

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Author's Preface
11 March 2001
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(Note: These notes are a lightly edited version of the notes that I used in teaching the class. The form is based on the style used by Winston Churchill for his speech notes. The HTML version doesn't show indentation, but the PDF does.)

Last week, we talked about the life and works of Jonathan Edwards.

Some one tell me when and where Edwards was born.

He was born on October 5, 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut

Where did he go to College?

Yale

Where were his two main pastorates?

Northampton and Stockbridge, both in Massachusetts.
At Stockbridge, he was a missionary to the Indians.

When did he die?

March 22, 1758

What killed him?

a smallpox inoculation

What are some of the works that he wrote?

A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections
The Freedom of the Will
Original Sin
Concerning the End for Which God Created the World
The Miscellanies
The Mind

Does anyone remember

the definition of truth that Edwards wrote
in one of his essays in the "Mind"?

"Truth is the consistency and agreement
of our ideas with the ideas of God."

Are there any questions about what we talked about last week?

Three things I'll mention from comments
folks made after last weeks class.

First, a couple of people asked me
who the second of my two heros was —
I said last week that JE was one of my two big heros —
A Navy destroyer named after him
was commissioned yesterday:
The U.S.S. Winston S. Churchill.

Second,
one thing that I forgot to mention last week,

is that Jonathan Edwards was not a dynamic speaker.
In fact, by all accounts,
he had a fairly weak,
and not particularly interesting voice.

Third,
one person pointed out that
I, on at least one occasion,
put a two
where a chew
belongs in the name
of the state in which Edwards spent
most of his adult life.

Having gone to graduate school
in state with a frequently mispronounced name—
When you write Illinois there's an s
on the end, but there isn't when you say it—
I understand how annoying mispronunciation can be.

Let's move on then,
to talk about Jonathan Edwards'
Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections.

Today, we're only going to look at the Author's Preface,
in which Edwards explains why he wrote the book.

Here's the first paragraph:

There is no question whatsoever,
that is of greater importance to mankind,
and that it more concerns every individual person
to be well resolved in,
than this:

What are the distinguishing qualifications
of those that are in favor with God,
and entitled to his eternal rewards?

Or, which comes to the same thing,
What is the nature of true religion?
And wherein
do lie
the distinguishing notes
of that virtue and holiness
that is acceptable in the sight of God?

But though it be of such importance,
and though we have clear and abundant light in the word of God
to direct us in this matter,
yet there is no one point, wherein professing Christians
do more differ one from another.

It would be endless to reckon up
the variety of opinions in this point,

that divide the Christian world;
making manifest the truth of that declaration of our Savior,
"Strait is the gate and narrow is the way,
that leads to life,
and few there be that find it."

What does this paragraph mean?

Knowing how to distinguish
the saved from the lost
is one of the most important things
we can be able to do;
however,
professing Christians are greatly divided on how to do it.

Edwards goes on to say that he's writing
the book to help Christians in this matter.

He also writes about how the controversies of the day
make it difficult to consider the question carefully and impartially.

Does anyone know what those controversies about?

The Great Awakening,
and whether it was a work
entirely of God,
entirely of Satan,
or a mixture of the two.

Never one to hide his positions,
Edwards explains in the preface,
where he stands on the controversy,
which is that it contains
a mixture of the good and bad,
and compares this to each individual believer:

It is a hard thing to be a hearty zealous friend
of what has been good and glorious,
in the late extraordinary appearances,
and to rejoice much in it;

and at the same time
to see the evil and pernicious tendency of what has been bad,
and earnestly to oppose that.

But yet, I am humbly
but fully persuaded,
we shall never be in the way of truth,
nor go on in a way acceptable to God,
and tending to the advancement of Christ's kingdom
till we do so.

There is indeed something very mysterious in it,
that so much good,
and so much bad,
should be mixed together in the church of God;

as it is a mysterious thing,
and what has puzzled and amazed many a good Christian,
that there should be that which is so divine and precious,
as the saving grace of God,
and the new and divine nature dwelling
in the same heart,
with so much corruption,
hypocrisy,
and iniquity, in a particular saint.

Edwards goes on to show from Scripture
that this pattern of great good mixed with great evil
is quite common.

Can anyone give some examples from Scripture that show such a pattern?
The Israelites during the exodus from Egypt.
The situations that prompted Paul's letters to Corinth and Galatia.

Edwards then explains how Satan uses
this mixture of the good and bad to hurt the church.

It is by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true,
not discerned and distinguished,
that the devil has had his greatest advantage
against the cause and kingdom of Christ,
all along hitherto.

It is by this means, principally,
that he has prevailed against all revivings of religion,
that ever have been since the first founding
of the Christian church.

By this, he hurt the cause of Christianity,
in and after the apostolic age,
much more than by all the persecutions
of both Jews and Heathens.

The apostles, in all their epistles,
show themselves much more concerned
at the former mischief, than the latter.

Think about this for a minute.

In the New Testament letters,
how often do the writers warn the church about
dangers from inside the church,
compared to dangers from outside?

There are some admonitions to stand firm in the face of persecution,
but the majority of warnings
are about false teachings *inside* the church.

Let's consider one example.

Look in your Bibles at 2 Peter.

Someone read beginning at chapter 1 and verse twenty
and going to the 2:3:

2 Peter 1:20-2:3(NASB) But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

The warning here is about
"false teachers *among* you",
that is, *within* the church.

The main danger was not from the outside,
but from the inside.

Let's continue with Edwards:

By this, Satan prevailed against the reformation,
began by Luther, Zwingli, &c.,
to put a stop to its progress,
and bring it into disgrace;
ten times more,
than by all those bloody, cruel,
and before unheard of persecutions
of the church of Rome.

By this,
principally,
has he prevailed against revivals of religion,
that have been in our nation since the reformation.

By this
he prevailed against New England,
to quench the love and spoil the joy of her espousals,
about a hundred years ago.

And I think,
I have had opportunity enough to see plainly
that
by this
the devil has prevailed against
the late great revival of religion in New England,
so happy and promising in its beginning.

Satan hasn't changed his strategy, according to Edwards.

The strategy is still to do mischief
primarily from

within the church.

Edwards describes the state of the church in New England like this:

It is

by this means,
that the daughter of Zion in this land
now lies on the ground,
in such piteous circumstances
as we now behold her;
with her garments rent,
her face disfigured,
her nakedness exposed,
her limbs broken,
and weltering in the blood of her own wounds,
and in no wise able to arise,
and this,
so quickly after her late great joys and hopes.

In our day,

we tend to think of the 1700's
as a time when the church was
much stronger than it is today.

And it almost certainly was.

But that doesn't mean the church was strong then.
It just means that we're in a truly sorry state today.

Let's think a little bit more about the state of the church today.

As we've just seen,

Edwards asserts, as did the apostles,
that errors from within the church
are more likely to do it harm than errors from without.

What are some errors that exist within the church in the U.S.
that have done much harm to the cause of Christ?

There are 3 particular ones that I want to address this morning:

One prevalent error in the church today is Anti-intellectualism:
the denying of the importance of knowing truth to Christianity.

In our day, the vast majority of the professing church,
even within the reformed ranks,
denounces the importance of doctrine,
claiming that it is divisive and unimportant.

This is utter nonsense,
and utterly opposed to what the Scripture teaches.

There are many results of this prevailing anti-intellectualism:

1. Christians are perceived, correctly, by the world as being generally dumb.

2. Christians are often easily fooled by charlatans, and by pseudo-intellectuals.
3. And there are plenty of such people,
because Christian scholarship is often an oxymoron,
instead of a redundancy,
which is what it ought to be.

For example,
much of what passes for "Creation Science" is very poor science.

This is inexcusable.

Please don't misunderstand me.

I am a young earth creationist.

I believe the Scripture
clearly teaches that God created everything in 7 days,
and that He did so relatively recently,

Good science based on this view is possible,
and there are a few people who do this,
such as Russell Humphries.

Sadly, 'though,
much of what is said, and written,
by young earth creationists is not good science,
and it is rightly ridiculed by non-believers.

It ought not be tolerated by believers, either,
but it is,
because we care so little about truth in every area of life.

Here's another example.

Many Christian histories are very bad, too.

Consider the founding of the United States.

Most modern secular histories try to suggest
that no important founder was an orthodox Christian,
which is false.

The error in modern Christian histories is different,
but no less erroneous.

They suggest that every important founder,
with the possible exception of Mr. Jefferson,
was an orthodox Christian.

This is utterly false,
and the cause of Christianity is in no way helped
by distortions such as this.

One more example:
the Y2K hysteria that gripped many professing Christians.

There was never any legitimate reason to fear Y2K disaster,
and not a single,
internationally respected expert on software issues,
ever suggested there was,
except for those attempting to make money on the hysteria.

Yet,
many Christians,
because they didn't know the right people to listen to,
got caught up in the silliness.

The Bible is as far from being anti-intellectual as it is possible to be.

Listen to these words from Proverbs 1:20-33

[20] Wisdom shouts in the street,
She lifts her voice in the square;
[21] At the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings:
[22] "How long, O naive ones,
will you love being simple-minded?
And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing
And fools hate knowledge?
[23] "Turn to my reproof,
Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
[24] "Because I called and you refused,
I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention;
[25] And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof;
[26] I will also laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
[27] When your dread comes like a storm
And your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.
[28] "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently but they will not find me,
[29] Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.
[30] "They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof.
[31] "So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way
And be satiated with their own devices.
[32] "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them,
And the complacency of fools will destroy them.
[33] "But he who listens to me shall live securely
And will be at ease from the dread of evil."

By God's grace,
not everyone has succumbed

to the anti-intellectualism that pervades our churches.

Listen to these two quotations.

Christianity includes the primacy of the intellect
and the sovereign claims of truth.
There is no antithesis
between the head and the heart,
no depreciation of intellectual belief.
Christianity cannot exist
without the truth
of certain definite historical propositions.
To deny the truth of such propositions
or to call them symbols of some mystic experience
is not Christianity.

On the contrary,
by faith we *understand* that God created the universe;
by faith we *assent* to the proposition
that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him;
by faith we *know* that Jesus rose from the dead.

Here's the second quote:

And before we evangelicals offer a sanctimonious sigh
about secular humanists and public education,
it should be kept in mind that we do precisely the same thing
when we dismiss a debate
or a point of clarification on the grounds,
"Well, we just can't know these things 'til we see Jesus,"
or,
"But that's theology."

We also do the same thing in our churches
when cliches pass for content,
pep talks for sermons,
and vague sentiment for serious teaching.

When we turn to the Bible,
not to learn from it or to be challenged by it,
but to be merely inspired,
we become the very relativists we disdain.

Every time someone says,
"This is what this verse means to me,"
or
"God told me ...,"
or
"I know this might not be what this verse is saying,
but the application is edifying,"
relativism sets in.

As we give away more territory,
we secularized America.

It was we who left a vacuum to be filled by alternative world views.
Unbelief grows because the reasons for faith
are either internally inadequate
or because they are inadequately defended.

The first quote was from Gordon Clark's book *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*.

The second quote was from
Michael Scott Horton
in *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern Evangelicalism*.

Unless the church soon listens to words such as these,
I fear that God will say of us,
what He said of His people long ago
through the prophet Hosea:

**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.**
(Hosea 4:6)

Another prevalent error within the church today is Antinomianism:
the denying of the importance of
God's commandments to the believer.

Just as the vast majority of professing Christians today
deny the importance of the intellect,
an equally large majority also
denies the importance
of following God's commandments.

The great Scripture truth that we're
not under the law, but under grace,
has been perverted,
just as Paul warned,
to mean that a Christian can do whatever he wants.

This despite the fact, that the very context in which the phrase appears
shows that the meaning is anything but that.

Turn in your Bibles to Romans 6. **Will someone please read verses 1-14.**

(Rom 6:1) What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?
(2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?
(3) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been
baptized into His death?
(4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ
was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
(5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also
in the likeness of His resurrection,
(6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away

with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;
(7) for he who has died is freed from sin.
(8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,
(9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.
(10) For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.
(11) Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.
(12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,
(13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.
(14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

The same Paul who said we're not under law but under grace,
also said
do not let sin reign
and
that sin shall not master us.

The final prevelant error within the church today
that I want to talk about this morning is Egalitarianism:
the denying of differences in abilities among people.

Egalitarianism is just as anti-Scriptural
as anti-intellectualism and antinomianism.

The Scripture teaches that God
has made different people different.

He gives different gifts,
different abilities,
different interests,
different personalities.

Our society wants to deny this.

And, even within the professing church,
even within the professing conservative, reformed church,
most people want to
deny this--if not in words, then certainly in actions.

We may want to deny it,
but it can't be really be denied,
not from experience,
and not from Scripture either.

Some people are smarter than others.

Some people are more attractive than others.

Some people are able to teach, and some people are not.

Some people run fast, others do not.

Some people are fit to lead, others are not.

I could go on and on.

There are several Scripture passages
that show the falsity of egalitarianism clearly,
but we'll only look at one.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 12.

Verses 4 and 5 say this in the NASB:

{4} Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

{5} And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

There are differences,
and God is responsible for them.

Let's skip down to verse 12 and continue through verse 21:

{12} For even as the body is one and yet has many members,
and all the members of the body, though they are many,
are one body,
so also is Christ.

{13} For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,
whether Jews or Greeks,
whether slaves or free, and we were all made
to drink of one Spirit.

{14} For the body is not one member, but many.

{15} If the foot should say,
"Because I am not a hand,
I am not a part of the body,"
it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

{16} And if the ear should say,
"Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,"
it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

{17} If the whole body were an eye,
where would the hearing be?
If the whole were hearing,
where would the sense of smell be?

{18} But now God has placed the members,
each one of them, in the body,
just as He desired.

{19} And if they were all one member,
where would the body be?

{20} But now there are many members, but one body.

{21} And the eye cannot say to the hand,
"I have no need of you";
or again the head to the feet,
"I have no need of you."

The Corinthians apparently had a tendency
towards egalitarianism, too.

They wanted to be the same,

but Paul told them they weren't.

There are lots more modern errors that we could talk about,
but that's enough for now.

As we continue to study *Religious Affections*,
we'll see how Edwards can help us to avoid errors
such as these that we've talked about.

It is important that we learn to do this, for as Edwards wrote:

Therefore it greatly concerns us
to use our utmost endeavors
clearly to discern,
and have it well settled and established,
wherein true religion does consist.

Till this be done,
it may be expected,
that great revivings of religion will be but of short continuance;

till this be done,
there is but little good
to be expected of all our warm debates
in conversation and from the press,
not knowing clearly and distinctly
what we ought to contend for.

Next week,
we'll look at Part I,
and learn what Edwards means by the term
"the affections",
and why they're important.

Your assignment for next week is to read Part I,
if you have the book,
and, even if you don't have the book,
come up with a definition for "the affections"
that uses exactly 3 words.

I'll post some hints on the web page during the week.

I'll close with another selection from the *"Miscellanies"*.

This passage is from #82,
and is titled "Decree."

It addresses the question of why we should pray,
even though God has sovereignly decreed all that will happen.

This is a question that many people ask.

I've never seen it answered as concisely or as clearly as Edwards does here.

"They say,
to what purpose are praying and striving and attending on means,
if all was irreversibly determined by God before?

But to say
that all was determined
before these prayers and striving
is a very wrong way of speaking,
and begets those ideas in the mind
which correspond to no realities with respect to God.

His decrees of our everlasting state
were not before
our prayers and strivings,
for these are as much present with God from all eternity
as they are the moment they are present with us.

They are present as part of his decree,
or rather as the same,
and they did as really exist
in eternity with respect to God
as much at one time as another.

Therefore we can no more fairly argue
that these will be in vain
because God has foredetermined,
than we can that they would be in vain
if they existed as soon as the decree;
for so they do,
inasmuch as they are a part of it."