

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs
of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections
(sign 6)
29 April 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.)

This is our ninth meeting.

Before we review what we've covered
in the previous eight meetings,
has anyone figured out
in what book Winston Churchill
wrote about butterflies and predestination?

Let's review a little of what we've talked about so far.

Jonathan Edwards lived from
October 5, 1703
until March 22, 1758.

He wrote

A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections.

To address the question:

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

Edwards gave a rather lengthy
description of what he meant by 'the affections',
but I gave you a short definition
that I believe is entirely consistent
with Edwards.

What was that?

The affections refers to the mind yearning.

They are important because they are essential to true belief.

In Part II of the book,
Edwards listed twelve things
that do not distinguish between godly
and ungodly affections.
I gave short names to each of these:

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

In Part III

Edwards listed twelve distinguishing marks
that he says are signs that religious affections
are from God.

We've studied five of them in detail so far.

What are those five signs?

Spiritual origin of affections
Appreciation of divine things in themselves
Love for the holiness of divine things

Enlightened understanding
Certainty of divine things

Someone tell us one thing you remember
from the study of these signs
the last two weeks.

Someone else tell us another thing you remember.

Today we'll study the sixth sign,
which is True humility

In the weeks that are left,
we'll study the remaining six signs:

Change of nature
Christ-like spirit
Tender spirit.

Beautiful symmetry and proportion
Desire to grow
Life of obedience

Are there any questions before we begin
looking at true humility?

Because there is much to cover
this morning,
I'll probably have a little
less discussion time
than has been typical in the course;
I'll try to make up for that next week.

I'm spending an entire class
on this one sign,
because I believe strongly
that this —
along with 'beautiful symmetry and proportion'
on which we'll also spend an entire class —
is an area in which
today's conservative,
reformed church,
is most deficient.

Edwards introduces the sign like this:

Gracious affections
are attended with evangelical humiliation.

Edwards phrase

'evangelical humiliation'
and my phrase
'true humility'
are equivalent.

When I read more quotes this morning,
I'm going to substitute 'true humility'
for 'evangelical humiliation'.

Edwards begins to describes what he means
in the next sentence:

[True humility] is a sense
that a Christian has
of his own utter insufficiency,
despicableness,
and odiousness,
with an answerable frame of heart.

Later on in the section,
he expands a bit on this description,
when he writes:

... the essence of [true humility]
consists in such humility,
as becomes a creature,
in itself exceeding sinful,
under a dispensation of grace;
consisting in a mean esteem of himself,
as in himself nothing,
and altogether contemptible and odious;
attended with a mortification
of a disposition to exalt himself,
and a free renunciation of his own glory.

What does this mean?

It means that a truly humble person
recognizes that he is a sinner
utterly incapable of saving

or even helping himself apart from God,

Edwards believes that the Scripture
teaches that true humility
is an essential part —
In fact, the most essential part —
of true Christianity.

Here's a bit of what he wrote:

This is a great
and most essential thing in true religion.
The whole frame of the gospel,
and everything appertaining to the new covenant,
and all God's dispensations towards fallen man,
are calculated to bring to pass
this effect in the hearts of men.

They that are destitute of this,
have no true religion,
whatever profession they may make,
and how high soever their religious affections may be ...

He then quotes 23 Scripture passages
to support this statement.

We'll look at only four of these.

[Psalm 138:6](#)

For though the LORD is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly; But the haughty He knows from afar.

[Habbakuk 2:4](#)

Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.

[Micah 6:8](#)

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

[Luke 18:9-14](#)

And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: {10} "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. {11} "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. {12} 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' {13} "But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' {14} "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

I doubt that there are many
professing believers
who would argue that true humility
is not
an essential aspect
of true Christianity.

The problem, however,
is that what humility means
is grossly misunderstood today —
both in the world at large,
and within the professing Church, too.

Several years
ago I taught a Sunday School class
on Biblical Word Studies.
One of the words we studied was 'humility',
along with its variants.

At that time,
I said that as best as I could tell,
most people within
the evangelical Christian community, too,
seem to think that
the two primary characteristics of humility
are
(1) never claiming
that you are able to do anything
better than someone else;
and
(2) never asserting
that very much is certainly true,
except, perhaps, for a very few things.

The situation hasn't gotten any better
since then;
if anything,
it has gotten worse.

The truth, however,
is that neither of these
really have anything to do with humility.

What they are related to
are two of the 3 major errors
within the Christian church today
that I mentioned in the second class:
egalitarianism
and
anti-intellectualism.

The idea that one ought never
to claim to be able to do something
better than someone else
comes directly from egalitarianism.

As we said in the second week,
this notion is unscriptural to the extreme.

The Scripture clearly teaches
that God has given different talents,
gifts,

abilities,
or whatever you want to call them,
to different people.

Some people can sing,
others can't,
for example.

The idea that one ought
never assert anything is certainly true,
comes directly from anti-intellectualism.

This is completely unscriptural, too,
as the Bible is full of assertions of truth.

There is also another kind of humility,
which isn't the false humility we've just talked about,
but it isn't godly humility either.

Edwards calls this 'legal humiliation',
and writes this about it:

In a legal humiliation,
men are made sensible
that they are little and nothing
before the great and terrible God,
and that they are undone,
and wholly insufficient to help themselves;
as wicked men will be at the day of judgment:

but they have not
an answerable frame of heart,
consisting in a disposition to abase themselves,
and exalt God alone;
this disposition is given only in [true humility],
by overcoming the heart,
and changing its inclination,
by a discovery of God's holy beauty:

in a legal humiliation,
the conscience is convinced;
as the consciences of all
will be most perfectly at the day of judgment;
but because there is no spiritual understanding,
the will is not bowed,
nor the inclination altered:
this is done only in [true humility].

In legal humiliation,
men are brought to despair of helping themselves;

in evangelical,
they are brought voluntarily
to deny and renounce themselves:

in the former,

they are subdued and forced to the ground;

in the latter,

they are brought sweetly to yield,
and freely and with delight
to prostrate themselves at the feet of God.

Let's us now look at some of the characteristics
of true humility.

To do this,

I'll quote to you some from
Jonathan Edwards' lecture
'The Spirit Of Charity Is An Humble Spirit',
which is lecture VII
of the Charity and Its Fruits series of lectures.

In this lecture

Edwards lists quite a few characteristics
including ones dealing with
behavior towards God
and behavior towards others.

I'm only going to mention four characteristics,
all of which involved behavior towards others.

**A humble person is satisfied
with differences among people.**

Edwards puts it this way:

The man that is under the influence of an humble spirit,
is content with such a situation
amongst men as God is pleased to allot to him,
and is not greedy of honor,
and does not affect to appear
uppermost and exalted above his neighbors. ...

Humility will ... tend to prevent a leveling behavior.

Some persons are always ready
to level those above them down to themselves,
while they are never willing
to level those below them
up to their own position.

But he that is under the influence of humility
will avoid both these extremes.

On the one hand,

he will be willing that
all should rise just so far
as their diligence
and worth of character entitle them to,

and on the other hand,
he will be willing that his superiors
should be known
and acknowledged in their place,

and have rendered to them
all the honors that are their due.
He will not desire
that all should stand upon the same level,
for he knows it is best
that there should be gradations in society:
that some should be above others,
and should be honored and submitted to as such.

Another characteristic is this:

A humble person is quick to admit mistakes.

Edwards puts it this way:

He that is under the influence
of an humble spirit,
if he has fallen into a fault,
as all are liable at some time to fall,
or if in anything he has injured another,
or dishonored the Christian name and character,
will be willing to acknowledge his fault,
and take the shame of it to himself.
He will not be hard
to be brought to a sense of his fault,
nor to testify that sense
by a suitable acknowledgment of his error.

The third characteristic
I'll mention is this:

A humble person is not ostentatious.

Here's some of Edwards' text
related to this subject:

Humility tends ... to prevent
an ostentatious behavior.
If the truly humble man has
any advantage or benefit of any kind,
either temporal or spiritual,
above his neighbors,
he will not affect to make a show of it.
If he has greater natural abilities
than others,
he will not be forward
to parade and display them,
or be careful that others
shall know his superiority in this respect.

... His behavior does not
carry with it the idea
that he is the best amongst those about him,
and that he is the one to whom
the chief regard should be shown,

and whose judgment
is most to be sought and followed.

The final characteristic
I'll mention is this one:

A humble person is kind to others.

Here's some of Edwards' text
related to this subject:

Humility tends also to prevent a scornful behavior.
Treating others with scorn and contempt
is one of the worst
and most offensive manifestations
of pride toward them.

But they that are under the influence
of an humble spirit are far from such a behavior.
They do not despise
or look down on those
that are below them
with a haughty supercilious air,
as though they were scarce worthy
to come nigh them
or to have any regard from them.

They are sensible
that there is no such vast difference
between themselves
and their fellowmen
as warrants such a behavior.
They are not found treating
with scorn and contempt
what others say,
or speaking of what they do
with ridicule and sneering reflections,
or sitting and relating
what others may have spoken or done,
only to make sport of it.

On the contrary,
humility disposes a person ...
to treat inferiors with courtesy and affability,
as being sensible
of his own weakness
and despicableness before God,
and that it is God alone
that makes him
in any respect
to differ from others,
or gives him the advantage over them.

Are there any questions
before we go on to discuss applications
of this sign?

I'll take the two applications to ourselves
directly from Edwards.

Edwards introduces this
with the following:

For persons to be truly emptied of themselves,
and to be poor in spirit,
and broken in heart,
is quite another thing,
and has other effects,
than many imagine.

It is astonishing how greatly
many are deceived about themselves
as to this matter,
imagining themselves most humble,
when they are most proud,
and their behavior is really the most haughty.

The deceitfulness of the heart of man
appears in no one thing
so much as this
of spiritual pride and self-righteousness.

The subtlety of Satan appears in its height,
in his managing of persons with respect to this sin.
And perhaps one reason may be,
that
here
he has most experience;
he knows the way of its coming in;
he is acquainted with the secret springs of it:
it was his own sin.

He then suggests that there are two
ways to discover whether one
is affected with spiritual pride —
that is, that one is not humble.

But though spiritual pride
be so subtle and secret an iniquity,
and commonly appears under a pretext of great humility;
yet there are two things
by which it may (perhaps universally and surely)
be discovered and distinguished.

The first thing is this;
he that is under the prevalence of this distemper,
is apt to think highly of his attainments in religion,
as comparing himself with others.

It is natural for him to fall
into that thought of himself,
that he is an eminent saint,

that he is very high amongst the saints,
and has distinguishingly good and great experiences.

Based on this,
I suggest a question you can ask yourself is this:

Do I think that I am
a better Christian than those around me?

As you think about how to answer this question,
keep these words from
Edwards in mind:

Let not the reader
lightly pass over these things
in application to himself.
If you once have taken it in,
that it is a bad sign for a person
to be apt to think himself
a better saint than others,
there will arise a blinding prejudice
in your own favor;
and there will probably be need
of a great strictness of self-examination,
in order to determine
whether it be so with you.
If on the proposal of the question,
you answer,
"No, it seems to me,
none are so bad as I,"
do not let the matter pass off so;
but examine again,
whether or no you do not
think yourself better than others on
this very account,
because you imagine
you think so meanly of yourself.

Some of you may be thinking
something like this,
"But I am a better Christian
than those around me —
by God's grace alone,
I know more than my fellow Christians,
or I'm more kind than they,
or I'm more devoted to prayer,
of something else like that."

And this,
looking only from a limited perspective
may even be true.

The problem is
that you're looking from the wrong perspective.

I've prepared a little
visual demonstration
that may help you see this —
remember I'm not a visual person,
so this might not help at all,
but at least I tried.

Some of you may be thinking
something like this,
"But I am a better Christian
than those around me —
by God's grace alone,
I know more than my fellow Christians,
or I'm more kind than they,
or I'm more devoted to prayer,
of something else like that."

And this,
looking only from a limited perspective
may even be true.

The problem is
that you're looking from the wrong perspective.

I've prepared a little
visual demonstration
that may help you see this —
remember I'm not a visual person,
so this might not help at all,
but at least I tried.

Will my two assistants please come up here now?

On my right,
you see [insert name] holding up
a piece of paper with a bell curve on it.

This represents the distribution
of any particular gift among people —
whether it be intelligence,
kindness,
musical ability,
whatever you want it to be —
the distribution among people
tends to look like this.

There are a lot of people
with a moderate degree of the gift
and progressively less as you move
to either a lot or a little.

The person on my left
represents the distance
between the best person

and God for any positive attribute —
and, as I'm sure you realize,
if [insert name]
were standing in California,
he still wouldn't be far enough away
to truly represent the distance.

So, you can see from this,
that the distance between the best and the worst person
for any given attribute
is effectively zero
when compared to the distance between
you and God.

For me to say I'm a better Christian than someone else
is to show a profound lack of understanding
of my true condition,
and how far away I am from being
what I should be.

Let's continue now
with another application.

Edwards identifies
the second sign of spiritual pride like this:

Another thing that
is an infallible sign of spiritual pride,
is persons being apt to think highly of their humility.
False experiences are commonly attended
with a counterfeit humility.
And it is the very nature of a counterfeit humility,
to be highly conceited of itself.
False religious affections
have generally that tendency,
especially when raised to a great height
to make persons think that their humility is great,
and accordingly to take much notice
of their great attainments in this respect,
and admire them.
But eminently gracious affections
(I scruple not to say it)
are evermore of a contrary tendency,
and have universally a contrary effect
in those that have them.
They indeed make them very sensible
what reason there is that they should be deeply humbled,
and cause them earnestly
to thirst and long after it;
but they make their present humility,
or that which they have already attained to,
to appear small;
and their remaining pride great,
and exceedingly abominable.

Based on this,
the second question I suggest for us is this:

Do I believe
that I am a humble person?

As you think about your answer
to this question,
consider this warning from Edwards:

The humble Christian is more apt
to find fault with his own pride
than with other men's. ...

Have not you a high opinion of [your] humility?

And if you answer again,
"No;
I have not a high opinion
of my humility;
it seems to me
I am as proud as the devil;"
yet examine again,
whether self-conceit
do not rise up under this cover;
whether on this very account,
that you think yourself
as proud as the devil,
you do not think yourself to be very humble.

Now,
if your answers to these two questions
aren't what they should be,
that doesn't necessarily mean
you're not a believer,
but it does certainly
identify an area in which
you need to improve,
by God's grace.

Are there any questions about
applications to yourself?

Now for application to others.
I have two questions also.

Does the person
acknowledge that God alone
is responsible for his salvation?

Recall from our discussion last week,
that a person's actions might provide
a better answer to this question
than the person's words.

And the second one —

To what extent
does the person exhibit the characteristics
of true humility that we discussed earlier?

Finally,
here are three questions
to consider when applying this sign
to ministries,
or supposed works of God.

Does the ministry
compare itself favorably to others?

If it does,
then there are certainly some aspects
of the ministry that are not godly.

Another question you may want to ask
is this one:

Does the ministry
encourage its followers
to think that they are superior
to believers who are not part of the ministry?

If so,
then there is at least something
not quite right in the ministry.

The third question to consider is this one:

Is the ministry
unwilling to be held accountable to others?

If so,
then there is definitely something not quite right.

Are there any quick
comments or questions before I close?

The plan for next week
is look at signs 7, 8, & 9:
Change of nature,
Christ-like spirit,
and Tender spirit.

So, if you have the book
read the appropriate sections.

My current plan
is to you all do some work
during class next week,
so come prepared for that, too.

Today's closing reading
from the "Miscellanies" is 'o'. **Irresistible Grace.**

The dispute about grace's being
resistible
or irresistible,
is perfect nonsense.

For the effect of grace
is upon the will,
so that it is nonsense,
except it be proper to say,
that a man with his will
can resist his own will,
or
except it be possible
for a man to will a thing
and not will it
at the same time,
and so far as he does will it.

Or if you speak of enlightening grace,
and say this grace is upon the understanding,
it is nothing but the same nonsense
in other words.

For them
the sense runs thus:
that a man,
after he has seen so plainly
that a thing is best for him
that he wills it,
yet he can
at the same time
nill it.

If you say he can will anything he pleases,
this is most certainly true,
for who can deny
that a man can will anything
he does already will?

That a man can will anything that he pleases,
is just as certain
as what is,
is.

Wherefore it is nonsense to say
that after a man has seen so plainly
a thing to be so much best for him
that he will it,
he could have not willed it
if he had pleased.

That is to say,
if he had not willed it,
he could have not willed it.

It is certain that a man
never does anything
but what he can do.

But to say,
after a man has willed a thing,
that he could have not willed it
if he had pleased,
is to suppose two wills in a man:
the one to will which goes first,
and the other to please or choose to will.

And so with the same reason
we may say that there is another will
to please;
to please to will;
and so on to a thousand.

Wherefore,
to say that the man could have willed otherwise
if he had pleased,
is just all one as to say,
that if he had willed otherwise,
then we might be sure he could will otherwise.