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# Jonathan Edwards

1703 - 1758

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Michael Holloway  
Evening Gathering  
March 2006

# Some Overlapping Famous Folks

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John Locke 1632-1704

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Isaac Newton 1642-1727

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Jonathan Swift 1667-1745

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J. S. Bach 1684-1750

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Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758

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John Wesley 1703-1791

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Benjamin Franklin 1706-1790

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Carl Linnaeus 1707-1778

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David Hume 1711-1775

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George Whitefield 1714-1770

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William Blackstone 1723-1780

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George Washington 1732-1799

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# Chronology of Edwards' Life - 1

- **1703** (October 5): born in East Windsor, Connecticut (5<sup>th</sup> child of an eventual 11 – only male)
  - **1716-20**: Undergraduate at Yale College
  - **1720-22**: M.A. student at Yale
  - **1721**: Becomes convinced of his own regeneration
  - **1722-1723** (April): Pastor of church in New York City
  - **1723** (November) - **1724** (May): Pastor of church in Bolton, Connecticut
  - **1724-26**: Tutors at Yale
  - **1726**: Called to assist his grandfather Solomon Stoddard in Northampton, Massachusetts
  - **1727** (July 28): Marries Sarah Pierpont
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# Chronology of Edwards' Life - 2

- **1728** (August): First child, Sarah, born
  - **1729** (February): Becomes full pastor at Northampton on Stoddard's death
  - **1734-35**: Northampton & Connecticut Valley awakening
  - **1737**: *A Faithful Narrative* brings worldwide attention to awakening
  - **1740**: George Whitefield tours New England; Great Awakening
  - **1741**: Preaches *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*
  - **1746**: *Religious Affections* published
  - **1748**: Begins to insist on credible profession of faith for admission to Lord's table
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# Chronology of Edwards' Life - 3

- **1749:** *Life of David Brainerd* published
  - **1750** (April): Last child, Pierrepont, born (11<sup>th</sup>, 10 survived; 9 made credible professions of faith)
  - **1750** (July 1): Dismissed from Northampton
  - **1751:** Becomes Pastor and missionary to Indians in Stockbridge, Massachusetts
  - **1754:** *Freedom of the Will* published
  - **1758:** *Original Sin* published
  - **1758** (January): Installed as President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton)
  - **1758** (March 22): Dies of smallpox inoculation
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# Some of Edwards' Writings - 1

- *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption*
- *A Divine and Supernatural Light*
- *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*
- *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God*
- *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*
- *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*
- *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*
- *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God*

Library has a complete set (to date) of Yale's *Works of Jonathan Edwards*

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# Some of Edwards' Writings - 2

- *A careful and strict Enquiry into The modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* --- commonly called *Freedom of the Will*
- *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*
- *The Nature of True Virtue*
- *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin defended; Evidences of its Truth produced, and Arguments to the Contrary answered* --- commonly called *Original Sin*
- *"Miscellanies"*
- *"The Mind"*

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# Misunderstanding Edwards

- Edwards is from time to time accused of being non-orthodox in certain doctrines
    - Musings about the omnipresence of God have been claimed to support pantheism
    - Inquiries concerning the fall have been claimed to make God the 'author' of Adam's sin
    - Recently, some have claimed that Edwards did not properly understand justification by faith alone
  - Some of Edwards's later followers did have problems in these and other areas; but he did not
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# Understanding Edwards

- A good understanding of Edwards provides a remedy to several maladies that infect the church
    - “Head” / “heart” dichotomy and other errors concerning the being of man
    - Degradation of reasoning below its proper priority
    - Elevation of reasoning above its proper priority
    - Errors concerning the sovereignty of God
    - Valuing words over actions
    - Presumptive regeneration
    - Elevating the corporate too highly at the expense of the individual, particularly in regards to regeneration
    - Elevating the individual too highly at the expense of the corporate, particularly in regards to duties
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# Key to Understanding Edwards - 1

- Recognize that understanding him is not a simple task; it requires hard, careful work
    - He had a tendency to write long, complicated sentences
    - Some of his works are “thoughts in progress”
    - He tackled some of the most difficult issues in theology
    - He was blessed by God with an intellect far superior to most people’s
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# Key to Understanding Edwards - 2

- For any passage, determine whether Edwards is applying Proverbs 26:4 or Proverbs 26:5
    - Proverbs 26:4: Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.  
Arguments based on Scriptural truth and reasoning from it to yield either (a) good and necessary consequences of that Scriptural truth, or (b) confirmation of other Scriptural truth not assumed in the argument
    - Proverbs 26:5: Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.  
Arguments based on presuppositions and premises of others taken to their logical (absurd) conclusions
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# Key to Understanding Edwards - 3

- Recognize his view of the right prepositional relationship between Scriptural truth and human reasoning ...

Scriptural truth comes ***before***  
human reasoning.

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# The Mind 10, “Truth”

“Truth, in the general, may be defined, after the most strict and metaphysical manner: ‘the consistency and agreement of our ideas, with the ideas of God.’ ...

Corol. 1. Hence we see in how strict a sense it may be said, that God is truth itself. ...

Corol. 3. ... if we had perfect ideas of all things at once, that is, could have all in one view, we should know all truth at the same moment, and there would be no such thing as ratiocination or finding out truth. And reasoning is only of use to us in consequence of the paucity of our ideas, and because we can have but very few in view at once. Hence it is evident that all things are self-evident to God.”

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## Miscellanies 350, “Christian Religion. Divine Revelation”

“Were it not for divine revelation, I am persuaded that there is no one doctrine of that which we call natural religion [but] would, notwithstanding all philosophy and learning, forever be involved in darkness, doubts, endless disputes, and dreadful confusion. Many things, now they are revealed, seem very plain, and as if we could easily arrive at a certainty of them if we never had had a revelation of them. It is one thing to see that a truth is exceedingly agreeable to reason, after we have been told it and have had it explained to us, and have been told the reasons of it; and another to find it out, and clearly and certainly to explain it, by mere reason. 'Tis one thing to prove a thing after we are showed how, and another to find it out and prove it of ourselves.

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## Miscellanies 350, “Christian Religion. Divine Revelation”

“If there never had been any revelation, I believe the world would be full of endless disputes about the very being of a God, whether the world was from eternity or not and whether the form and order of the world don't result from the mere nature of matter: ten thousand schemes there would be about it. And if it was allowed that there was a first cause of all things, there would be endless disputes and abundance of uncertainty, to determine what sort of a thing that first cause was. ...

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## Miscellanies 350, “Christian Religion. Divine Revelation”

“We hardly can have a conception [of] how it would be if there never had been any revelation. For we are bred up in the light of revelation from our very infancy. If there was a nation of philosophers, where all were taught philosophy as soon as they came to be capable of understanding anything, and so they were bred up in it, they would be surprised at the ignorance, the thoughtlessness of a people that did not meddle in it. ... Knowledge is easy to us that understand by revelation, but we do not know what brutes we should have been, if there never had been any revelation.”

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# Key to Understanding Edwards - 4

- Realize that he treats man as a whole being, not as a collection of parts or faculties
  - 'soul', 'mind', 'heart', 'head' are not truly different concepts, but rather synonyms with only a slightly different emphases
  - Various activities of the soul may be given different names ('will', 'affections', ...), but they should not be thought of as separate or independent
  - The soul and body cannot be divided clearly, either, in that each can strongly effect the other

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## Some Excerpts from Edwards ...

- Miscellanies 237, “Eternal Punishment”
  - Miscellanies 761, “Free Will. Man’s Impotence”
  - Miscellanies 765, “Mysteries in Religion”
  - Miscellanies ‘o’, “Irresistible Grace”
  - From sermon “Christian Knowledge”
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## Miscellanies 237, “Eternal Punishment”

“It seems to me certain that the wicked that are punished by God will continue to hate God all the while they are punished, and that their punishment, instead of humbling them, will stir up their hatred to God, and make them blaspheme him. Now it is not probable that their punishment will be either taken off or mitigated whilst they do so, nor that they will cease so to do while their punishment is upon them. Those minds that are so destitute of principles of virtue, will unavoidably dreadfully hate that being that brings so much misery upon them. Therefore, the punishment of the damned will be eternal.”

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## Miscellanies 761, “Free Will. Man’s Impotence”

“If men are wholly unable to believe of themselves, or unless God works faith in them, yet that is no argument that they are not chargeable with the blame of their own unbelief: for though man can’t believe in Christ of himself, yet that is no argument that he can’t reject him of himself. ‘Tis no argument that because one of two opposites is of God, that therefore the other is so too; but the contrary. If sweet water proceed from a certain fountain, that is no argument that bitter water is from the same fountain; but on the contrary, an argument that is from some other source (Jas. 3:11). ...”

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## Miscellanies 761, “Free Will. Man’s Impotence”

“... Sinners, in laying the blame of their rejection of Christ to God from that, that all faith must be of God, and not of themselves, argue in this manner: God is the fountain of all light and, therefore, he must be the fountain of all darkness too; he is the author of all good and, therefore, the blame of all evil must be laid to him: whereas it would certainly be more natural and rational to argue contrariwise. ... If all faith and receiving Christ be from God, and that be true in John 6:44 ... then ‘tis natural to suppose that unbelief is not of God, but of ourselves. ‘Tis no argument that man can’t hate Christ of himself, because God is the bestower of all love to Christ.”

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## Miscellanies 765, “Mysteries in Religion”

“If one seeks for anything in the dark, by so low a faculty of discerning as the sense of feeling, or by the sense of seeing with a dim light, sometimes we cannot find it, though it be there. It seems to [be] impossible that it should be there; but yet when a clear light comes to shine into the place, and we discern by a better faculty, viz. of sight, or the same faculty in a clearer manner, the thing appears very plain to us. So doubtless many truths will hereafter appear plain, when we come to look on them by the bright light of heaven, that now are involved in mystery and darkness.”

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## Miscellanies ‘o’, “Irresistible Grace”

“The dispute about grace's being resistible or irresistible, is perfect nonsense. For the effect of grace is upon the will, so that it is nonsense, except it be proper to say, that a man with his will can resist his own will, or except it be possible for a man to will a thing and not will it at the same time, and so far as he does will it. Or if you speak of enlightening grace, and say this grace is upon the understanding, it is nothing but the same nonsense in other words. For them the sense runs thus: that a man, after he has seen so plainly that a thing is best for him that he wills it, yet he can at the same time nill it. If you say he can will anything he pleases, this is most certainly true, for who can deny that a man can will anything he does already will? That a man can will anything that he pleases, is just as certain as what is, is. ...

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# Miscellanies 'o', "Irresistible Grace"

... Wherefore it is nonsense to say that after a man has seen so plainly a thing to be so much best for him that he will it, he could have not willed it if he had pleased. That is to say, if he had not willed it, he could have not willed it. It is certain that a man never does anything but what he can do. But to say, after a man has willed a thing, that he could have not willed it if he had pleased, is to suppose two wills in a man: the one to will which goes first, and the other to please or choose to will. And so with the same reason we may say that there is another will to please; to please to will; and so on to a thousand. Wherefore, to say that the man could have willed otherwise if he had pleased, is just all one as to say, that if he had willed otherwise, then we might be sure he could will otherwise."

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# From sermon “Christian Knowledge”

“Seek not to grow in knowledge chiefly for the sake of applause, and to enable you to dispute with others; but seek it for the benefit of your souls, and in order to practice. ... Practice according to what knowledge you have. This will be the way to know more. ... You all have by you a large treasure of divine knowledge, in that you have the Bible in your hands; therefore be not contented in possessing but little of this treasure. God has spoken much to you in the Scripture; labor to understand as much of what he says as you can. God has made you all reasonable creatures; therefore let not the noble faculty of reason or understanding lie neglected. Content not yourselves with having so much knowledge as is thrown in your way, and as you receive in some sense unavoidably by the frequent inculcation of divine truth in the preaching of the word, of which you are obliged to be hearers, or as you accidentally gain in conversation; but let it be very much your business to search for it, and that with the same diligence and labor with which men are wont to dig in mines of silver and gold.”

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# On Edwards' Tombstone (in Latin)

“Would you know, oh Traveller, what manner of person he was whose mortal part lies here?”

A man indeed, in body tall yet graceful, attenuated through acidity and abstinence and studies most intense; in the acuteness of his intellect, his sagacious judgment and his prudence second to none among mortals; in his knowledge of sciences and the liberal arts remarkable, in sacred criticism eminent, and a theologian distinguished without equal; an unconquered defender of the Christian Faith and a preacher grave, solemn, discriminating; and by the favor of God most happy in the success and issue of his life.

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# On Edwards' Tombstone (in Latin)

Illustrious in his piety, sedate in manners, but toward others friendly and [kind], he lived to be loved and venerated, and now, alas! to be lamented in his death.

The bereaved college mourns for him, and the church mourns, but Heaven rejoices to receive him: Go hence, oh traveller, and his pious footsteps follow.”

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