that “has the promises of life” (see Deut. 30:6). He also reasons that for us not to be “in good earnest in religion,” with “our wills and inclinations . . . strongly exercised” when we consider the great Christian truths, indicates that we are not truly converted, because the “things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful.”

This follows from a principle that we all generally acknowledge; namely, that our desires and emotions ought to be proportioned to the real value of their objects. For example, virtually everyone recognizes that there is something really wrong with spouses who don’t love their husbands or wives much more than they love their dogs or with parents who aren’t much more emotionally involved with their children than with their cars. According to this principle, human beings should love God more than anything else: “In nothing, is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.” This is what Edwards had preached to his young people in 1734 as he tried to convince them, after the sudden death of one of their own, of the utter unreasonableness of their not immediately and completely turning from this world’s fleeting pleasures to embrace in faith God’s eternal pleasures as offered in Christ.

As I have noted, New England’s Puritans were well aware that true Christian conversion makes people active and fervent for Christ, and they also saw New England’s fervency cooling as its earliest generation of pilgrims gave way to later generations. These later generations almost invariably shared the “form” of their parents’ faith—that is, they subscribed to the same truths—but they often lacked the power thereof. Edwards now tackles this problem head-on, arguing that

True religion is evermore a powerful thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in the inward exercises of it in the heart, where is the principal and original seat of it. Hence true religion is called the power of godliness, in distinction from the external appearances of it, that are the form of it, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it" (II Tim. 3:5).

Those who are reborn of the Spirit are also indwelt by him (see John 3:1-8 with 14:15-17; Rom. 8:9); and, Edwards observes, "The Spirit of God in those that have sound and solid religion, is a spirit of powerful holy affection; and therefore, God is said to have given them the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7)." Consequently, regeneration always manifests itself in godly desires and emotions. Edwards grants that "true grace has various degrees, and there are some that are but babes in Christ, in whom the exercise of the inclination and will towards divine and heavenly things is comparatively weak"; but even in such babes in the faith, the Spirit who indwells them will ultimately prevail over "all carnal or natural affections." So one sign of true conversion is the persistence of godly desires and emotions throughout a Christian's life.<sup>28</sup>

This summarizes just the first of ten arguments Edwards gives in support of the claim that true conversion will manifest itself in godly desires and emotions. His second and third arguments appeal to general features of human nature and thus are primarily philosophical, but all the rest of his arguments are primarily scriptural and theological. They stress that the Scriptures "do everywhere place religion very much in . . . affections . . . such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion and zeal"; that Scripture's greatest saints—such as David and the apostles Paul and John and our Lord Jesus Christ him-

<sup>28</sup> Edwards stresses this point especially in the last of the twelve signs of true conversion that make up *Religious Affections*' third part:

True saints may be guilty of some kinds and degrees of backsliding, and may be soiled by particular temptations, and may fall into sin, yea great sins: but they can never fall away so, as to grow weary of religion, and the service of God, and habitually to dislike it and neglect it; either on its own account, or on account of the difficulties that attend it. . . . Nor can they ever fall away so, as habitually to be more engaged in other things, than in the business of religion; or so that it should become their way and manner to serve something else more than God; or so as steadily to cease to serve God, with such earnestness and diligence, as still to be habitually devoted and given up to the business of religion. (390ff.)

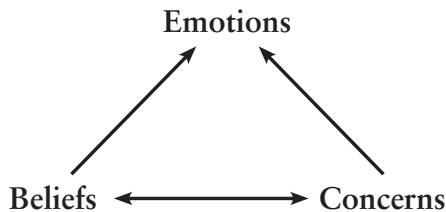
True saints, Edwards insists, will always be manifestly different after conversion than before, because the truly converted "are new men, new creatures; new, not only within, but without; . . . [with] new hearts, and new eyes, new ears, new tongues, new hands, new feet; i.e. a new conversation and practice; and they walk in newness of life, and continue to do so to the end of life" (391). Lack of perseverance is, then, "a sign that [those who don't persevere] never were risen with Christ" (391).

self—were full of godly desires and emotions;<sup>29</sup> that the Scriptures very much condemn hardness of heart; and that they “represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in *love*, [which is] the chief of the affections, and [the] fountain of all other affections.”

The truth of Edwards’s claim about the centrality of godly desire and emotion in true conversion can be driven home like this. Our emotions can be considered to arise from our beliefs and concerns. Our *beliefs* are what we take to be real or true—I believe right now, for instance, that I am composing this chapter on my Dell laptop computer, that I am looking at the Yale edition of Edwards’s *Religious Affections*, that God exists and that he speaks to me through the Christian Scriptures, and so on. Our *concerns* are our more persistent or insistent inclinations and desires. They are what we care about. For example, I am concerned for my own and my wife’s welfare, for the salvation of my daughter’s children, for my ability to work and pay the bills, and (near dinnertime) for eating enough to get rid of my hunger pangs.

Now our emotions arise from our beliefs and concerns like this. Suppose I care deeply about something, let’s say my wife’s welfare. And then suppose that I hear that she has just been in a car accident. If I believe what I’ve heard, then the combination of that belief and that concern will prompt an emotion, something like *fear* or *anxiety* about her physical state. Suppose that I then hear that it was a very minor car accident and that she wasn’t hurt. As my belief changes while my care for Cindy remains constant, my emotion will also change from fear or anxiety to something like *relief* and then perhaps to *gratitude to God* for keeping her safe.

Picture the linkage among our beliefs and concerns and emotions like this:



<sup>29</sup> Indeed, God commends David as a man after his own heart (see 1 Sam. 13:14 with Acts 13:22). David’s Psalms, then, being “nothing else but the expressions and breathings of devout and holy affections” that are “penned for the use of the church of God in its public worship” in every age, model the kind of affectionate religion that is to be the norm for godly persons at all times and in all places.

The line between beliefs and concerns with its double arrows signifies the way that our beliefs and concerns interact in producing our emotions. The lines with single arrows pointing from beliefs and concerns to emotions represent how our emotions arise out of the interaction of our beliefs and concerns.<sup>30</sup>

This picture helps us to understand what our emotions can reveal about our beliefs and concerns. Suppose a teenage girl has just been seriously hurt in an automobile accident and then observes that her father is more distraught about the damage to his new Mercedes than about her injuries. If she loves her father and has always assumed that he loves her, then observing this will probably shatter her heart. For the fact that he is more emotionally distressed about his car than about her injuries manifests what he cares for most.<sup>31</sup> Or suppose that a staunchly orthodox pastor preaches regularly about the danger of everlasting punishment and yet doesn't seem to be at all disturbed by the fact that none of his children is seeking salvation. His apparent lack of emotion about his children's apparent spiritual destiny may tell us something about either his concerns or his beliefs: It may tell us either that he does not care enough about his children or that he doesn't really believe what he

<sup>30</sup> Careful thought about the linkage among our beliefs and concerns and emotions will convince us that all three of the lines should probably have double arrows because our emotions affect our beliefs and concerns as well as being affected by them. Think, for instance, of how much more likely you are to believe a negative report about someone (e.g., "I hear that he cheats on his taxes") if you are already angry with him. (For a biblical example linking the condition of someone's heart to her beliefs, see Acts 16:14, where Luke says that God opened Lydia's heart to pay attention to what Paul was saying.) This confirms Edwards's rejection of faculty psychology as I reported it in footnote 26; human nature is much more a unity of somewhat but not fully distinguishable powers than an amalgamation of separate faculties or parts. Such was in fact Edwards's own experience, as his description of his own contemplation of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation as involving "a *delightful* conviction" shows. See his "Personal Narrative" of his own spiritual life in *WJE*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 792 (Edwards's emphasis). (Portions of Edwards's "Personal Narrative" can also be found at the beginning of Volume One of the two-volume *Banner of Truth* edition of Edwards's works in Sereno E. Dwight's "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards, A. M." This passage is found on xiii.)

I owe my understanding of emotions as products of our beliefs and concerns to the thinking that Robert C. Roberts's book, *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), prompted me to do many years ago. He first taught me to think of our concerns as emotion-dispositions that produce specific emotions when we have or acquire specific beliefs. Roberts should not, however, be held responsible for my particular way of picturing the linkages among our beliefs and concerns and emotions or for the conclusions I subsequently draw. Those who would like to pursue the topic of emotion much more thoroughly cannot do better than to look at Roberts's more recent *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), which is a full-blown philosophical treatment of emotions.

<sup>31</sup> This example is not merely hypothetical. I had a female student some years ago who was suffering from serious depression, and after much counseling it came out that something very like this had happened to her during her senior year in high school and had triggered her depression. She had heard her father, outside the curtain of the emergency-room bay she was in, inquiring first about the damage to his car and only afterwards about how badly she was hurt.

preaches. For otherwise that concern and that belief would be likely to produce fear and anxiety about his children's spiritual states.<sup>32</sup>

Now transfer these general insights to Edwards's claim about the centrality of godly desire and emotion in true conversion. These insights show how our desires and emotions can be signs or marks of our spiritual states. My spiritual state depends on whether or not God has regenerated my heart. Regeneration involves God giving me a radically different set of inclinations and desires (see Ezek. 36:22-32; Jer. 32:37-41). I go from being a child of the devil who does what he desires (see John 8:44; Eph. 2:1-3) to being a child of God who is now capable of doing what the Spirit, who is living within me, desires (see Gal. 5:16-25; Col. 3:1-17). It is the Spirit living within me who gives me this whole new set of desires and concerns (see Rom. 8:5, 9; Gal. 4:6). And these godly desires and concerns, combined with my beliefs, dispose me to have specific godly emotions. My having these emotions, then, indicates that my heart is regenerate. And my not having these emotions would indicate that my heart is not. My emotions, as feelings that indicate what I am genuinely concerned about, betray my spiritual state.<sup>33</sup>

## PRACTICAL INFERENCES

In typical Puritan fashion, Edwards draws some practical inferences from his claim that "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections" before closing Part One of his book.

The first practical inference is that it is a very great error to denigrate all religious affections "as having nothing solid or substantial in them." This, as Edwards observes, was the position of many in his day, especially after the first Great Awakening had ceased. One main criticism of the first Great Awakening even while it was occurring was that it was marked by a lot of odd behavior. Even while fostering it, Edwards himself readily admitted that it was accompanied by many "impru-

<sup>32</sup> I have tried to state this example carefully because (1) the pastor may actually be feeling a lot of emotion about his children's apparent spiritual state and yet attempt not to show it because he thinks that manifesting it would make it even harder for his children to deal with their spiritual states or (2) his concern and his belief may prompt him just to place the salvation of his children even more into God's hands. He may then know a peace that passes all understanding about what God is doing with his children.

<sup>33</sup> For Edwards's own sense of these things and the way that he understood his own affections as indicating his own spiritual state, see his "Personal Narrative," in *Letters and Personal Writings*, 790-804. The first couple of paragraphs deal with his early and carnal religious affections and then there is a transition to the sort of spiritual affections that arise from a regenerated heart.



dences and irregularities.”<sup>34</sup> For instance, George Marsden reports that in some meetings in 1741 in New Haven, Connecticut, it seemed that “all order had disappeared, [with] ‘some praying, some exhorting and terrifying, some singing, some screaming, some crying, some laughing and some scolding,’” so that a contemporary observer claimed it was “the most amazing confusion that ever was heard.” How, some asked, could spectacles like this come from God?

After it ended, the criticism sharpened. And thus, writing in about 1745, Edwards remarks that 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; and because the high affections of many seem to be so soon come to nothing, and some who seemed to be mightily raised and swallowed with joy and zeal, for a while, seem to have returned like the dog to his vomit: hence religious affections in general are grown out of credit, with great numbers, as though true religion did not at all consist in them.

This, Edwards says, seems to have been in reaction to the earlier, uncritical attitude that many took to the whole range of affections that displayed themselves during the Great Awakening. For despite the fact that some doubted such displays even during “those extraordinary circumstances and events,” there was overall, at that time,

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

<sup>34</sup> I take the phrase “imprudences and irregularities” from Edwards’s August 31, 1741, letter to Deacon Lyman, who had formerly lived in Northampton. See Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 97. The context of that phrase is instructive:

Concerning the great stir that is in the land, and those extraordinary circumstances and events that it is attended with, such as persons crying out, and being set into great agonies, with a sense of sin and wrath, and having their strength taken away, and their minds extraordinarily transported with light, love and comfort, I have been abundantly amongst such things, and have had great opportunity to observe them, here and elsewhere, in their beginning, progress, issue and consequences, and however there may be some mixtures of natural affection, and sometimes of temptation, and some imprudences and irregularities, as there always was, and always will be in this imperfect state; yet as to the work in general, and the main of what is to be observed in these extraordinary things, they have all the clear and incontestable evidences of a true divine work. If this ben’t the work of God, I have all my religion to learn over again, and know not what use to make of the Bible.

The next quotation is from Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 232.

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.

Similar polarizations to the display of religious affection are as prevalent in our day as they were then and as they were even in biblical times (see 2 Sam. 6:16-23; Acts 2:1-13).

Edwards always maintained that the awakening that began in Northampton around 1734 and then was renewed and spread through the preaching of George Whitefield and others in the early 1740s could only be explained as involving a great movement of God's Spirit that had indeed resulted in many true conversions—and, that, consequently, could be ignored or denigrated only at great spiritual peril.<sup>35</sup> He published his *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* in 1741 to defend the thesis that the Great Awakening was a bona fide work of God's Spirit, even if many of those who were then being influenced by God's Spirit were not in fact regenerated by him. Edwards opened that book with these words from 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every

<sup>35</sup> Writing in 1742 about the first Great Awakening overall, Edwards said:

And now let us consider—Is it not strange that in a Christian, orthodox country, and such a land of light as this is, there should be many at a loss whose work this is, whether the work of God or the work of the Devil? Is it not a shame to New England that such a work should be much doubted of here? . . . We need not say, "Who shall ascend into heaven" [Rom. 10:6], to bring us down something whereby to judge of this work. Nor does God send us beyond the seas, nor into past ages, to obtain a rule that shall determine and satisfy us. But we have a rule near at hand, a sacred book that God himself has put into our hands, with clear and infallible marks, sufficient to resolve us in things of this nature; which book I think we must reject, not only in some particular passages, but in the substance of it, if we reject such a work as has now been described, as not being the work of God. The whole tenor of the Gospel proves it; all the notion of religion that the Scriptures gives us confirms it. (*Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival of Religion in New-England*, in WJE, 4:330-331)

Later in the same book we find him claiming:

This work that has lately been carried on in the land is the work of God, and not the work of man. Its beginning has not been of man's power or device, and its being carried on depends not on our strength or wisdom; but yet God expects of all that they should use their utmost endeavors to promote it, and that the hearts of all should be greatly engaged in this affair. (384)

Elsewhere in the same book we find him speculating that this awakening may eventuate in God's millennial reign: "'Tis not unlikely that this work of God's Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind" (353). And a few pages later, he warns of the dangers of resisting the Holy Spirit's work in this awakening:

It is very dangerous for God's professing people to lie still, and not to come to the help of the Lord, whenever he remarkably pours out his Spirit, to carry on the work of redemption in the application of it; but above all, when he comes forth in that last and greatest outpouring of his Spirit, to introduce that happy day of God's power and salvation. (358)

spirit, but *try the spirits* whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (KJV, my emphasis). That is then what he attempted to do, articulating nine kinds of considerations that don’t indicate, one way or another, whether some extraordinary awakening is a work of God’s Spirit,<sup>36</sup> then developing from 1 John 4 five “sure, distinguishing, Scripture evidences and marks of a work of the Spirit of God, by which we may proceed in judging of any operation we find in ourselves, or see among a people, without danger of being misled.”<sup>37</sup>

Edwards reprises and expands his analysis of “some things, which are no signs that affections are gracious, or that they are not” in Part Two of *Religious Affections*. This part of his book can be very valuable to us, for there is little doubt, to use Edwards’s own words, that in much of the emotion that we see displayed in various quarters of the contemporary church there are “some mixtures of natural affection, and sometimes of temptation, and some imprudences and irregularities, as there always was, and always will be in this imperfect state.”<sup>38</sup> Observing these mixed displays can tempt us to dismiss these odd and sometimes aberrant ways of fellowshiping and worshiping as being entirely beyond the realm in which God works. But Edwards’s arguments can help us to remember that such dismissals are unwarranted. We can and should deplore unscriptural and sinful excesses of affection among those who call on the name of Christ while recognizing that even in their midst God may be gathering some of his children to himself.

Yet Edwards’s main point in the first of his three applications in Part One of his text is that as much as we may be uneasy about excessive or aberrant displays of affection during times of awakening (or in specific quarters of the Christian church), condemning all religious affection is much more deadly. “If the great things of religion are rightly understood,” he declares, “they will affect the heart.” Granted, there are false and true religious affections and, consequently, someone’s “having much affection [doesn’t] prove that he has any true religion.” Yet “if he has no

<sup>36</sup> And especially, he adds, “what are no evidences that a work that is wrought amongst a people, is not the work of the Spirit of God” (*Distinguishing Marks*, 228). In other words, Edwards is particularly concerned in this portion of his book to discredit those who said that specific observable phenomena—e.g., great physiological effects, strong impressions on the imagination, utilization of some standard means to produce an effect, imprudent or unbiblical conduct, errors of judgment and delusions of Satan, apostasy, etc.—were clear indicators that God was *not* at work.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, *Distinguishing Marks*, 248ff.

<sup>38</sup> For these words, see footnote 34, above.

affection, it proves that he has no religion,” because those with no religious affections are “in a state of spiritual death.” The right way forward, then, “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.” Edwards’s fullest account of Scripture’s approved affections is found in Part Three of *Religious Affections*; and his fullest account of those to be rejected is found in several chapters of *Charity and Its Fruits*.<sup>39</sup>

The next practical implication that Edwards draws from the fact that “true religion lies much in the affections” is that Christians will then want to convey their faith in ways that are most likely to move the affections. “Such books,” Edwards explains,

and such a way of preaching the Word, and administration of ordinances, and such a way of worshipping God in prayer, and singing praises, is much to be desired, as has a tendency to affect the hearts of those who attend these means.<sup>40</sup>

Edwards recognizes that “there may be such means, as may have a great tendency to stir up the passions of weak and ignorant persons, and yet have no great tendency to benefit their souls” because these means act on natural human capacities that work independently of any saving grace. But, he insists,

undoubtedly, if the things of religion, in the means used, are treated according to their nature, and exhibited truly, so as tends to convey just apprehensions, and a right judgment of them; the more they have a tendency to move the affections, the better.

He felt so strongly about this that, for example, with regard to music, he urged all Christian parents to give their children singing lessons and

<sup>39</sup> *Charity and Its Fruits* is found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989). It is not in the two-volume *Banner of Truth* edition of Edwards’s works, although *Banner of Truth* puts it out individually in an inexpensive paperback.

<sup>40</sup> One secular book that corroborates this point is Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994), which shows from a clinical and medical point of view how central emotion is to human life. Books such as Damasio’s show that our emotions hold our thoughts in place and that, when people lose their capacity to feel emotionally (through an accident or a brain tumor or whatever), they also lose their ability to function well in the normal everyday world. Of course, Scripture has always recognized the truth of this and this is why it takes, e.g., the fear of the Lord to be fundamental to a godly life.

proudly notes that his own congregation, especially during its times of awakening, sang loudly and heartily and in three parts.<sup>41</sup> As he says a bit earlier in Part One of *Religious Affections*:

The duty of singing praises to God, seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned, why we should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections.

In typical English translations of the Scriptures, words such as “sing,” “singers,” “singing,” and “songs” appear around 300 times.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, he declares, as his third practical implication, that if true religion lies so much in godly affections, then 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.” If God has given to us the capacity to desire and to feel

for the same purpose which he has given all the faculties and principles of human life for, [namely] that they might be subservient to man’s chief end, and the great business for which God has created him, that is the business of religion,

then the fact that our desires and emotions are usually much more engaged and aroused regarding worldly things is a very bad sign about the sanctity of our hearts. We should be most moved by the great things that God has done for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. And the fact that we are not moved by this work means that we should “be humbled to

<sup>41</sup> For Edwards’s remarks about singing, see his *Faithful Narrative*, 151 and *Religious Affections*, 115. His more general emphasis on a proper use of means is reiterated by many other Puritans. Here, for instance, is a passage from Richard Baxter’s *A Christian Directory* (1673; reprint, Morgan, Penn: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 59:

We are no sooner warmed with the celestial flames, but natural corruption is inclining us to grow cold; like hot water, which loseth its heat by degrees, unless the fire be continually kept under it. Who feeleth not that as soon as in a sermon, or prayer, or holy meditation, his heart hath got a little heat, as soon as it is gone, it is prone to its former earthly temper, and by a little remissness in our duty, or thoughts, or business about the world, we presently grow cold and dull again. Be watchful, therefore, lest it decline too far. Be frequent in the means that must preserve you from declining: when faintness telleth you that your stomach is emptied of the former meat, supply it with another, lest strength abate. You are rowing against the stream of fleshly interest and inclinations; and therefore intermit not too long, lest you go faster down by your ease, then you get up by labour.

<sup>42</sup> For more about the importance of singing to the Christian life, see my “Why We Sing,” *Modern Reformation* 11/6 (November/December 2002): 22-25.

the dust.” We should turn our hearts and minds to hearken to the things of God, even while confessing that we know we are incapable of being moved properly by these things, and then pray that God’s indwelling Holy Spirit will move us to love and to take joy in what is godly above all else. Then, if God graciously grants our prayer, we will possess one of the chief marks of true conversion, as Paul’s words to the Thessalonians makes clear: “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. . . . And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:4-6).

#### THE ROLE OF NEGATIVE DESIRES AND EMOTIONS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Christians sometimes seem to assume that godliness ought to be proof against having any negative desires or emotions. Numbers 25 contradicts that assumption. Phinehas had an intensely negative emotion, and God blessed him for it.

Negative desires and emotions involve our reacting against something. Our perceiving or considering something is then tinged with dislike, displeasure, disapproval, aversion, or something like that. It would be nice if it were possible to experience only positive desires and emotions<sup>43</sup>—desires and emotions involving only mental states like pleasure, approval, and attraction. But the linkage that holds among our beliefs, concerns, and emotions is such that, in a world where we can know or believe or worry that something we care about is or may be threatened, the same concerns that give rise to positive emotions when we have certain beliefs will inevitably give rise to negative emotions when we have other beliefs. For the very same care or concern that disposes me to feel a particular positive emotion under certain conditions will dispose me to feel a particular negative emotion under others. If I am able to feel joy at my wedding, then I am also capable of feeling sorrow if something bad happens to my wife.

Indeed, when we think carefully about it, we see that many desires

<sup>43</sup> I say this even though negative desires and emotions aren’t always unpleasant. For example, getting angry can sometimes feel pretty good. And someone can “nurse” a negative emotion like envy in a way that involves its being a familiar and somehow even a welcome presence in the person’s life. So to classify something as a “negative” desire or emotion is not to say that we necessarily feel badly while having it.

and emotions come in complementary pairs: love and hatred, joy and sorrow, fear and hope, gratitude and resentment, and so on. A desire or emotion is not “right,” then, just because it is a positive desire or emotion; it is right when it is the desire or emotion that is appropriate to the situation at hand, whether it is positive or negative.<sup>44</sup> If, upon hearing that my wife has just been in a very serious automobile accident, I don’t experience any negative emotion, there is probably something wrong with me.

Edwards, utilizing both reason and Scripture, recognizes all of this and more.<sup>45</sup> He says,

As all the exercises of the inclination and will, are either in approving and liking, or disapproving and rejecting; so the affections are of two sorts; they are those by which the soul is carried out to what is in view,

<sup>44</sup> C. S. Lewis makes a very similar point, in the second chapter of *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), 10-12, when he warns us against elevating any affection—which he calls “instincts” or “impulses”—to the place where we consider it always to be good:

It is a mistake to think that some of our impulses—say mother love or patriotism—are good, and others, like sex or the fighting instinct, are bad. All we mean is that the occasions on which the fighting instinct or the sexual desire need to be restrained are rather more frequent than those for restraining mother love or patriotism. But there are situations in which it is the duty of a married man to encourage his sexual impulse and of a soldier to encourage the fighting instinct. There are also occasions on which a mother’s love for her own children or a man’s love for his own country have to be suppressed or they will lead to unfairness towards other people’s children or countries. Strictly speaking, there are no such things as good and bad impulses. . . .

The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. There is not one of them which will not make us into devils if we set it up as an absolute guide. You might think love of humanity in general was safe, but it is not. If you leave out justice you will find yourself breaking agreements and faking evidence in trials ‘for the sake of humanity’, and become in the end a cruel and treacherous man.

Lewis’s claims here may need some qualification if we include among possible impulses or instincts ones such as love of God the Father of Jesus Christ or a desire that the Trinity will receive their proper glory. (Of course, these impulses are only had by the regenerate, so Lewis may be right concerning “natural”—meaning “unregenerate”—instincts and impulses.) In addition, no matter whether there are any desires or emotions that are always right, there are probably some that are always wrong—the desire to be maliciously cruel, for example, or the emotion of spite. Edwards does a good job in isolating some of these sorts of desires or emotions in *Charity and Its Fruits*.

<sup>45</sup> While Edwards clearly acknowledges that our ultimate guide is *sola Scriptura*, he also (and properly, I think) recognizes that human reasoning can start us on the way towards right views on some theological issues. And so he often investigates important theological questions both from the standpoint of reason and of Scripture. For instance, in his *Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World*, in *WJE*, vol. 8, the first chapter is entitled, “Wherein Is Considered What Reason Teaches Concerning This Affair,” and the second chapter, “Wherein It Is Inquired, What Is to Be Learned from Holy Scriptures Concerning God’s Last End in the Creation of the World.” (The most readable version of Edwards’s *Dissertation* is found in John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998].)

It is always important to remember that, while Edwards was one of the most biblically literate Christians of all time and so we should take anything that he says seriously, he occasionally reasons in ways that outrun or contradict Scripture. So, with him as with anyone else, we must always check his claims and conclusions against Scripture.

cleaving to it, or seeking it; or those by which it is averse from it, and opposes it.

Of the former sort are love, desire, hope, joy, gratitude, complacency. Of the latter kind, are hatred, fear, anger, grief, and such like. . . .

And there are some affections wherein there is a composition of each of the aforementioned kinds of actings of the will; as in the affection of pity, there is something of the former kind, towards the person suffering, and something of the latter, towards what he suffers. And so in zeal [which is another term for what Phinehas was feeling in Numbers 25], there is in it high approbation of some person or thing, together with vigorous opposition to what is conceived to be contrary to it.<sup>46</sup>

He then lists some of the positive and negative desires and emotions that, in appropriate circumstances, are among the signs of true conversion: “fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion and zeal.” He also argues that the Scriptures “represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in *love*, the chief of the affections,” citing our Lord’s declaration that love to God and neighbor make up the two great commandments (see Matt. 22:37-40) as well as the apostle Paul’s commendation of love “as the greatest thing in religion, and as the vitals, essence and soul of it,” as found especially in 1 Corinthians 13. He then claims that love is the “fountain of all other affections.” From love, he argues,

arises hatred of those things which are contrary to what we love, or which oppose and thwart us in those things that we delight in: and from the various exercises of love and hatred, according to the circumstances of the objects of these affections, as present or absent, certain or uncertain, probable or improbable, arise all those other affections of desire, hope, fear, joy, grief, gratitude, anger, etc.

This general claim, applied to Christianity, yields claims like these:

<sup>46</sup> *Religious Affections*, 98ff. The next quotation is from 102 and the remaining ones in this paragraph from pp. 106-108. I am unsure whether Edwards’s claim that love is the “fountain of all other affections” is true. It is certainly the source of many other affections, as my observations from Scripture will show. But it isn’t clear to me, either rationally or biblically, that it is the source of *all* of our other desires and emotions.



From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love to God, will necessarily arise . . . an intense hatred and abhorrence of sin, fear of sin, and a dread of God's displeasure, gratitude to God for his goodness, complacency and joy in God when God is graciously and sensibly present, and grief when he is absent,

as well as "a joyful hope when a future enjoyment of God is expected and fervent zeal for the glory of God."

Edwards buttresses these claims with various Scriptures, but some additional biblical reflection is in order. I will concentrate on the emotional aspects of love and hatred, highlighting especially what Scripture claims about hate, since we tend to think that having strong negative emotions like it couldn't possibly be godly.

Ecclesiastes confirms that "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; . . . *a time to love, and a time to hate*" (Eccl. 3:1, 4, 8). Moreover, Scripture takes love and hatred as complementary, presenting some juxtapositions of them as inevitable: Those who fear God and love his law inevitably hate and abhor falsehood and evil (see Ps. 119:163; Prov. 8:13); fools love being simple and hate knowledge (see Prov. 1:22); and it is impossible to love both God and money (see Matt. 6:24). And sometimes Scripture commands us to juxtapose them: "O you who love the LORD, hate evil!" (Ps. 97:10; cf. Amos 5:15); "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Rom. 12:9).

In addition, Scripture informs us that wrong loves and hates provoke God's wrath. For example, Jehu the prophet at one point confronts King Jehoshaphat by saying, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD" (2 Chron. 19:2; cf. Exod. 20:5). Earlier, Moses warns the Israelites,

*Know . . . that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today. (Deut. 7:9-11; cf. 32:41)*

Since the whole affective side of our natures involves our hearts, this means that God's wrath rests on those who have wrong—that is, unregenerate—hearts.

This allows us to understand why David and some of the other psalmists cite their hatreds as proof of their pure hearts. Sometimes they say they hate the ways and works of those who sin (see Ps. 101:3; 119:128; cf. Rev. 2:6) or the gatherings of liars, hypocrites, evildoers, and sinners:

*Prove me, O LORD, and try me;  
test my heart and my mind.  
For your steadfast love is before my eyes,  
and I walk in your faithfulness.  
I do not sit with men of falsehood,  
nor do I consort with hypocrites.  
I hate the assembly of evildoers,  
and I will not sit with the wicked. (Ps. 26:2-5; cf. 119:161-163)*

Sometimes, however, they declare that they hate not just ungodliness but ungodly people: "I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols" (Ps. 31:6); "I hate the double-minded" (Ps. 119:113); and, most shockingly,

*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! . . .  
Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! . . .  
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
I hate them with complete hatred;  
I count them my enemies.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps. 139:17, 19, 21-24)<sup>47</sup>*

This is shocking to us because we have uncritically accepted the saying, "Love the sinner; hate the sin." But David's claims in Psalm 139 parallel Scripture's claims about what God himself hates: God hates evil (see,

<sup>47</sup> Traditionally, this psalm is ascribed to David. But if, as I noted in footnote 29, the Scriptures themselves describe David as a person after God's own heart, we may then expect that David's emotions will generally be godly. And so it is especially significant that we find Scripture recording David's declaration that he hates ungodly people.

e.g., Deut. 12:31; 16:22; Prov. 6:16-18; Isa. 1:14; 61:8) and also evil-doers (see Ps. 5:5; 11:5; Prov. 6:19; Hos. 9:15).

Furthermore, hating specific things qualifies human beings for specific divinely sanctioned tasks, offices, and blessings. Thus Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, advises him on how to manage his workload by urging him to appoint others to help with specific tasks and says: "look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people . . . [to] judge the people" (Exod. 18:21ff.; cf. Prov. 15:27). In Psalms, this sort of qualification gets picked up and applied to the kind of kings God blesses (see Ps. 45:6ff.), and ultimately it is applied in Hebrews to God the Son:

*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.  
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness  
beyond your companions. (Heb. 1:8-9)*

Finally, Jesus makes the right hates key to Christian discipleship and obtaining eternal life by declaring that "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26), and "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:24ff.).

Hatred, dictionaries inform us, involves feeling extreme enmity or a strong aversion toward something or someone. When we hate something, we usually can't stand the sight of it, and we want it damaged or destroyed. And so these declarations by Jesus seem a bit puzzling, especially in the light of 1 Timothy 5, where Paul declares that Christians who do not provide for their relatives are worse than unbelievers—and how likely are we to do that if we bear them such ill will? In these cases we need to remember that sometimes Scripture uses the word *hate* comparatively, as a way of contrasting how much we must value being Christ's disciples over everything else, including our families or ourselves. In those cases, if we must choose, then we only avoid idolatry by choosing Christ and eternal life as if we hate everything else.

Scripture ascribes not only hatred but many other strong negative desires and emotions both to God and to God's people. For instance, it often characterizes God as *jealous* (see Exod. 34:14; Deut. 6:13-15; Nah. 1:2), and its references to God's *anger* and *wrath* are too frequent to be easily counted (see, e.g., Exod. 4:14; Josh. 7:1; Ezra 8:22; Ps. 78:49; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Rev. 14:9-11). Moreover, any adequate treatment of anger in Scripture must deal with what B. B. Warfield established in his article on "The Emotional Life of our Lord," namely, that Jesus himself, as the sinless God/man, was often angry or upset (see Mark 3:5; 10:14; John 2:14-16).<sup>48</sup>

Why does Scripture do this? It is not merely because we need to remember that strong negative desires and emotions are inevitable in a fallen world so that we will not be too discouraged or shocked when (in appropriate circumstances) we have them. It is also because we need the reassurance of knowing that *God* has them.<sup>49</sup> God is majestic in his holiness (see Exod. 15:11; 1 Chron. 16:29), which is manifested in his perfect righteousness, absolute justness, and moral purity (see Isa. 5:16; Zeph. 3:5), and which necessitates his inveterate hatred of all sin,

<sup>48</sup> See "The Emotional Life of our Lord," in Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950), 93-145. Warfield opens that article's second section like this:

The moral sense is not a mere faculty of discrimination between the qualities which we call right and wrong, which exhausts itself in their perception as different. The judgments it passes are not merely intellectual, but what we call moral judgments; that is to say, they involve approval and disapproval according to the qualities perceived. It would be impossible, therefore, for a moral being to stand in the presence of perceived wrong indifferent and unmoved. Precisely what we mean by a moral being is a being perceptive of the difference between right and wrong and reacting appropriately to right and wrong perceived as such. The emotions of indignation and anger belong therefore to the very self-expression of a moral being as such and cannot be lacking to him in the presence of wrong. We should know, accordingly, without instruction that Jesus, living in the conditions of this earthly life under the curse of sin, could not fail to be the subject of the whole series of angry emotions, and we are not surprised that even in the brief and broken narratives of his life-experiences which have been given to us, there have been preserved records of the manifestation in word and act of not a few of them. (107)

Warfield then shows that these emotions are particularly on display in the Gospel of Mark, when various Greek phrases within it are properly translated.

Moses, who is a type of Christ (see Deut. 18:18-19 with Acts 3:18-23), was often angry (see Exod. 11:8; 16:20; 32:19-20). Occasionally, his anger was sinful (see Num. 20:2-13 with Ps. 106:32-33), but it usually arose out of a proper concern for God's honor or for the welfare of God's people. On at least one occasion, it anticipated God's own anger (see Num. 16).

Sometimes it is claimed that Scripture's attitude to strong negative emotions like hatred, jealousy, and anger changes radically in the New Testament. For a refutation of this claim, see my piece "Godly Emotions" in *Modern Reformation* magazine as cited in footnote 3.

<sup>49</sup> There are deep philosophical and theological questions about the sense in which God has desires and especially emotions. When Scripture represents God as having emotions, it may be speaking only analogically. In other words, it may be saying no more than that, e.g., God is righteous and consequently must have whatever is the appropriate divine analogical equivalent of a righteous human being's emotional reaction to sin.

wickedness, and evil (see Isa. 61:8). We need to know that he hates these things because our fallen world contains so much that is wrong and evil. For instance, each of us gives and gets small but real affronts and injuries every day. Then there are less frequent but more horrifying evils and crimes against humanity. Encountering these things reminds us that the world is not the way it is supposed to be and that these wrongs need righting. Yet often we cannot right them, and no one else rights them. So we need the reassurance of knowing that it is part of God's nature and glory to get angry about sin (see Rom. 2:6-11) and to be continuously indignant at the world's many evils (Ps. 7:11; Nah. 1:2-13). God now disciplines us less than we deserve so that we are not consumed (see Ezra 9:13; Ps. 78:37-39; 103:8-14). Yet his anger and hatred against all wrongdoing and sin will endure until all wrongdoing is finally confronted and fully requited (see Deut. 7:10; Ps. 1:5-6; 21:8-13; Prov. 11:19-21; Zeph. 3:8-10; Rom. 2:1-5; Rev. 18:4-8).<sup>50</sup>

Scripture ascribes hatred and other strong negative desires and emotions not only to God but also to God's people because we must be encouraged to have them in the right circumstances. As counterintuitive as this may at first seem, to have such desires and emotions in the right circumstances is part of our glory, as creatures made in God's image.<sup>51</sup> They show that our hearts are attuned to God's own heart and thus that we are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. Thus if God's standards are flouted, then we should feel sorrow or indignation (see Jer. 13:15-17; Ps. 119:53). Consequently, one sign of true conversion is that we feel strong negative emotions when we should. As Edwards puts it, Christians "are

<sup>50</sup> For a much fuller examination of why it is part of God's glory to requite every wrong, see my "The Morality of Everlasting Punishment," *Reformation & Revival Journal* 5 (Fall 1996), 117-134. This is also available on the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals website: [www.alliancenet.org](http://www.alliancenet.org).

One reason why we need to be reassured that God will ultimately requite every wrong is that we then can often leave the dispensing of justice up to God. Indeed, Scripture sometimes commands us to do this: "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you" (Prov. 20:22; cf. Rom. 12:19). Christ, of course, is our exemplar in this: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet. 2:23).

<sup>51</sup> For instance, it is part of a mother's glory that she does not approve of any one of her children mistreating or endangering any other. Suppose, as can happen with very young children, that a young boy were to endanger his younger sister by (in a fit of pique) pushing her down some steps. In that situation, their mother should react very negatively to what her boy has done, which (among other things) shows him how unacceptable she takes his behavior to be. In these circumstances, we should think *less* and not *more* of this mother if she didn't react negatively. As Calvin makes clear in his commentary on Genesis 9:5-7, God commands us to be vigilant in protecting and nurturing the well-being of each other precisely because we are each made in his image, and thus to dishonor each other is the same as dishonoring him. For more on this, see my "Morality of Everlasting Punishment."

called upon to give evidence of their sincerity by this, ‘Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.’”<sup>52</sup>

But in addition to being reliable signs of true conversion, strong negative emotions in the right circumstances help us to be more godly in particular ways. One of the chief characteristics of a strong negative emotion like anger is that it motivates us. My being righteously angry can help me to think clearly and then act decisively.<sup>53</sup> Of course, anger can be sinful or turn sinful; and so we must be very careful not to indulge it inappropriately and thus, as Paul says, “give . . . opportunity to the devil” (Eph. 4:27). But this does not mean all anger is wrong, as Paul’s counsel, “Be angry and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26), makes clear.

Again, hatred’s tendency to persist can keep us focused on confronting and countering truly horrific evils in exactly the way that God’s people should; and detesting wickedness—that is, loathing and abhorring it—is good. Scripture calls various sexual acts and practices *detestable* (see Lev. 18:22; Deut. 22:5; Jer. 13:24-27), which means that God detests them (see 1 Kings 14:22-24 with Deut. 23:18), and so should we (see Deut. 7:26). In Moses and the prophets, these acts and practices are detestable partly because they were associated with pagan religious rituals (see Deut. 23:17-18; Jer. 5:7-9). Engaging in them thus meant breaking covenant with Yahweh and making covenant with pagan deities deliberately and explicitly (see Num. 25:1-3 and 31:15-16 with Rev. 2:14). Yet even then, the detestation that such acts and practices should produce was never completely separate from the fact that they fly in the face of the created order as God intended it (see, for instance, Deut. 24:1-4 with Gen. 2:24). This aspect of their immorality or perversity becomes more central in the Wisdom literature and in the New Testament (see Prov. 11:20; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Pet. 2:4-16). And it remains the primary reason why we, as God’s New Covenant people, should detest them.<sup>54</sup>

As Michael Grisanti says, in his *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* articles on the Hebrew terms

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 104.

<sup>53</sup> Think here of a father who discovers that a good friend of his has been abusing his daughter sexually. His anger can prompt him to think carefully about what has happened as well as what he should do and then goad him to do it in spite of his previous love for his friend.

<sup>54</sup> As I understand it, if an act or practice—such as homosexual sexual practice and homosexual marriage—perverts the natural moral order as God intended it (see Rom. 1:26-27), then it is supposed to be recognized as wrong by everyone and not merely by Christians; and so it is appropriate for a government to legislate against it.

that the *New International Version* translates as “detestable,” “Yahweh’s demand for Israel’s heartfelt obedience . . . provided Israel with a tangible means to fulfill her divine commission to be a ‘treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:5-6).”<sup>55</sup> Yahweh demanded that his people reject and loathe certain sexual acts and practices because they were incompatible with his holiness. He desired “to preserve the purity of his chosen people so as to enable them to clearly mirror his character to the surrounding pagan nations.” Whether or not they loathed these acts and practices “demonstrated their spiritual condition and served as an indicator of their coming fate.”

We, in God’s New Covenant times, are God’s new royal priesthood and holy nation (see 1 Pet. 2:9). And we also are called to be holy because he is holy (see Lev. 20:7-26; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). This means that “there must not be *even a hint* of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity [among us], . . . because these are improper for God’s holy people” (Eph. 5:3, NIV; see 5:3-20; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). In the Beatitudes, Jesus stresses that the threshold for sexual immorality is much lower than the Jewish people had taken it to be (see Matt. 5:27-32). Paul is so averse to any sexual impurity that he rules even “foolish talk” and “crude joking” “out of place” (Eph. 5:4).

But in our time the floodgates of sexual immorality and moral perversity have been thrown wide open. Many in our culture are constantly attempting to make us more tolerant and thus less inclined to react strongly against such things. One of their primary strategies involves their redescribing various forms of sexual immorality and moral perversity in ways that make those acts and practices less likely to arouse emotional aversion. For instance, some segments of the homosexual community are working hard to destigmatize the sexual molestation of pre- and post-pubescent boys by homosexual adults. In 1998, an article appeared in the American Psychological Association’s prestigious *Psychological Bulletin* claiming that scientific evidence does not support the common belief that such sexual encounters invariably harm the boys involved. Consequently, it concluded, it is inappropriate to label all such encounters “sexual abuse.” Willing encounters “with positive reac-

<sup>55</sup> Michael Grisanti, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 4:315. The other two quotations from Grisanti in this paragraph are found, respectively, at 4:315 and 4:244.

tions” should just be labeled “*adult-child sex*.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in 2001 Peter Singer of Princeton University’s Center for Human Values published an essay on the webzine Nerve.com that tried to normalize bestiality by highlighting some of the “science” in Midas Dekkers’s pro-bestiality book, *Dearest Pet*.

In both cases, this strategy involved comparing these still generally abhorred practices with sexual practices that our culture no longer decries. The *Psychological Bulletin* article compared pedophilia with behaviors like masturbation, homosexuality, oral sex, and sexual promiscuity, all of which were once but are no longer classified as pathologies in the American Psychological Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Singer associates bestiality with the once-widespread beliefs that contraception and masturbation were wrong as well as with practices such as heterosexual sodomy and homosexuality that our society now tolerates and sometimes celebrates.

It is clear that, with the likely exception of contraception, God detests practices like these (see Lev. 18:22-30; 20:13, 15-16; Deut. 27:21). Yet is it clear that *we* do? Do we feel emotional aversion in the face of sexual immorality and moral perversion? Are we willing to serve as mirrors of God’s character to our culture by expressing it? On any given evening, any number of us watch television programs that break the bounds of propriety that the Scriptures set. We may think that our assent to Scripture’s sexual standards is enough and that it does not really matter that we do not emotionally detest what we see, but Scripture tells us otherwise: “O you who love the Lord, *hate* evil.”

Have we allowed the culture around us to “squeeze [us] into its own mould” rather than allowing “God [to] re-make [us] so that [our] whole attitude of mind is changed” (Rom. 12:2, *Phillips*)? In Jeremiah, God condemns those who do not know how to blush (see 8:12). Paul declares that “it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret” (Eph. 5:12, NIV). Strong negative emotions are important indicators of who—and *whose*—we are. To claim to be Christians and yet not to feel emotional aversion when Christian moral standards are violated is, at

<sup>56</sup> See Mary Eberstadt’s “‘Pedophilia Chic’ Re-considered,” *Weekly Standard* (January 1/January 8, 2001).



best, to exhibit a kind of mental schizophrenia between our heads and our hearts.

The Psalmist declares that God's wrath against human beings brings him praise and that its survivors are restrained by that very wrath (see 76:10, NIV). It is part of our task, as God's holy people, to manifest his holiness through our emotions. Moral perversion makes headway in our culture when we are not moved to decry the less-shocking forms of sexual immorality. How much better might the moral situation of our time be if many of us could say, "I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation" (Jer. 15:17, NIV)?

"TAKE AND READ!"

Negative desires and emotions like jealousy, hatred, anger, indignation, and fear can be godly, then, if we have them in the appropriate circumstances. But then how can we tell that a desire or emotion is or is not godly, since we can't just assume that all positive desires and emotions are godly and all negative ones are not?

The only sure indicator is that our desires and emotions conform to those that God approves of in his Scriptures. Holy affections are desires and emotions that God has or that he wants his people to have. The way that we know what he wants us to desire and feel is by reading the Scriptures and noting what his saints are represented as properly desiring and feeling as well as what God commands and counsels his saints to desire and feel. This is what Edwards sets out to do in Part Three of his *Religious Affections*. Its whole purpose is to show us what in Scripture distinguishes "truly gracious and holy affections" from all others.

Thus Part Three is the treasure trove in Edwards's great work. Everything that I have written just gets you ready to appreciate it. And, somewhat in the manner of Philip's reply to Nathanael early in John's Gospel, to any Christian who doubts what is to be found there, I would say, "Come and see" (see John 1:43-46). Pore through those pages of Edwards's great book, and you will find much to enlighten your mind and warm your heart. Indeed, you will find truths that will bring you joy from now throughout eternity.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cherry, Conrad. *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1966.  
Perhaps the most reliable survey of Edwards's theological thinking.

McDermott, Gerald. *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment*. Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000.

McDermott, an accomplished Edwards scholar, uses the outline and arguments of *Religious Affections* to provide a contemporary rendition of this classic work. McDermott's more recent work on Edwards needs to be read more critically.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

This is the third volume in Plantinga's justly famous trilogy on epistemology. In chapter 8 he explores the cognitive aspects of faith. Then in chapter 9 he examines the affective side of faith, using Edwards's *Religious Affections* as the basis for his discussion.

Roberts, Robert C. *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

A helpful, full-blown philosophical treatment of emotions by a noted philosopher.

Robinson, Jeff. "Religious Affections: Sorting the Wheat from the Chaff." *Founders Journal* (Summer 2003): 25-30.

A shorter article that uses *Religious Affections* to help us sort the good from the bad in intense religious experience.

Spring, Gardiner. *The Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1966.

This is a nice attempt to restate much of Edwards's *Religious Affections* in simpler language.

Talbot, Mark R. *The Signs of True Conversion*. Today's Issues Booklets. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.

A booklet exploring the scriptural steps for and signs of true conversion.

Wainwright, William. *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Chapter 1 of this work—previously published in part as “Jonathan Edwards and the Sense of the Heart,” *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 43-62—utilizes Edwards’s *Religious Affections* to examine the relationship between reason and our “passional nature” (or the reasons of our hearts).

Walton, Brad. *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2002.

A scholarly work that explores the connection between Edwards’s view of the religious affections and his sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritan forerunners, arguing that the former extends the latter.

Warfield, B. B. “The Emotional Life of our Lord.” In Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, 93-145. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950.

In this brilliant essay, Warfield argues that since Christ has “all sinless emotions,” it behooves us to note the full range of our Lord’s emotions.