

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs
of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections
(overview)
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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 sixth meeting.

Before we begin our review,
does anyone want to venture a solution
to the butterfly problem?

Let's review we've covered in the previous five weeks.

Someone tell me something about his life (repeat for a while).

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

He attended Yale.

He pastored churches in Northampton and Stockbridge in MA.

He wrote many books, including Religious Affections, Freedom of the Will, Original Sin.

Collections of his personal writings include The Mind, and the Miscellanies.

In the mind, he gave a wonderful definition of truth:
"Truth is the consistency and agreement of our ideas with the ideas of God."

He died March 22, 1758.

In the second week we talked about why Edwards wrote Religious Affections.

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?"

One thing that makes this hard
is a particular strategy Satan often uses to attack the church —
What is that?

Mixing error with truth within the church.

In the third week we talked about
what the affections are,
and why they are important.

To what does the term 'the affections' refer?

The affections refers to the mind yearning.

Why are the affections important?

They are important because they are essential to true belief.

The past two weeks
we looked at 12 things that
Edwards says are
No Certain Signs
that Religious Affections
are Truly Gracious,
or that They are Not.

What are those?

Intensity

Bodily Affects

Verbosity

Origin outside self

Scripture quotations

Appearance of love

Many kinds

Order of appearance

Much worship

Verbal praise

Confidence of salvation

Beliefs of others

To paraphrase Edwards,
It is time now to take notice of some things,
wherein those religious affections that
are spiritual and gracious,
do differ from those that are not so.

But before we look at these distinguishing characteristics,
we need to mention some things
that must observed and remembered
concerning the distinguishing marks we shall discuss.

First, Edwards does not claim to be giving signs
that are sufficient to enable any[one]
certainly
to distinguish true affection from false in others;
or to determine
positively
which of their neighbors are true professors,
and which are hypocrites.

JE puts it this way:

Though it be plain that Christ has given rules to all Christians,
to enable them to judge of professors of religion,

whom they are concerned with,
so far as is necessary for their own safety,
and to prevent their being led into a snare by false teachers,
and false pretenders to religion;

and though it be also beyond doubt,

that the Scriptures do abound with rules,
which may be very serviceable to ministers,
in counseling and conducting souls committed to their care,
in things appertaining to their spiritual and eternal state;

yet it is also evident,
that 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;
but that, on the contrary,
it was God's design to reserve this to himself, as his prerogative.

And therefore
no such distinguishing signs
as shall enable Christians or ministers to do this,
are ever to be expected to the world's end:
for no more is ever to be expected from any signs,
that are to be found in the Word of God, or gathered from it,
than Christ designed them for.

What does this mean?

No Christian's judgement of another is infallible.

We may err.

We may judge a true believer to be reprobate.

We may judge a true heathen to be regenerate.

Second,

Edwards says that
the signs he will give
are not sufficient
to enable Christians who are,
as he calls it,
very low in grace,
to discern that they are truly believers.

That is, a believer may,
for a time,
be so far fallen
from fellowship with God
as to think he is not a believer.

Such a person
will not be convinced

otherwise by the signs we'll discuss.

But, as Edwards writes,
this isn't a bad thing,
because such people may be driven back to God
by their recognition of their sad state.

Then, they'll be able to recognize their salvation through these signs.

The third observation to remember
as we discuss the signs
is that we
must not expect
to be able to use these signs
to convince deeply deceived unbelievers
of their true state.

Edward says that these hypocrites ...
have been deceived with great false discoveries and affections,
and are ... settled in a false confidence,
and high conceit of their own supposed great experiences and privileges.

Such hypocrites are so conceited of their own wisdom,
and so blinded and hardened with a very great self-righteousness
(but very subtle and secret, under the disguise of great humility),
and so invincible a fondness of their pleasing conceit
of their great exaltation,
that it usually signifies nothing at all to lay before them
the most convincing evidences of their hypocrisy.

... Some of this sort of persons seem
to be most out of the reach of means of conviction and repentance.

But yet the laying down good rules
may be a means of preventing such hypocrites,
and of convincing many of other kinds of hypocrites;
and God is able to convince even this kind,
and his grace is not to be limited,
nor means to be neglected.

And besides, such rules may be of use to the true saints,
to detect false affections,
which they may have mingled with true;
and be a means of their religion's becoming more pure,
and like gold tried in the fire.

Are there any questions about these three observations before we move on?

What I hope to do in the rest of class this morning
is give a quick overview of all 12 of the signs,
or distinguishing marks,
that Edwards discusses.

As we go through this overview,
you'll notice,

I'm sure,
that recognizing the presence
of the signs
is easier for some than for others.

Then we'll talk about them in more detail in future weeks.

What I'll do is read the mark as Edwards gave it,
then we'll discuss it briefly,
and give it a shorthand name.
We're not going to provide much support
for why each one is really a true sign this week,
nor can I entertain
any disagreements with any of them today.

Those things
will have to wait
until the detailed discussions in future weeks.

Sign 1: Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious,
do arise from those influences and operations on the heart,
which are spiritual,
supernatural
and divine.

What does this mean?

Affections that are truly godly are spiritual,
not natural, in origin.
They also come from God,
rather than from ourselves.

That this is a sign ought not surprise us,
because the Scripture
often uses the distinction
between the spiritual and the natural
to refer to the difference
between the godly and the ungodly.

We'll call this one, [Spiritual origin of affections](#).

Sign 2: The first objective ground of gracious affections,
is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature
of divine things as
they are themselves;
and not any conceived relation
they bear to self,
or self-interest.

What do you think this means?

Consider the distinction
between appreciating someone for

who he is,
and appreciating someone for
what he can do for you.

When I was in school,
there were people who would pretend to like me,
and to want to be my friend,
when all they really wanted
was for me to help them with their homework.

What Edwards is saying here
is that truly gracious affections
are those that cause an appreciation for God
based solely on who He is,
not on what He can do for us.

That is, we should want to serve God
because He is God,
not because we're interested in fire insurance,
or we think serving Him will improve our lot in life.

Let's call this one, [Appreciation of divine things in themselves](#).

Sign 3: Those affections that are truly holy,
are primarily founded on
the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things.
Or a love to divine things
for the beauty and sweetness of their moral excellency
is the first beginning and spring of all holy affections.

Edwards uses the phrase
'moral excellency'
frequently.
By it, he generally means
'Holiness.'

So, what this is saying is that
not only should we appreciate divine things in themselves,
but we should also have a true love for them
because of their holiness.

[Love for the holiness of divine things](#) will be our shorthand for this one.

Sign 4: Gracious affections
do arise from
the mind's being enlightened,
richly and spiritually
to understand or apprehend divine things.

What's this mean?

Sin has so blinded our minds,
that only those who are truly believers

can fully understand the things of God.

Augustine put it this way:

"I believe
so that I may understand."

In shorthand, [Enlightened understanding](#).

Sign 5: Truly gracious affections are attended
with a reasonable
and spiritual conviction
of the judgment,
of the reality
and certainty of divine things.

What's this mean?

Someone who has truly gracious affections
doesn't just
think that the Bible is,
for example,
probably true,
he *knows*,
by the
direct operation of God
on his mind,
that it is *certainly* true.

I'll call this sign, [Certainty of divine things](#).

Sign 6: Gracious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation.

The phrase "evangelical humiliation"
may seem a bit odd to you.

What Edwards means by it is simple:
true humility.

And that will be our shorthand for this mark: [True humility](#).

When we talk about this in greater detail
in a few weeks,
we'll see how to distinguish true humility
from various forms of false humility.

That will be an especially important discussion,
because in our day,
there's an awful lot of false ideas
about what constitutes humility.

Sign 7: Another thing,
wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others,

is, that they are attended with a change of nature.

What's this mean?

This is one that's probably pretty clear.

Most of us probably know 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore if any man is in Christ,
he is a new creature;
the old things passed away;
behold, new things have come.

Change of nature, will be what we'll call this sign
as a shorthand.

Sign 8: Truly gracious affections
differ from those affections
that are false and delusive,
in that they tend to,
and are attended with the lamb-like,
dove-like spirit and temper
of Jesus Christ;
or in other words,
they naturally beget and promote
such a spirit of love,
meekness,
quietness,
forgiveness and mercy,
as appears in Christ.

What's this mean?

It means that someone
who is truly a believer has a,
Christ-like spirit.
That'll be our shorthand for it, too.

Sign 9: Gracious affections soften the heart,
and are attended and followed
with a Christian tenderness of spirit.

This is very much related to the previous one.
It's really a subset of it,
for a Tender spirit is certainly
a part of a Christ-like spirit.

Nevertheless, there is some value
in talking about this a bit separately,
as Edwards does.

Sign 10: Another thing wherein
those affections that are truly gracious and holy,

differ from those that are false,
is beautiful symmetry and proportion.

Anyone have an idea what this means?

The basic idea here
is that a true believer
tends to possess the various relevant
religious affections
in proper proportion and balance.

For example,
he will have a godly sorrow over sin,
accompanied by righteous rejoicing
over Christ's having paid for that sin on the cross.

There will not be
a fixation
on sorrow alone,
or on rejoicing alone, either.

This one especially extends well
in application beyond just people
to movements and works.

Beautiful symmetry and proportion,
is what our shorthand for this one will be.

Sign 11: Another great and very distinguishing difference
between gracious affections and others is,
that gracious affections,
the higher they are raised,
the more is a spiritual appetite
and longing of soul
after spiritual attainments increased.
On the contrary, false affections rest satisfied in themselves.

We'll call this, [Desire to grow](#).

The basic idea is that someone who is truly a child of God
will be continually wanting to be more and more like Christ,
and will never be satisfied with where he stands now.

This general principle applies to lots of other areas, too.

Usually the best athletes are ones
who aren't satisfied with what they're able to do now,
but want to get better.

The best teachers are ones
who aren't satisfied
with their teaching ability,
but are always trying to improve,
and to learn from others.

The more intelligent someone is,
usually the more aware he is of what he doesn't know,
and the more he wants to learn more and more.

God has so designed our bodies,
that we usually stop growing physically fairly early in life.

I was the height I am now in 8th grade, for example.

But this isn't intended to be true of our souls.
We should continue to grow throughout our life on earth.

The final sign,
and the one that basically ties everything together,
is this one.

Sign 12: Gracious and holy affections
have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.
I MEAN, they have
that influence and power
upon him who is the subject of them,
that they cause that a practice,
which is universally conformed to,
and directed by Christian rules,
should be the practice and business of his life.

Our short name for this will be, [Life of obedience](#).

The idea here is simply this:
someone who is truly a believer
will live like he or she is truly a believer.

As I said earlier,
we'll begin looking at these in more detail
in the next several weeks.

The plan is study
[Spiritual origin of affections](#)
[Appreciation of divine things in themselves](#), and
[Love for the holiness of divine things](#)
next week.

The week after that, we'll look at
[Enlightened understanding](#), and
[Certainty of divine things](#).

The next we'll concentrate solely on
[True humility](#).

The following week we'll study
[Change of nature](#)
[Christ-like spirit](#), and
[Tender spirit](#).

After that, we'll spend a whole class on
Beautiful symmetry and proportion

Then, we'll look at the final two signs:
Desire to grow
Life of obedience

For the most part,
I'm not going to spend a lot of time
each week
justifying that the signs
are indeed signs —
We'll do some of that,
but not a lot.

Instead,
I will concentrate on
how to identify the signs
in ourselves,
in others,
and in "movements" and works.

If we're able to keep this schedule,
we'll have one week left for wrapping up loose ends,
and sawing off any limbs
I may have climbed out onto..

I'll close with this selection from the Miscellanies,
#1039. The Creation of the World

We are wont
to make a distinction
between
the work of creation
and
the work of providence,
but indeed
the creation of the world,
or the manner of creation,
is one thing,
and one main thing
that appertains to God's providence,
or the provision that God makes,
in the disposal of things
for the bringing to pass
the events and designs
he had in view
to be accomplished and attained
in
and by the world.

The creation of the world,
in strictness,
cannot
be distinguished

from his government
and disposal of all things.

God's making the creatures such as he did,
and in constituting the world as he did at first,
and disposing of them as he did in their first creation
is a part,
and a very great and main part,
of what he did
as the great
and sovereign
and all-wise disposer
of all things,
in order to attain the purposes and designs
and indeed the general course
of all things in the natural world
from the creation of the world
to the end of it.

It was in effect
mainly disposed,
ordered,
and governed
and provided for
in the manner
in which things were made,
constituted
and ordered at their first creation.