

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs
of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections
(sign 10)
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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 eleventh meeting;
we have only two more left after this one.

Did anyone discover in what book
Sir Winston Churchill wrote about butterflies and predestination?

I'll reveal the answer a little later on this morning.

Because there's quite a bit
I want to cover this morning —
far more than we have time for anyway —
I'm going to skip our normal review,
except to mention that for the past few weeks
we've been looking
at the twelve distinguishing marks
that Edwards asserts in Part III of *The Religious Affections*
are truly signs whether religious affections
are godly or not.

So far we've looked in detail at 9 of these marks:
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, and
Tender spirit.

Today, we're going to study
the 10th sign,
which is
beautiful symmetry and proportion.

I'll begin this study
in a very non-Edwardian way:
by telling a joke.

The story is told about
an old farmer who went to the city one weekend
and attended the big city church.

He came home and his wife asked him how it was.
"Well,"

said the farmer,
"it was pretty good.
They did something different, however.
They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

"Praise choruses?"
said his wife.
"What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay.
They're sort of like hymns,
only different,"
said the farmer.

"Well, what's the difference?"
asked his wife.

The farmer said,
"Well, it's like this -
If I were to say to you:
'Martha, the cows are in the corn,'
well, that would be a hymn.

If, on the other hand,
I were to say to you:
Martha, Martha, Martha,
Oh Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA,
the cows,
the big cows,
the brown cows,
the black cows,
the white cows,
the black and white cows,
the COWS,
COWS,
COWS
are in the corn
are in the corn,
are in the corn
are in the corn,
the CORN,
CORN,
CORN.

Then
if I were to repeat
the whole thing two or three times,
well that would be a praise chorus."

Not long after that, the story goes,
a young new Christian
left the big city church one weekend
and attended the farmer's small-town church.

He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

"Well,"
said the young man,
"it was good.
They did something different, however.
They sang hymns instead of regular songs."

"Hymns?" said his wife.
"What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay.
They're sort of like regular songs,
only different,"
said the young man.

"Well, what's the difference?"
asked his wife.

The young man said,
"Well, it's like this -
If I were to say to you,
'Martha, the cows are in the corn,'
well, that would be a regular song.

If, on the other hand,
I were to say to you:

Oh, Martha,
dear Martha,
hear thou my cry;
Inclinest thine ear to the words of my mouth,
Turn thou
thy whole wondrous ear,
by and by,
To the righteous,
inimitable,
glorious truth.

For the way of the animals
who can explain?
There in their head
is no shadow of sense.
Hearkenest they in God's sun
or His rain,
Unless from the mild,
tempting corn they are fenced.

Yea, those cows
in glad bovine rebellious delight,
Have broke free their shackles,
their warm pens eschewed.
Then goaded by minion of darkness and night,
They all my mild
Chilliwack sweet corn have chewed.

So look to that

bright shining day by and by,
Where all foul corruptions
of earth are reborn.
Where no vicious animal
makes my soul cry,
And I no longer see
those foul cows in the corn.

Then
that would be a hymn."

I suspect that how you reacted to this joke
may tell you a bit about how well
you're doing with symmetry and proportion,
at least in regard to music —
it may not,
but I suspect that it will.

Let's see how Edwards introduces this sign:

Another thing wherein those affections
that are truly gracious and holy,
differ from those that are false,
is beautiful symmetry and proportion.

Edwards never quite defines
what he means by
beautiful symmetry and proportion,
but he does give
ample examples,
and contrasts —
primarily contrasts —
to enable us to figure out what he intends.

He goes on to write this:

NOT that the symmetry of the virtues,
and gracious affections of the saints,
in this life is perfect:
it oftentimes is in many things defective,
through the imperfection of grace,
for want of proper instructions,
through errors in judgment,
or some particular unhappiness of natural temper,
or defects in education,
and many other disadvantages that might be mentioned.

But yet there is,
in no wise,
that monstrous disproportion in gracious affections,
and the various parts of true religion in the saints,
that is very commonly to be observed,
in the false religion,
and counterfeit graces, of hypocrites.

He then uses a wonderful phrase
from Hosea 7:8
to describe the condition of these hypocrites.

In this verse,
God describes Ephraim as
“a cake not turned.”

We’re not talking about a cake
like a birthday cake,
but rather a cake of bread,
perhaps resembling a modern crab cake.

So, a cake not turned,
is one that’s
roasted on one side
(because that side got all the heat)
and raw on the other side
(because that side got no heat) —
it is totally out of symmetry
and out of proportion.

In contrast,
a true believer
should be like a cake properly turned.

Edwards argues
that because a believer is to
become more and more
conformed to the image of Jesus,
and
because Jesus’ has beautiful symmetry and proportion
in his affections,
so too
should a believer have
beautiful symmetry and proportion
in his affections.

Edwards recognizes,
as he said in what I’ve already quoted,
that this symmetry is not perfect:
but he asserts that even in the weakest saint,
the degree of symmetry
is distinguishable from that possessed
by any of the unregenerate.

There is symmetry and beauty
in God's workmanship.

The natural body,
which God hath made,
consists of many members;
and all are in a beautiful proportion:
so it is in the new man,
consisting of various graces and affections.

The body of one
that was born a perfect child,
may fail of exact proportion through distemper,
and the weakness
and wounds of some of its members;
yet the disproportion is in no measure
like that of those that are born monsters.

Edwards then describes
several evidences of the lack
of proper symmetry and proportion.

We'll look at three of them.

The first evidence is
no sorrow for sin.

But particularly one great difference
between saints and hypocrites is this,
that the joy and comfort
of the former
is attended with
godly sorrow and mourning for sin.

They have not
only
sorrow to prepare them
for their first comfort,
but after they are comforted,
and their joy established. ...

Although Christ hath borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows,
so that we are freed from the sorrow
of punishment,
and may now sweetly feed
upon the comforts Christ
hath purchased for us;
yet that hinders not
but that our feeding on these comforts
should be attended with
the sorrow of repentance.

A truly regenerate person
will continue to have sorrow for his sin,
while also rejoicing over his salvation.

Someone who hasn't been regenerated
will often have only one or the other,
but not both in proper proportion.

The second evidence
of "a cake not turned" is
what I'll call
selective love.

This can come in
several forms,
such as pretense of love for God,
but no love for others.

Not only is there often in hypocrites an essential deficiency
as to the various kinds of religious affections,
but also a strange partiality and disproportion,
in the same affections, with regard to different objects.

Thus, as to the affection of *love*,
some make high pretenses,
and a great show of love to God and Christ, ...
but they have not a spirit of love and benevolence
towards men,
but are disposed to contention,
envy,
revenge,
and evil speaking;
and will, it may be,
suffer an old grudge ... towards a neighbor, ...
living in real ill will and bitterness of spirit towards him:
and it may be in their dealings with their neighbors,
are not very strict and conscientious in observing
the rule of *doing to others as they would that they should do to them*.

Someone who claims to love God
but shows no love towards others
is definitely "a cake not turned."

1 John 4:20-21

If someone says, "I love God,"
and hates his brother,
he is a liar;

for the one who
does not love his brother
whom he has seen,
cannot love God
whom he has not seen.

And this commandment
we have from Him,
that the one who loves God
should love his brother also.

It can also come
as love of only a select few:

And as to love to men,
there are some that have flowing affections to some;
but their love is far from being
of so extensive and universal a nature,
as a truly Christian love is.

They are full of dear affections to some,
and full of bitterness towards others.

They are knit to their own party,
them that approve of them,
love them and admire them;
but are fierce against those
that oppose and dislike them.

Jesus Himself
says that there is nothing special
about such a love.

Matthew 5:44-47

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you {45} in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. {46} For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? {47} And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Neither Edwards, nor Jesus,
is saying that we have to enjoy the company
of everyone equally —
Jesus Himself spent more time
with certain people than he did with others —
but what both are saying
is that our willingness to pray for others,
our willingness to help others,
our kindness towards others,
should not be selective.

Another instance of selective love
is seen in that

Some show a great affection to their neighbors,
and pretend to [enjoy greatly] the company of the children of God *abroad*;
and at the same time are uncomfortable and churlish
towards their wives and other near relations *at home*,
and are very negligent of relative duties.

And a final instance
involves compassion for only particular sinners.

And as to the great love
to sinners and opposers of religion,
and the great concern for their souls,
that there is an appearance of in some,
even to extreme distress and agony,
singling out a particular person,
from among a multitude,
for its object,
there being at the same time
no general compassion to sinners,
that are in equally miserable circumstances,
but what is in a monstrous disproportion;
this seems not to be of the nature of gracious affection. ...

I say,

such agonies are greatly to be suspected,
for reasons already given; viz.,
that the Spirit of God is wont
to give graces and gracious affections
in a beautiful symmetry and proportion.

The third area
in which lack of symmetry
is often manifested is
misplaced zeal.

This can come in at least two forms.

One is selective zeal
for only a few
right things.

[The] religious desires and longings
[of] the saints,
are to those things that are
spiritual and excellent in general,
and that
in some proportion
to their excellency,
importance or necessity,
or their near concern in them;
but in false longing
it is often far otherwise.

They will strangely run, with an impatient vehemence,
after something of less importance,
when other things of greater importance
are neglected.—

Thus for instance,
some persons,
from time to time,
are attended with a vehement inclination,
and unaccountably violent pressure,
to declare to others what they experience,
and to exhort others;
when there is,
at the same time,
no inclination,
in any measure equal to it,
to other things,
that true Christianity has as great,
yea, a greater tendency to;
as the pouring out the soul
before God in secret,
earnest prayer and praise to him,
and more conformity to him,
and living more to his glory, &c.

In the Old Testament,
we read often about people
making a big show of sacrifice —
that is, public worship —
while neglecting things God said were more important,
such as obeying Him.

1 Samuel 15:22

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

Misplaced zeal can also appear
in selective zeal
against only
certain evil.

And so as to hatred and zeal;
when these are from right principles,
they are against sin in general,
in some proportion
to the degree of sinfulness:
Psal. 119:104, "I hate every false way." ...

But a false hatred and zeal against sin,
is against some particular sin only. ...

False zeal is against the sins of others,
while men have no zeal against their own sins.

But he that has true zeal,
exercises it chiefly against his own sins;
though he shows also
a proper zeal against
prevailing and dangerous iniquity in others.

The Bible clearly teaches
that some sins are worse than others,
but I'm afraid that often our rankings
aren't the same as God's.

One example,
which may get me into trouble,
but I'll say it anyway, because it illustrates the point well.

In the last few years,
most of the people
who've railed against homosexuals in the military,
have had very little to say
about adulterers in the military.

Considering that the penalties in God's law
for homosexuality and adultery are the same —
namely, death —
it is fairly difficult to claim that one
is a substantially worse sin than the other.

Now that we've seen
what Edwards means
by beautiful symmetry and proportion,
and several examples
of lack of symmetry,
let's move now to applications.

First, here are two questions
that we should ask ourselves
concerning this sign:

Is my zeal well-placed –
that is,
do I adore what God adores,
and abhor what God abhors?

To do this,
I have to know well
what God adores
and what he abhors.

Am I willing to help
those who are not my friends?

As with the other signs,
you can change the pronouns
to get questions to ask about others,
but here are two more questions
that can apply to inspecting the fruit
of others, too.

Does the person
demonstrate true sorrow for his sins?

Now, we have to be really careful here,
because different people
show sorrow differently;
just because someone doesn't show sorrow
the same way that you do
doesn't mean they don't have it.

Is the person
as kind and loving to his family
as he is to others?

You can, of course,
change these around a bit,
and get more questions to ask yourself, too.

Concerning ministries,
two questions you can ask are these:

Does the ministry
emphasize the same things

that God emphasizes?

If the ministry is spending a lot of time
talking about things that the Bible
doesn't emphasize much —
detailed rules about clothing,
or acceptable music styles,
for example —
then there's certainly something wrong.

It doesn't mean there's
nothing good about the ministry,
but it does mean that the ministry
is lacking symmetry and proportion in that area.

A related question,
but with a slightly different emphasis is this:

In matters of theology
in which the Scripture balances several ideas —
God's sovereignty & human responsibility,
faith & works,
are two examples —
does the ministry's
teaching align with
the Scriptural balance?

Returning to Sir Winston's butterfly analogy,
if the ministry talks
only about deep brown wings,
when the Scripture talks about
deep brown wings,
and
brilliant blue wings,
then the ministry is lacking proper symmetry.

He wrote that analogy
in a book titled,
[*My Early Life: 1874-1904*](#),
which was first published in England in 1930,
and which is still in print.

Are there any questions,
before I move on to talk a bit
about how lack of symmetry
has played out in history?

You have on your handout the following assertion:
Lack of symmetry and proportion
is a major contributing factor
in the rise of modern prevailing errors.

In the second class of this series,
I mentioned three major errors
that I believe are prevalent

in the Christian community today:
anti-intellectualism,
egalitarianism,
and antinomianism.

Although I've not had the time
to do the detailed historical research
to establish a strong case that it is so,
I nevertheless believe
that all three of these errors came about
as reactions to abuses of the truth.

That is,
those who knew and taught the truth
gradually began to lose
symmetry and proportion
in their teaching,
and to over-emphasize
certain aspects
at the expense of others.

When this happened,
others started over-emphasizing
the aspects that were being overlooked.

Over time,
large groups of people —
whole denominations in some cases —
became almost exclusively devoted
to the reactionary ideas,
so much so,
that the original true ideas,
and the subsequent distortions to the other side,
were nearly,
if not completely,
forgotten.

So, the American Christian community today
is predominately
antinomian,
anti-intellectual,
and egalitarian.

There are pockets here and there
that haven't succumbed to all three
of these errors,
but there are very, very few
who haven't fallen victim,
in at least some way,
to at least one of them.

Now,
in saying this,
I'm not saying that antinomianism,
or anti-intellectualism,

or egalitarianism,
are new errors —
there are no new errors,
only new manifestations of old errors.

What I am saying
is there was once a time in this country
when not one
of these ideas prevailed.

Antinomianism prevails today,
I believe,
because people who once
understood and taught
the proper relationship between
law and grace,
works and faith,
began to so overemphasize
the importance of works
that they seemed to be saying —
and perhaps some were saying —
that a person strives to obey the law
in order to become regenerate,
instead of saying
that a person who is regenerate
will strive to obey the law.

Anti-intellectualism prevails today,
I believe,
because people who once
understood and taught
the critical need for right thinking,
began to so overemphasize
the importance of thinking
that they seemed to be saying —
and perhaps some were saying —
that right thinking
is an end in itself,
instead of saying
that right thinking
is a means to right doing,
which glorifies God.

Egalitarianism prevails today,
I believe,
because people who once
understood and taught
the importance of God-created distinctions
among people
began to so overemphasize
the importance of distinctions
that they seemed to be saying —
and some definitely *were* saying —
that because God created distinctions,
man can create his own distinctions

even where God did not;
instead of saying
that the Bible alone determines
what distinctions should be made.

As we fight against
these errors,
and others that I've not mentioned,
we need to be careful
to maintain the proper symmetry and balance,
lest we accomplish
nothing more than
exchanging one cake not turned,
for another cake not turned
from the other side.

I'll close today with a reading from "The Mind"
instead of from "The Miscellanies" —
It is entry 8, Rules of Reasoning:

'Tis no matter
how abstracted our notions are —
the further we penetrate
and come to the prime reality
of the thing,
the better;

provided we can go
to such a degree of abstraction,
and carry it out clear.

We may go so far in abstraction,
that,
although we may thereby,
in part,
see truth and reality,
and farther than ever was seen before,
yet we may not be able
more than just to touch it,
and to have a few obscure glances.

We may not have strength of mind
to conceive clearly of the manner of it.

We see farther indeed,
but 'tis very obscurely
and indistinctly.

We had better stop
a degree or two short of this,
and abstract no farther
than we can conceive of the thing distinctly,
and explain it clearly:

otherwise
we shall be apt to run into error,

and confound our minds.