

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs
of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections
(signs 1-3)
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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 seventh meeting.

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

During the week,
someone guessed Theodore Roosevelt.
That's not correct;
however, TR's lifetime
and the lifetime of the author did overlap,
as did Sam Derr's lifetime,
and my lifetime.

However,
the author's lifetime did not
overlap with the lifetimes
of the Drowns.

I have a handout for you this week
with the quotation on it,
along with the hints I've given so far.

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

When did Jonathan Edwards live?

From October 5, 1703
until March 22, 1758.

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?"

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.

What are twelve things
that are not signs
one way or the other
that the mind's yearnings
are truly from God?

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

Last week I gave an overview
of the twelve things that Edwards
says are signs that religious affections
are from God.

What were those twelve signs?

Spiritual origin of affections

Appreciation of divine things in themselves

Love for the holiness of divine things

Enlightened understanding

Certainty of divine things

True humility

Change of nature

Christ-like spirit

Tender spirit.

Beautiful symmetry and proportion

Desire to grow

Life of obedience

I didn't mention it last week,
but did any one notice a general
pattern in this list?

Although the pattern is not perfect,
the list tends to go
from the abstract
to the concrete.

I think we could make this pattern perfect
by moving on two of the twelve signs
to another position in the list:
change of nature

needs to move to earlier in the list,
and
true humility
needs to move to later in the list.

Today, we're going to look in more detail
at the first three of those signs,
all of which are relatively abstract:
Spiritual origin of affections
Appreciation of divine things in themselves
and
Love for the holiness of divine things.

Let's begin with
Spiritual origin of affections.

Recall that Edward introduces it like this:
Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious,
do arise from those influences
and operations
on the heart,
which are spiritual,
supernatural
and divine.

He writes about this sign in great detail,
far more detail than we have time to cover this morning.

He begins by making 3 points.

First, the Scripture
often uses the contrast
between
"spiritual"
and
"natural" or "fleshly"
to describe the difference
between
the regenerate
and
the unregenerate.

Here are two examples only.

1 Cor. 2:14, 15
But a natural man
does not accept the things of the Spirit of God;
for they are foolishness to him,
and he cannot understand them,
because they are spiritually appraised.
But he who is spiritual appraises all things,
yet he himself is appraised by no man.

Jude 1:4,19

For certain persons
have crept in unnoticed,
those who were long beforehand
marked out for this condemnation,
ungodly persons
who turn the grace of our God
into licentiousness
and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. ...
These are the ones who cause divisions,
worldly-minded,
devoid of the Spirit.

The second point that Edwards makes
is that the word
"spiritual"
is
not
used to distinguish
between
qualities that relate to the soul
and
qualities that relate to the body.

For example,
pride and self-righteousness
are qualities of the soul,
not the body,
but these are called "fleshy".

Edwards' third point
is that the term "spiritual"
is used to refer
to those who have been
changed by the Holy Spirit.

He says it this way:

But it is with relation
to the Holy Ghost,
or Spirit of God,
that persons or things
are termed spiritual
in the New Testament.
Spirit,
as the word is used
to signify the third person in the Trinity,
is the substantive,
of which is formed the adjective spiritual,
in the Holy Scriptures.
Thus Christians are called spiritual persons,
because they are born of the Spirit,
and because of the indwelling
and holy influences
of the Spirit of God in them.
And things are called spiritual

as related to the Spirit of God.

He then goes on to talk about
the differences between
the way the Holy Spirit
operates
in the lives of believers
and
in the lives of unbelievers.

He also talks about how people
may be deceived into thinking
that the Holy Spirit is working in them,
when He's not really doing so.

Both of these discussions
are quite interesting,
but in many ways
these discussions simply
introduce in general terms
ideas that Edwards develops more specifically
in his discussion of the other signs.

For that reason,
it is difficult to discuss
specific applications of this sign
without referring directly to other signs.

So, we're going to go on to the second and third signs,
for which we can discuss specific applications.

Before I do that,
are there any questions?

I called the second sign:
Appreciation of divine things in themselves.

Edwards described this sign like this:
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.

He explains his meaning as follows:

.... the divine excellency and glory of God
and Jesus Christ the Word of God,
the works of God,
and the ways of God, etc.,
is
the primary reason

why a true saint loves these things;
and not
any supposed interest that he has in them,
or any conceived benefit that he has received from them,
or shall receive from them,
or any such imagined relation which they bear to his interest

What does this mean?

We should love God
because He is God,
not because of what
He has done
or can do
for us.

He then goes on to address the assertion,
which some made in his day
and some continue to make in our own day,
that
all love
has its foundation
in self-love.

That is,
we love that which
we think benefits us most.

He goes on to show
how this
cannot
be true with regards
to true believers love for God.

Listen closely as I read this passage:

What chiefly makes a man, or any creature lovely,
is his excellency;
and so what chiefly renders God lovely,
and must undoubtedly be
the chief ground of true love,
is his excellency.

God's nature,
or the divinity,
is infinitely excellent;
yea it is infinite beauty,
brightness,
and glory itself.

But how can that be true love of this excellent and lovely nature,
which is not built
on the foundation of its true loveliness?

How can that be true love of beauty and brightness

which is not
for beauty and brightness' sake?

How can that be a true prizing
of that which is in itself infinitely worthy and precious,
which is not
for the sake of its worthiness and preciousness?

This infinite excellency of the divine nature,
as it is in itself,
is the true ground of all that is good in God in any respect;
but how can a man truly and rightly love God,
without loving him for that excellency in him,
which is the foundation of all
that is in any manner of respect good or desirable in him?

Edwards doesn't deny that self-love,
or an appreciation for what God
can do for a person,
plays
a part
in a person's love for God.

He just explains that
there
must be more
than this.

... the exercises of true and holy love in the saints arise in [this] way.

They do not
first see that God loves them,
and
then
see that he is lovely,
but they
first see that God is lovely,
and that Christ is excellent and glorious,
and their hearts are
first
captivated with this view,
and the exercises of their love are wont
from time to time to begin here,
and to arise
primarily from these views;
and then,
consequentially,
they see God's love,
and great favor to them.

The saint's affections
begin with God;
and self-love has a hand in these affections
consequentially,
and secondarily only.

Let's consider how to apply these ideas.
I'll do this by suggesting some questions that you
might consider asking.

First, for yourself, here are 3 questions:

Do you believe God is great
because of what He has done for you,
or do you believe God has done
what He has done for you,
because He is great?

When you pray,
do you spend more time
thanking God for what He's done for you,
or praising God for who He is?

Do you spend more time thinking
about what great things God has done for you,
or about God Himself?

For all 3 of these questions,
the answer that a dedicated Christian,
full of the grace of God,
will give is the second one:

We should believe God has done
what He has done because He is great.

We should spend more time
praising God for who He is,
than for what He's done.

We should spend more time
thinking about God Himself,
than about what He's done
for us.

Again,
I'm not saying that we don't
do any of those other things,
but we're talking
proper proportions,
and ordering.

If you aren't able to answer these questions
this way,
does it mean you're not a believer?

Not necessarily.

If you *never* praise God for who He is,
and you *never* think about His glorious attributes,
and you *always* think only about what He's done for you,
then you need to give

serious consideration to your spiritual state.

If you don't do so badly as never,
but the balance is still skewed towards
benefits to yourself,
ask God to give you the grace
to love him more deeply for who He is.

Remember this,
our love for God should be independent
of how He chooses
to work our His sovereignty
in our lives.

These same questions you ask yourself,
are appropriate application to others, too.

Instead of asking someone,
Do you know for sure if you died tonight,
you'd go to heaven?

consider asking him:

Do you believe God is great
because of what He has done for you,
or do you believe God has done
what He has done for you,
because He is great?

For application to ministries,
consider this question:

How often do people within this ministry
talk about what God has done for them
or can do for you,
instead of
about who God is,
and why He is worthy of praise?

If the emphasis is always
on the things God does,
then you should have serious doubts
about whether the ministry is
from God.

The emphasis should be
primarily on who God is,
not on what He does for you.

This leads us to the third sign,
for it is in this one
that Edwards addresses specifically
why God deserves our praise.

I called this sign,
Love for the holiness of divine things.

There's a fairly common distinction
made in theology
between
a being's "natural attributes"
and
his "moral attributes".

In relation to God, Edwards puts it this way:

[theologians] make a distinction between the natural and moral perfections of God:
by the moral perfections of God,
they mean those attributes which God exercises as a moral agent,
or whereby the heart and will of God are good, right,
and infinitely becoming and lovely;
such as his righteousness, truth, faithfulness, and goodness;
or, in one word, his holiness.

By God's natural attributes or perfections,
they mean those attributes,
wherein, according to our way of conceiving of God,
consists, not the holiness or moral goodness of God,
but his greatness,
such as his power,
his knowledge,
whereby he knows all things,
and his being eternal,
from everlasting to everlasting,
his omnipresence,
and his awful and terrible majesty.

Edwards goes on to explain this sign by relating it to the previous one:

It has been already shown, under the former head,
that the first objective ground of all holy affections
is the supreme excellency of divine things as they are in themselves,
or in their own nature;

I now proceed further,
and say more particularly,
that [the] kind of excellency of the nature of divine things,
which is the first objective ground of all holy affections,
is their moral excellency, or their holiness.

Holy persons,
in the exercise of holy affections,
do love divine things primarily for their holiness:
they love God, in the first place,
for the beauty of his holiness or moral perfection,
as being supremely amiable in itself.

Not that the saints, in the exercise of gracious affections,
do love God only for his holiness;
all his attributes are amiable and glorious in their eyes;
they delight in every divine perfection;
the contemplation of the infinite greatness,
power, knowledge, and terrible majesty of God,
is pleasant to them.

But their love to God for his holiness
is what is most fundamental and essential in their love.

What has Edwards done here?

First of all,
he starts off in the discussion of the previous sign
by saying that our love for God has at least two aspects:
loving God for what He has done,
and loving God for who He is.

Of these two,
the second aspect —
loving God for who He is —
should be the greater emphasis in our lives.

Now, in this sign,
Edwards suggests that we love God for who He is
in two aspects:
one involves appreciation for His power,
sovereignty,
greatness,
and similar attributes;
the other
involves appreciation for His holiness.

Of these two aspects,
love of His holiness should
have the greater emphasis.

Edwards gives many Scripture references
to support these statements,
because the Scriptures are
full of praises to God for His holiness.

[Ask for volunteers to read some of these]

1 Samuel 2:2

There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God.

Psalms 99

The LORD reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! The LORD is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the peoples. Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; Holy is He. And the strength of the King loves justice; Thou hast established equity; Thou hast executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool; Holy is He. Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called on His name; They called upon the LORD, and He answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; They kept His testimonies, And the statute that He gave them. O LORD our God, Thou didst answer them; Thou wast a forgiving God to them, And yet an avenger of their evil deeds. Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill; For holy is the LORD our God.

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy,

Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

Revelation 4:8

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

Revelation 15:4

"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THEE, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed."

The Scripture also speaks
of the holiness of God's word:

Psalms 19:7-10 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalms 119 is full of descriptions of the holiness of the Word, also.

We could go on and on with more verses,
but these should be enough.

I grew up in a Southern Baptist Church.
For many years,
and over many editions,
the first hymn in the Baptist Hymnal
was always "Holy, Holy, Holy".

I think that is very appropriate,
for God's holiness is where it all should begin.

In his discussion of this sign,
Edwards spends quite a few words
explaining how the unregenerate
may frequently be stirred by
God's majesty,
or sovereignty,
or power,
but rarely by His holiness.

That is,
in Edwards day,
and in ours too, although to a lesser extent,
it is fairly common
to hear unregenerate people
talking about the greatness of God;
it is rare to hear them talking about His holiness.

In fact,
most often in our day,
God's holiness,
and the requirements this holiness places on people,

is mocked,
and called intolerant.

There are people who are perfectly
happy to have us talk about a God
who loves people,
but who become quite indignant
if we talk about a God who is holy,
and who cannot abide the presence of sin.

So,
how can we apply this sign to our own lives?

Here are two questions to consider:

How often do you contemplate God's holiness,
and the ways this holiness has been exhibited in history?

When you contemplate God's holiness,
what yearnings,
what additional thoughts,
do you have?

A true believer,
walking in God's grace,
will often contemplate God's holiness,
and this contemplation will
fill his soul with love for God,
and the yearning to be more holy.

In applying this sign
to "fruit inspection" of others,
here are two questions to consider:

How often does the person
speak fondly of God's holiness,
especially in relation to how often
he speaks of God's other attributes?

Does the person
show an understanding of the implications of God's holiness
by what he does and approves of?

These same questions,
extended appropriately,
are appropriate for using in evaluating ministries.

I can think of some fairly prominent people
who have large followings
who spend a lot of time
talking about just about every attribute of God,
except His holiness.

In our day,
it is especially popular to talk about God's love,

although often it is a human-defined love,
and it is often OK to talk about His power,
although that power is often limited,
but few people
want to hear anyone talk about God's holiness.

The writer of Hebrews
says that "our God is a consuming fire",
and part of the notion there is that
He cannot abide the presence of sin at all.

Those sorts of notions,
in our day,
are frowned on.

I mentioned the first week
that today the thing for which Edwards is most known
is the sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."
It still appears in many anthologies of American literature,
but it is usually mocked,
and Edwards is said to have a ridiculous idea of God.

Well, Edwards didn't have a ridiculous idea of God;
He understood God's holiness far better than most of us today do.

When you're looking at other ministries,
one of the things to consider is
To what extent
does this ministry
elevate God's holiness.

That shouldn't be the only part,
but it should be a big part,
and if God's holiness is never mentioned,
then you've really got to question to what extent
God is really working in that ministry.

Next week,
deo volente,
we'll be looking at the 4th and 5th signs:
Enlightened understanding and
Certainty of divine things.

If you have the book,
read the sections about those two signs.

Don't forget the butterfly problem, either.

Today's closing reading
from the Miscellanies is
#638. Vanishing of Shades,
which seems especially appropriate
for an Easter Sunday.

There is a harmony
between
the methods of God's providence
in the natural
and religious world,
in this as well as many other things:
that as when day succeeds the night,
and the one comes on
and the other gradually ceases,
those lesser lights
that serve to give light
in the absence of the sun
gradually vanish as the sun approaches.

One star vanishes after another
as daylight increases:
the lesser stars first
and the greater ones afterwards.

The same star gradually vanishes
till at length it wholly disappears
and all these lesser lights
are extinguished
and the sun appears
in his full glory above the horizon.

So when the day of the gospel dawned,
the ceremonies of the Old Testament
and ordinances of the law of Moses
that were only appointed to give light
in the absence of the sun of righteousness
(or until Christ should appear),
and shone only with a borrowed and reflected light
(like the planets),
were gradually abolished
one after another,
and the same ordinance gradually ceased,
and those ordinances that were principal
(one of which was the Jewish Sabbath)
continued longest.

There were a multitude of those ceremonies,
which was a sign of their imperfection,
but they altogether did
but imperfectly supply the place
of the sun of righteousness.

But when the sun of righteousness is come,
there is no need of them.

When the true sacrifice is come,
there is no need of any of the legal sacrifices.

When Christ is come
and gives and introduces the gospel,
that is the ministration of the Spirit,
there is no more need of ceremonies in worship.

But the time is now come

that men must worship God in spirit and truth.

So there is a multitude of stars that shine in the night,
but they altogether do but very imperfectly
supply the absence of the sun.

But when the sun rises,
they all vanish,
and we find no want of them.