

**Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections**  
**Part II: Showing What Are No Certain Signs that**  
**Religious Affections are Truly Gracious, or that They are Not**  
**25 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.)*

This is our fourth meeting.

Because we have a lot  
to do this morning  
we'll review the previous 3 weeks quite quickly.

So far, we've learned about the life of Jonathan Edwards,  
discussed what he wrote in the preface to **Religious Affections**,  
and talked about Part I of the book.

Jonathan Edwards lived  
from 1703 until 1758.  
Who are some people who also lived while he was living?

George Whitefield

Charles & John Wesley

David Hume

Why did Edwards write *The Religious Affections*?

To address the question:  
"How do we discern between that which is good,  
and that which is evil?"

He said this was especially important  
because Satan's main strategy  
is to try to mix error with truth within the church.

I mentioned 3 errors within the church today:  
Anti-intellectualism — denying the importance of truth.  
Antinomianism — denying the importance of God's law.  
Egalitarianism — denying differences among people.

Last week,  
We learned that the term  
the affections refers to the mind yearning,  
just as the will refers to the mind choosing,  
and the understanding refers to the mind learning.

They are important  
because they are essential to true belief.  
The Scripture talks of true believe  
involving the fervent devotion of the entire soul,  
that is, the mind yearning.

We're ready now to go on to Part Two of the Religious Affections.

Its title is:

Showing What Are No Certain Signs  
that Religious Affections  
are Truly Gracious,  
or that They are Not

Edwards begins this part like this:

If anyone,  
on the reading of what has been just now said,  
is ready to acquit himself, and say,

"I am not one of those who have no religious affections;  
I am often greatly moved with the consideration of the great things of religion:"  
let him not content himself with this,  
that he has religious affections:

for as we observed before,  
as we ought not to reject and condemn all affections,  
as though true religion did not  
at all  
consist in affection.  
So on the other hand,  
we ought not to approve of all,  
as though everyone that was religiously affected had true grace,  
and was therein the subject of the saving influences of the Spirit of God;  
and that therefore the right way is to distinguish among religious affections,  
between one sort and another.

Therefore let us now endeavor to do this;  
and in order to do it, I would do two things.

I. I would mention some things,  
which are no signs one way or the other,  
either that affections are such as true religion consists in,  
or that they are otherwise;  
that we may be guarded against judging of affections by false signs.

II. I would observe some things,  
wherein those affections which are spiritual and gracious,  
differ from those which are not so, and may be distinguished and known.

The first of these things  
is what he does in Part Two.

He discusses 12 things  
that are  
*not*  
signs  
whether a person's religious affections are godly.

That is,

a truly regenerate person  
may exhibit these signs,  
or he may not.

*And* a truly unregenerate person  
may also exhibit these signs,  
or he may not.

We're going to try to look at 6 of those this week,  
and 6 next week.

As I told you last week,  
in the class today,  
you all are going to do some work.

I've got a sheet of paper for each of these 6 non-signs.

I've asked six folks to serve  
as group leaders —  
fellows, please stand up.

Please get together with someone who has been given  
one of the sheets.

As a group,  
I want you to come up with a convincing argument  
why the non-sign you have is a non-sign,  
that is,  
why it is neither a sign of religious affections being godly,  
nor a sign of religious affections being ungodly.

Here's a hint about one way to do this:  
Find an example from Scripture  
of a believer exhibiting the sign,  
and an example from Scripture  
of an unbeliever exhibiting the sign.

If it is the case that both a believer  
and a non-believer  
can exhibit the sign,  
then it can't really be a sign.

If someone in your group has a copy of Religious Affections,  
you may use that, too.

You'll have about 10 minutes to do this,  
then I'll give each group leader  
time to explain his group's answers.

[ groups worked, then presented results,  
all of which were quite good.  
I added some of what is  
below ]

Non-sign number 1,

in Edwards' words:

It is no sign one way or the other,  
that religious affections are very great, or raised very high.

For short, let's call this simply,

**Intensity.**

[ group presented results ]

At the time Edwards wrote the book,  
quite a few people were claiming that  
intensity was a negative sign —  
If some one had intensive religious yearnings,  
It was a certain sign that Satan was at work.

So he begins by showing that this isn't the case.

He does this by giving quite a few examples of  
believers showing intensive religious affections.

Let's take only one: Paul.

Look at Romans 9:1-5

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, {2} that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. {3} For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, {4} who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, {5} whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Clearly this shows intense religious affections,  
intensive yearnings of the mind.

Clearly, also, Paul was regenerate,  
so intensity cannot be  
a sign of unregeneration.

To show that it cannot be a certain sign of regeneration,  
consider the Israelites during the exodus.

Edwards puts it like this:

... the children of Israel were greatly affected with God's mercy to them, when they had seen how wonderfully he wrought for them at the Red Sea, where they sang God's praise; though they soon forgot his works. So they were greatly affected again at mount Sinai, when they saw the marvelous manifestations God made of himself there; and seemed mightily engaged in their minds, and with great forwardness made answer, when God proposed his holy covenant to them, saying, All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient. But how soon was there an end to all this mighty forwardness and engagedness of affection! How quickly were they turned aside after other gods, rejoicing and shouting around their golden calf!

Edwards describes the second non-sign like this:

It is no sign that affections

have the nature of true religion,  
or that they have not,  
that they have great effects on the body.

We'll call this:

### **Bodily Affects**

[ group presented results ]

Giving examples of unregenerate people  
having bodily affects is simple,  
so seeing that this is not a sign of regeneration is also simple.

Examples of bodily affects  
on the regenerate abound in the Scripture,  
so we also see that this is not a sign of unregeneration.

Here're two examples from Edwards:

The prophet Habakkuk  
speaks of his body's being overborne  
by a sense of the majesty of God,  
Hab. 3:16, "When I heard,  
my belly trembled:  
my lips quivered at the voice ..."

So the Psalmist speaks  
expressly of his flesh trembling,  
Psa. 119:120, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee."

Concerning the possibility that  
the Scripture references are all figurative only,  
Edwards wrote this:

Before I leave this head, I would farther observe, that it is plain the Scripture often makes use of bodily effects, to express the strength of holy and spiritual affections; such as trembling (Psa. 119:120; Ezra 9:4; Isa. 66:2, 5; Hab. 3:16), groaning (Rom. 8:26), being sick (Song 2:5, and 5:8), crying out (Psa. 84:2), panting (Psa. 38:10, and 43:1, and 119:131), and fainting (Psa. 84:2, and 119:81). Now if it be supposed, that these are only figurative expressions, to represent the degree of affection: yet I hope all will allow, that they are fit and suitable figures to represent the high degree of those spiritual affections, which the Spirit of God makes use of them to represent; which I do not see how they would be, if those spiritual affections, let them be in never to high a degree, have no tendency to any such things; but that on the contrary, they are the proper effects and sad tokens of false affections, and the delusion of the devil. I cannot think, God would commonly make use of things which are very alien from spiritual affections, and are shrewd marks of the hand of Satan, and smell strong of the bottomless pit, as beautiful figures, to represent the high degree of holy and heavenly affections.

The third non-sign Edwards describes like this:

It is no sign that affections are truly gracious affections,  
or that they are not,  
that they cause those who have them  
to be fluent,  
fervent,  
and abundant,  
in talking of the things of religion.

I'll call this  
**Verbosity.**

[ group presented results ]

In Edwards day,  
many people were likely to denounce as unregenerate  
any one who spoke freely and often about religious matters.  
There were also people  
who saw verbosity in religious things as a sure sign of regeneration.

We can see that verbosity is not a sign either way  
by seeing the Scripture both  
commands us to speak to others about the things of God,  
and warns us about those who lips praise God,  
but whose deeds show hatred for God.

Though the Scripture be full of rules, both how we should judge of our own state, and also how we should be conducted in our opinion of others; yet we have nowhere any rule, by which to judge ourselves or others to be in a good estate, from any such effect: for this is but the religion of the mouth and of the tongue, and what is in the Scripture represented by the leaves of a tree, which — though the tree ought not to be without them — yet are nowhere given as an evidence of the goodness of the tree.

Edwards description of the fourth non-sign is this:

It is no sign that affections are gracious,  
or that they are otherwise,  
that persons did not make them themselves,  
or excite them of their own contrivance  
and by their own strength.

I'll call this:  
**Origin outside self.**

[ group presented results ]

That true believers can have  
affections that originate from outside themselves is  
clear in the Scripture.

Edwards cites Ephesians 1:18-19 as one example:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, {19} and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. ...

So, origin outside self can't be a sign of unregeneration.

How about it being a sign of regeneration?

Edwards writes this:

There are other spirits who have influence on the minds of men, besides the Holy Ghost. We are directed not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they be of God. There are many false spirits, exceeding busy with men, who often transform themselves into angels of light, and do in many wonderful

ways, with great subtlety and power, mimic the operations of the Spirit of God. And there are many of Satan's operations which are very distinguishable from the voluntary exercises of men's own minds. They are so, in those dreadful and horrid suggestions, and blasphemous injections with which he follows many persons; and in vain and fruitless frights and terrors, which he is the author of. And the power of Satan may be as immediate, and as evident in false comforts and joys, as in terrors and horrid suggestions; and oftentimes is so in fact.

The fifth non-sign that Edwards discusses is described by him this way:

It is no sign that religious affections are truly holy and spiritual,  
or that they are not,  
that they come with texts of Scripture,  
remarkably brought to the mind.

My short-hand for this is  
**Scripture quotations.**

[ group presented results ]

No one argues that Scripture coming to mind is a sure sign of unregeneration, so we'll not worry about that side.

As for Scripture quotations being a sure sign of regeneration, Edwards writes the following:

What evidence is there that the devil cannot bring texts of Scripture to the mind, and misapply them to deceive persons? There seems to be nothing in this which exceeds the power of Satan. It is no work of such mighty power, to bring sounds or letters to persons' minds, that we have any reason to suppose nothing short of omnipotence can be sufficient for it. If Satan has power to bring any words or sounds at all to persons' minds, he may have power to bring words contained in the Bible. There is no higher sort of power required in men, to make the sounds which express the words of a text of Scripture, than to make the sounds which express the words of an idle story or song. And so the same power in Satan, which is sufficient to renew one of those kinds of sounds in the mind, is sufficient to renew the other: the different signification, which depends wholly on custom, alters not the case, as to ability to make or revive the sounds or letters.

We know the devil's instruments, corrupt and heretical teachers, can and do pervert the Scripture, to their own and others' damnation, 2 Pet. 3:16. We see they have the free use of Scripture, in every part of it: there is no text so precious and sacred, but they are permitted to abuse it, to the eternal ruin of multitudes of souls; and there are no weapons they make use of with which they do more execution. And there is no manner of reason to determine, that the devil is not permitted thus to use the Scripture, as well as his instruments. For when the latter do it, they do it as his instruments and servants, and through his instigation and influence: and doubtless he does the same he instigates others to do; the devil's servants do but follow their master, and do the same work that he does himself.

The sixth non-sign is the last one we'll discuss today.

Edwards introduces it like this:

It is no evidence that religious affections are saving,  
or that they are otherwise,  
that there is an appearance of love in them.

Let's call this one  
**Appearance of love.**

[ group presented results ]

Just like the fifth non-sign,  
to use Edwards words,  
THERE are no professing Christians who pretend  
that this is an argument against  
the truth and saving nature of religious affections.  
But, on the other hand, there are some who suppose  
it is a good evidence that affections are  
from the sanctifying and saving influences of the Holy Ghost.

But the Scripture makes plain that this is not true.

Edwards gives Matthew 24:12-13 as an example:

"And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. {13} "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved."

About this passage, Edwards writes:.

Which latter words plainly show,  
that those spoken of before,  
whose love shall not endure to the end,  
but wax cold,  
should not be saved.

Persons may seem  
to have love to God and Christ,  
yea, to have very strong  
and violent affections of this nature,  
and yet have no grace.

Next week we'll look at the final six non-signs.

If you have a copy of the book,  
please read the rest of Part II.

I'll close with a selection from the "*Miscellanies*"  
#598, on *The Scriptures*.

Listen to this closely,  
because it touches on many things,  
including apologetics.

Much of the Scriptures  
is apt to seem insipid to us now,  
as though there were no great matter of instruction in it,  
because the points of instruction most plainly contained in it,  
are old to us  
and what we have been taught from our infancy.  
They have been most plainly taught in the world  
these many hundred years,

so that doctrines seem self-evident  
and so plain to us now,  
that there seems to have been no need  
of a particular revelation of such things,  
especially of insisting upon them so much.

But how exceedingly different would it have seemed  
if we had lived in those times  
when the revelation was given,  
when the things were  
in a great measure new,  
at least as to that distinctness  
and expressiveness of their revelation?

It is so now with some of those  
that seem to us very plain points  
of what is now called natural religion.

If we had an idea  
of the state of the world  
when God gave the revelation,  
they would appear glorious instructions,  
bringing great light into the world,  
and most worthy of God.

We are ready to despise  
that which we are so used to,  
which is so common and old to us,  
as the children of Israel despised manna.