

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
**Part I Concerning the Nature of the Affections,
and Their Importance in Religion**
18 March 2001
by C. Michael Holloway

(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.)

Good morning. Let's begin with prayer.

Dear Father,
May all that we do and say this morning glorify You.
In Christ's name we ask, Amen.

This is our third class.

As I always do,
let's begin by reviewing what we've covered so far.

In the first class,
we talked about the life and works of Jonathan Edwards.

When was Edwards was born.
October 5, 1703 (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 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

Last week,
we discussed the Author's Preface to *Religious Affections*.

What event prompted Edwards to write the book?

The Great Awakening.

Did Edwards believe that the Great Awakening
as all truth,
all error,
or a mixture of the two?

A mixture of the two.

Is this mixture of good and evil
normal or abnormal?

It is normal.

So why did Edwards write the book?

To address the question:

“How do we discern between that which is good,
and that which is evil?”

Does Satan most often attack the church
from within
or from without?

From within —
the greatest dangers to truth
usually come from within the church.

What 3 examples of error within the modern church
did we discuss last week?

Anti-intellectualism — denying the importance of truth.
Antinomianism — denying the importance of God's law.
Egalitarianism — denying differences among people.

Before we start with new material,
I want to say a bit more
about the mixture of truth and error within the church.

Depending on your personality,
you will tend to either dismiss the truth because of the error,
or excuse the error because of the truth.

For me,
if there's something that's 98% true,
and 2% wrong,
I'll tend to dismiss the whole thing as worthless.

Some people are the opposite.
They will speak highly of something that
is 2% right and 98% wrong.

Neither extreme is right.

What we need to be able to do
is recognize the truth — and make use of it;
and discern the error — and dismiss it.

As we continue studying Edwards,
I think we'll develop understanding

to help us do this well.

Two quick examples.

The charismatic movement has much that is wrong,
but not everything is wrong.
There is much we can learn in some areas,
and we need not to dismiss that
just because of the excesses in some areas.

Another example is the Messianic Jewish movement.

The theology tends to be heavily dispensational,
which is wrong, and ought not be embraced,
but there's some good things. too.

For example,
some of the music is truly wonderful.
We ought not dismiss this,
which can be a great blessing to us,
just because of errors in other areas.

That's enough review.

Are there any questions or comments about what we've done the last two weeks?

Today, we're going to discuss
Part One of *Religious Affections*,
which is titled:
"Concerning the Nature of the Affections
and Their Importance in Religion".

In doing this, we'll answer three questions:

What are the affections?

You had an assignment to try to answer that question.
We'll see how well you did a little later this morning.

What is the relationship between body and soul?

Why are the affections important?

Here's what Edwards writes about the meaning of "the affections":

It may be inquired, what the affections of the mind are?

I answer:

The affections are no other
than the more vigorous and sensible exercises
of the inclination and will of the soul.

He goes on to explain what he means by this.

God has endued the soul with two faculties:
one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation,
or by which it discerns,
and views, and judges of things;
which is called
the understanding.

The other faculty is
that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things,
but is some way inclined
with respect to the things it views or considers;
either is inclined *to* them,
or is disinclined and averse *from* them;
or is the faculty by which
the soul does not behold things
as an indifferent unaffected spectator,
but either as liking or disliking,
pleased or displeased,
approving or rejecting.

This faculty is called by various names;
it is sometimes called the *inclination*:
and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it,
is called the *will*:
and the mind,
with regard to the exercises of this faculty,
is often called the *heart*.

What's he said here?

The soul has two faculties: the understanding, and the will.

When are you exercising your understanding?

When you try to learn something new.

When are you exercising your will?

When you make a choice whether to approve or reject something.

Please note carefully,
Edwards is not saying
that there are two **parts**
to the soul.

Some people like to divide the soul into parts.

The most common division is probably
the mind (or the head),
and the heart.

Edwards is not doing this,
nor should anyone,
because such a division is not Biblical.

The soul is an undivided whole.

Mind and *heart* are simply synonyms for the soul.

To talk about them as separate parts
of the soul makes no sense.

It does make sense,
'though to talk about the things the soul can do.

That is,
its faculties.

Edwards says that the soul has two main faculties:
it can learn,
and it can choose.

When the soul is learning,
we refer to the understanding.

When the soul is choosing,
we refer to the will.

Of the will, Edwards continues ...

The exercises of this faculty [the will] are of two sorts;
either those by which the soul is carried out towards the things that are in view,
in approving of them,
being pleased with them,
and inclined to them;
or those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view,
in disapproving of them,
and in being displeased with them,
averse from them,
and rejecting them.

What does this mean?

The will is either pleased or displeased with something.

And as the exercises of the ... will of the soul are various in their kinds,
so they are much more various in their degrees.

There are some exercises of pleasedness or displeasedness,
inclination or disinclination,
wherein the soul is carried but a little beyond the state of indifference.

For some decisions of the will,
the difference between being pleased or displeased may be quite small.

Take, for example,
deciding whether to wear a blue shirt or a green shirt.

You must make a decision,
and you choose the one that most pleases you at the time,
but the difference may be very slight.

And there are other degrees above this,
wherein the approbation or dislike,
pleaseness or aversion,
are stronger,
wherein we may rise higher and higher,
till 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 the soul and the body)
the motion of the blood and animal spirits begins to be sensibly altered;
whence oftentimes arises some bodily sensation,
especially about the heart and vitals ...
from whence it comes to pass that the mind,
with regard to the exercises of this faculty,
perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the *heart*.

And it is to be noted,
that they are these more vigorous and sensible exercises of this faculty
that are called the *affections*.

Edwards notes here,
that there are also situations in which
the degree, or extent
of being pleased or displeased is great,
so great that you can even feel it in your gut, so to speak.

It is to these situations that he will apply the term affections.

He goes on to note something that is
essential if we are to have a correct understanding
of how God has designed us.

The will, and the affections of the soul,
are not two faculties;
the affections are not essentially distinct from the will,
nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will,
and inclination of the soul,
but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise.

What does this mean?

The affections aren't distinct from the will,
but simply a word used to describe
certain types of actions of the will.

Edwards continues, by recognizing the difficulty of talking about this subject clearly.

It must be confessed,
that language is here somewhat imperfect,
and the meaning of words
in a considerable measure
loose and unfixed,
and not precisely limited by custom,
which governs the use of language.

In some sense,
the affection of the soul differs nothing at all from the will and inclination,
and the will never is in any exercise
any further than it is affected;
it is not moved out of a state of perfect indifference,
any otherwise than as it is affected one way or other,
and acts nothing any further.

But yet there are many actings of the will and inclination,
that are not so commonly called *affections*:
in everything we do, wherein we act voluntarily,
there is an exercise of the will and inclination;
it is our inclination that governs us in our actions. ...

So, we need to be careful in how we speak about these things,
otherwise,
we might end up causing more harm than good.

A good example of how this can happen
comes from some of the attempts at creating modern English versions
of *Religious Affections*.

Some of these use the word 'emotions'
in place of 'the affections'.

This terrible word choice greatly distorts the meaning of the book.

From what Edwards wrote in passages
I've already quoted,
if any single word is to be substituted for 'affections'
that word would be
what?

Will.

We've already said that the will
is the term we use for the soul, the mind, the heart
use whichever term you like best —
they all refer to the same thing —
when it is making choices.

To be even more explicit,
Edwards, in *The Freedom of the Will*,
defined the will simply as
"the mind choosing."

This is almost adequate
for a definition of
the affections, too.

Almost,
but not quite.

Not quite because it

doesn't do justice
to the distinction that Edwards wants to make.

He wants to distinguish between
the mind choosing in matters of relative indifference,
and the mind choosing in matters of strong preference,
And only to the latter
does he want to give the label,
"the affections".

This is a distinction
that seems to me to be worth making.

Now it is time to see how
you did on your assignment.
Was anyone able to come up with a definition
of the affections that uses exactly 3 words?
Here's a hint:
it follows the same general form as
the definition of the will.

Here's mine:
the mind yearning.

Now because
'the affections' sounds like a plural term,
saying,
The affections are the mind yearning,
sounds a bit odd.

To get around this,
I'm going to cheat a little and put it this way:
**The term 'the affections' refers to
the mind yearning.**

**The term 'the affections'
refers to the mind yearning.**

Or, if you want to make the notion of dislike also explicit,
the mind yearning or spurning.

That is,
the affections
is the name we give to the mind,
when the mind is expressing
what it likes and dislikes,
especially
when these likes
and dislikes are strong.

Please don't think
that 'the affections'
are somehow another *part* of you — they aren't —
just like the mind is not a *part* of you,

the heart is not a *part* of you,
and the will is not a *part* of you.

You think,
You yearn,
You choose,
You do.

If you want to talk about
the mind when you think,
the heart when you yearn,
the will when you choose,
and
the strength or might when you do,
that's fine,
so long as you realize all of these
talk about your whole soul.

Are there any questions?

It is very important to understand the meaning of the affections,
so please ask questions if you don't understand.

Before we look at why the affections are important,
I want to take a couple of minutes to show how
Edwards answers the question:
"What is the relationship
between the body and the soul?"

Let's look briefly at what he writes.

Such seems to be our nature,
and such the laws of the union of soul and body,
that there never is in any case whatsoever,
any lively and vigorous exercise of the will or inclination of the soul,
without some effect upon the body. ...

And, on the other hand,
from the same laws of the union of the soul and body,
the constitution of the body, and the motion of its fluids,
may promote the exercise of the affections.

But yet it is not the body,
but the mind only,
that is the proper seat of the affections.
The body of man is no more capable
of being really the subject of love or hatred,
joy or sorrow,
fear or hope,
than the body of a tree,
or than the same body of man
is capable of thinking and understanding.

As it is the soul only that has ideas,
so it is the soul only
that is pleased or displeased with its ideas.

As it is the soul only that thinks,
so it is the soul only that loves or hates,
rejoices or is grieved at what it thinks of.

What's Edwards saying here?

In this life, the body and soul
are so interconnected that
one can affect the other.
But ultimately,
the soul is responsible for what it chooses to do.

I think that Christians
sometimes tend to forget
the extent to which the body and soul are interconnected.

Many non-believers want to
deny the existence of the soul
and attribute everything
to electro-chemical impulses in the body.

Such people say
the mind and the brain
are one and the same thing,
for example.

This is nonsense.

The opposite extreme—
claiming the body has no effect on the soul—
such as what those do who
completely disconnect the mind and the brain,
is just as much nonsense, though.

Take someone who is depressed
all the time as an example.

Our tendency is probably to counsel him with Scripture,
and tell him about how we are to rejoice in the Lord always,
and other such things.

Those are good things to say,
but,
it might that what we really need to tell him
is to stop drinking NutraSweet,
or to get more sleep.

The cause of his depression might not necessarily be spiritual;
it can be physical.

By all indications from the Scripture,
this intimate connection between the body and soul
will continue after death,
as we will still have bodies.

We won't just be disembodied spirits floating around.

We now come to the third question:
Why are the affections important?

Edwards gives a simple answer to this question,
namely **That True Religion, in Great Part, Consists in the Affections.**

He then goes on to explain why he can make this statement.

What has been said of the nature of the affections makes this evident,
and may be sufficient,
without adding anything further,
to put this matter out of doubt;
for who will deny that true religion consists in a great measure,
in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul,
or the fervent exercises of the heart?

That religion which God requires,
and will accept,
does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes,
raising us but a little above a state of indifference:
God, in his word,
greatly insists upon it,
that we be good in earnest,
"fervent in spirit,"
and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion.

Edwards gives four Scripture passages to illustrate this.

Will someone look up and read Romans 12:10-11?

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;
not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

He also cites the following:

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all
your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

I think that an accurate paraphrase is this:

love the Lord your God
in all your yearnings,
in all your choices,
and in all your actions.

Deuteronomy 10:12

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk
in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul"

Deuteronomy 30:6

"Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the
LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live."

If we be not in good earnest in religion,
and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised,
we are nothing. ...
In nothing is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite,
as in religion;
and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.

Recall also Jesus words to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:15-16

'I know your deeds,
that you are neither cold nor hot;
I would that you were cold or hot.
So because you are lukewarm,
and neither hot nor cold,
I will spit you out of My mouth.'

This church had no yearnings,
they just went through the motions.

Edwards goes on to make an important point,
namely that believers differ in the strength
of their yearnings for God.

And though 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;

yet everyone
that has the power of godliness in his heart,
has his inclinations and heart
exercised towards God and divine things,
with such strength and vigor
that these holy exercises do prevail in him
above all carnal or natural affections,
and are effectual to overcome them:
for every true disciple of Christ
"loves him above father or mother,
wife and children,
brethren and sisters,
houses and lands:
yea, than his own life."

From hence it follows,
that wherever true religion is,
there are vigorous exercises of the inclination and will towards divine objects:
but by what was said before,
the vigorous, lively, and sensible exercises of the will,
are no other than the affections of the soul.

Why are affections important?

The affections are important because they are essential to true belief.

That is,
true belief necessarily includes
the mind yearning,

in particular,
yearning for the things of God.

Are there any questions
before I wrap up?

Next week,
we'll move on to the 2nd part of the book,
and begin looking at what Edwards identifies
as signs that do not help us
distinguish between good and evil.

The plan is to cover 6 of these non-signs
next week,
and the other 6 the week after that.

Your reading assignment is
to read Part II up to the end of the section
that begins "It is no evidence
that religious affections are saving,
or that they are otherwise,
that there is an appearance of love in them".

Come to class prepared to work,
as we'll have an assignment to do during class next week.

I'll close with a selection from the "*Miscellanies*"
that addresses the difficulties of talking clearly
about some matters of theology.
It is Miscellany #83,
and Edwards titled it simply, Theology.

I'll read only an excerpt.

The things of Christianity are so spiritual,
so refined,
so high and abstracted,
so much above the things we ordinarily converse with
and our common affairs for which we adapt our words,
and language not supplying us
with words completely adapted to these high and abstracted ideas,
we are forced to use words
which do no otherwise exhibit what we would
than analogically
— which words in their ordinary use do not in everything,
but only in some part,
exhibit what we intend they should when used in divinity.

And therefore religion raises so many shadows and seeming contradictions.

And it is for want of distinguishing ... the meaning of words in divinity
from what is intended by them in their ordinary use
that arise most of the jangles about religion in the world.

And to one who is not much for elevated thought,
many things that are in themselves
as easy and natural as the things we every day converse with,
seem like impossibility and confusion. ...