

**Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections**  
**Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs**  
**of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections**  
**(signs 10-11)**  
**20 May 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 12<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Let's quickly review  
what we've covered in the previous 11.

We've learned a bit about Jonathan Edwards life,  
including some of the works he wrote  
in addition to *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* —  
*The Freedom of the Will*,  
*Original Sin*,  
"Miscellanies",  
"The Mind",  
and many others.

We've learned why he wrote  
*The Religious Affections*,  
what the affections are,  
and why they are important.

We studied twelve things  
that Edwards explains in Part II  
do not distinguish between godly  
and ungodly affections,  
and I gave short names to each of them:  
Intensity  
    Bodily Affects  
    Verbosity  
    Origin outside self  
Scripture quotations  
    Appearance of love  
    Many kinds  
    Order of appearance  
Much worship  
    Verbal praise  
    Confidence of salvation  
    and Beliefs of others.

We then began studying the  
twelve distinguishing marks  
that Edwards asserts in Part III  
are signs that religious affections  
are godly.

We began this section of our study with  
a quick overview of all twelve,  
and have studied ten of them in detail so far:

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,  
and  
beautiful symmetry and proportion.

We'll cover the last 2 of the distinguishing marks today:

**Desire to grow**

and

**Life of obedience.**

Jonathan Edwards introduces  
the sign I've called desire to grow  
like this:

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.

That is,  
true believers  
are *never satisfied*  
with their current spiritual condition.

They always yearn  
to improve their condition —  
to grow in grace and knowledge  
of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That this should be the case  
should not come as a surprise,  
because the same general principle  
applies in other areas of life, too.

For example,  
in athletics,  
the best athletes are almost always  
the ones who work hardest at getting better.

Consider Karch Kiraly,

the greatest volleyball player of all time.

In his prime,  
Karch was so good,  
that it would be appropriate  
to say that Tiger Woods  
is almost the Karch Kiraly of golf,  
or that Michael Jordan  
was almost the Karch Kiraly of basketball.

As one example of how good Karch was,  
in the trials and practices for  
the 1984 Olympic indoor team,  
which won the Gold medal,  
whichever group of 5 other men  
Karch played with  
always won the practice matches.

That is,  
If the starting team  
with the next best non-starter  
substituted for Karch,  
played against a team  
consisting of Karch and 5 bench-warmers,  
Karch's team would win.

Although he was the best player  
in the world,  
Karch was never satisfied  
with his level of play —  
he always wanted to get better.

The same principle  
applies in academic pursuits,  
business,  
music,  
and just about every other area.

The best and the brightest  
want to get better and brighter,  
while the mediocre and dull  
are often satisfied  
with their mediocrity and dullness.

So, too with true Christians.

THE more a true saint loves God with a gracious love,  
the more he desires to love him,  
and the more uneasy is he at his want of love to him;  
the more he hates sin,  
the more he desires to hate it,  
and laments that he has so much remaining love to it...

Consider also Paul's letter to the Philippians,  
in which he wrote this:

Phil 3:13-15

Brethren, I do not regard myself  
as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do:  
forgetting what lies behind  
and  
reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
I press on  
toward the goal  
for the prize  
of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us therefore,  
as many as are perfect,  
have this attitude;  
and if in anything  
you have a different attitude,  
God will reveal that also to you;

My son David has a music CD  
called "Aussie Praise For Kids: More Like Jesus".

One of the songs on it speaks to this wonderfully.

Here are some of the words:

"Have you seen those fit and healthy guys  
Always doin' their exercise?  
Well it's better to work  
for a heavenly prize  
So practice being godly.

Never give up,  
make it your aim  
Practice being godly.  
If you've been forgiven in Jesus' name  
Practice being godly.  
He paid the price for all our sin  
His Holy Spirit dwells within  
So center all you do on Him ...  
Practice being godly.

You can lift big weights,  
you can swim or run  
Train everyday to be number one  
But it's better to train  
for the life to come.  
Practice being godly."

Let's now consider  
how to apply this sign to ourselves,  
to others,  
and to ministries.

As we do this,  
notice how closely related

this mark is to true humility.

Here are two questions to ask yourself:

Am I satisfied  
with my current spiritual condition?

and

Do there exist aspects  
of my walk with God  
that I'm striving,  
by God's grace,  
to improve?

If your answer to  
the first question is, "yes";  
and the second question is, "no",  
then Jonathan Edwards,  
Paul,  
and most importantly, God,  
say that, without a doubt,  
your answers are wrong.

Concerning others,  
besides the obvious questions  
coming from modifying the ones I just gave you,  
I'll offer one more:

Do the person's attitudes and behavior  
show evidence of desire to  
grow closer to the Lord?

Now, for evaluating the  
extent to which a ministry  
is godly,  
I suggest the following two questions.

Does the ministry  
encourage its members  
to improve their spiritual condition,  
or does it promote  
in them  
an attitude of 'having arrived'?

and

Do the leaders of the ministry  
regularly  
and earnestly  
evaluate the condition of the ministry  
in regard to  
faithfulness to the Word of God?

Any questions about desire to grow  
before we move to the last sign?

The twelve sign,  
which I've called  
**life of obedience**,  
is, in many ways,  
a summarization of the other signs.

When we looked at the first sign,  
spiritual origin of affections,  
recall that I said that it  
was the foundation of,  
the signs that would follow.

**The first sign was the foundation;  
this final sign  
is the capstone.**

Edwards describes this sign like this:

Gracious and holy affections  
have their exercise and fruit  
in Christian practice.

I MEAN, they have [such an] 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.

Now, this is not one of Edwards'  
best sentences,  
but its meaning is relatively clear,  
at least after the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> reading.

Here's an edited version:

A person who has  
gracious and holy affections  
will make it the practice and business of his life  
to be universally conformed to,  
and directed by,  
Christian rules.

Edwards says that

This implies three things:

1. That his behavior or practice  
in the world  
be universally conformed to,

and directed by Christian rules.

2. That he makes  
a business  
of such a holy practice  
above all things;  
that it be a business which he is chiefly engaged in,  
and devoted to,  
and pursues with highest earnestness and diligence:  
so that he may be said  
to make this practice of religion  
eminently *his work and business*.

--- And

3. That he persists in it to the end of life:  
so that it may be said,  
not only to be his business at certain seasons,  
the business of Sabbath days,  
or certain extraordinary times,  
or the business of a month,  
or a year, or of seven years,  
or his business under certain circumstances;  
but the *business of his life*;  
it being that business  
which he perseveres in  
through all changes,  
and under all trials,  
as long as he lives.

The necessity of each of these,  
in all true Christians,  
is most clearly and fully taught in the Word of God.

He then goes on to show  
how the Scripture teaches each of these 3 implications.

Let's look at these.

First, **conformance**.

By this Edwards means  
that a regenerate person  
strives to obey God  
in every area of his life,  
and not just in some areas,  
and that he becomes  
more and more successful  
in obeying.

He cites many Scripture passages  
to show that this is what God requires.

We'll look at only two short ones:

[John 15:14](#)

"You are My friends, if you do what I command you."

James 2:10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

Other passages Edwards cites include:

1 John 3:3

1 John 5:18

1 Corinthians 6:9

Galatians 5:19-20

Ezekiel 33:15

Matthew 5:29-30.

While discussing conformance to God's Word,  
Edwards makes a very important observation:

... obedience must not  
only consist in negatives,  
or in universally avoiding wicked practices,  
consisting in sins of commission,  
but he must also be universal  
in the positives of religion.

Sins of omission  
are as much breaches of God's commands  
as sins of commission.

Christ, in Matt. 25 represents  
those on the left hand  
as being condemned and cursed  
to everlasting fire for sins of omission.

"I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat," &c.

A man,  
therefore,  
cannot be said to be universally obedient,  
and of a Christian conversation,  
only because  
he is no thief,  
nor oppressor,  
nor fraudulent person,  
nor drunkard,  
nor tavern haunter,  
nor whoremaster,  
nor rioter,  
nor night walker,  
nor unclean,  
nor profane in his language,  
nor slanderer,  
nor liar,  
nor furious,  
nor malicious,  
nor reviler.

He is falsely said  
to be of a conversation that becomes the gospel,  
who goes thus far and no farther;  
but in order to this,  
it is necessary that he should also  
be of a serious,  
religious,  
devout,  
humble,  
meek,  
forgiving,  
peaceful,  
respectful,  
condescending,  
benevolent,  
merciful,  
charitable  
and beneficent  
walk and conversation.

Without such things as these,  
he does not obey the laws of Christ,  
and laws that he and his apostles  
did abundantly insist on,  
as of the greatest importance and necessity.

The second important characteristic  
of a life of obedience  
is what I've called on your outline,  
**business.**

About this, Edwards writes the following:

In order to men's being true Christians,  
it is necessary that  
they prosecute the business of religion,  
and the service of God  
with great earnestness and diligence,  
as the work which they devote themselves to,  
and make the  
main business  
of their lives.

All Christ's peculiar people  
not only  
do good works,  
but are zealous  
of good works, Tit. 2:14.

No man can do the service of two masters at once.  
They that are God's true servants  
do give up themselves  
to his service,  
and make it as it were  
their whole work,  
therein employing their whole hearts,

and the chief of their strength:  
Phil. 3:13, "This one thing I do."

An old Ford slogan said,  
"Quality is Job One." (Check on this)

For a true Christian,  
the slogan must be  
"Obedience is Job One."

The third characteristic that Edward mentions  
is **perseverance**.

Every true Christian perseveres  
in this way of universal obedience,  
and diligent and earnest service of God,  
through all the various kinds of trials that he meets with,  
to the end of life.

That all true saints,  
all those that do obtain eternal life,  
do thus persevere in the practice of religion,  
and the service of God,  
is a doctrine so abundantly taught in the Scripture,  
that particularly to rehearse  
all the texts which imply it would be endless;  
I shall content myself with referring to some  
in the margin.

As a footnote,  
he lists some 35 scripture passages.

We'll look at only one:

[Hebrews 3:12-14](#)

Take care, brethren,  
lest there should be in  
any one of you an evil,  
unbelieving heart,  
in falling away from the living God.

But encourage one another  
day after day,  
as long as it is still called "Today,"  
lest any one of you  
be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have become partakers of Christ,  
if we hold fast  
the beginning of our assurance  
firm until the end

Edwards recognizes  
that the obedience of true believers  
is never perfect in this life.

True saints may be guilty  
of some kinds and degrees of backsliding,

and may be foiled by particular temptations,  
and may fall into sin,  
yea great sins;  
but they never can  
fall away so as to grow weary of religion,  
and the service of God,  
and habitually to dislike it  
and neglect it,  
either on its own account,  
or on account of the difficulties that attend it;  
as is evident by Gal. 6:9,  
Rom. 2:7,  
Heb. 10:36,  
Isa. 43:22,  
Mal. 1:13.

...

Nor can a true saint  
ever fall away so,  
that it shall come to this,  
that ordinarily there shall be  
no remarkable difference  
in his walk and behavior  
since his conversion,  
from what was before.

...

they that fall away,  
... it is a sign they  
never were  
risen with Christ.

The true Christian,  
should apply these words  
of a famous English statesman  
and honorary United States citizen  
to his life:

“Never give in—  
never,  
never,  
never,  
never,  
in nothing great or small,  
large or petty,  
never give in ...

Never yield to force;  
never yield  
to the apparently overwhelming  
might of the enemy.”

For the true believer  
will persevere.

Edwards spends quite a few pages  
writing about the ways in which  
a life of obedience is evident,  
but I think we've covered enough  
to move on to applications.

Are there any questions  
before we do so?

As we consider how to apply this sign  
to ourselves,  
here are two questions we may ask:

First,  
Do I yearn  
to obey God  
in my attitudes and actions  
in every area of life?

Remember that obedience  
involves both  
not doing what God forbids,  
and  
doing what God requires.

Second,  
Do the choices I make  
show that my highest priority  
in life is to obey God?

The choices we make  
are the best indicator  
of our true priorities —  
much better than  
what we simply claim are our priorities.

Here's an example.

Suppose I'm given  
the opportunity at work  
to take a new assignment  
that will pay me more money,  
but require me to work on Sundays  
twice a month.

If I choose to take that assignment,  
then I will demonstrate conclusively —  
no matter how loudly I may claim otherwise —  
that obeying God  
is not  
my highest priority.

This second question,  
is a good one to consider,  
with appropriate wording changes, of course,

when inspecting the fruit of others, too.

Here is another question  
that applies well to others:

How does the person  
respond to trials in his life?

Another question for others is this:

When the person learns  
something new about God's revealed will  
does he make all needed changes  
to bring his life into conformity  
with what God requires?

In applying this sign to ministries,  
or supposed works of God,  
we might consider these two questions:

First,  
Does the ministry  
exhort its members  
to live lives that  
conform to Scripture in every area?

Second,  
Do the lives of the ministry's leaders  
conform to the Scripture  
in every area?

If a ministry  
is telling people  
to "do what you think is best",  
or "let your conscience be your guide"  
or even  
"follow the leading of the Holy Spirit"  
in areas  
that are not areas  
of Christian liberty,  
then  
the ministry is definitely in error.

Actually,  
I need to issue a warning here,  
which actually applies to many things,  
and which will be reinforced  
by our closing reading  
from "The Mind" in a few minutes.

The warning is this:

Be sure you know what people  
mean by the words they use,  
and don't just assume

that you know,  
or that they mean  
the same thing  
you would mean  
by the same words.

For example,  
the phrase  
"follow the leading of the Holy Spirit"  
has been used by some people  
to mean something like this:  
"Do what the Scripture says  
for things in which  
the Scripture gives instruction,  
and follow your God-given  
inclinations and desires  
in other things."

This is a really bad choice of words  
to convey that particular meaning,  
but the error of bad word choice  
is not the same error as  
suggesting that the Holy Spirit  
might lead a person  
to do something  
that is against the Scripture.

If someone asks you,  
"Should I murder my boss  
for not giving me a raise?"

I strongly suggest  
that answering,  
"No,"  
is better than answering,  
"Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit,"  
no matter what  
you intend by the latter phrase.

As another example,  
consider one of the tragedies  
of the U.S. church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:  
the long rift between Cornelius Van Til,  
(and his followers),  
and  
Gordon Clark (and his followers).

That whole controversy began with  
misunderstandings over how words were being used,  
and it was perpetuated by continuing misunderstandings.

In some people,  
those misunderstandings still exist today.

Had folks stopped to ask questions like,  
"What do you mean by incomprehensibility?"  
"What do you mean by proof?"  
"What do you mean by analogy?",  
and listened to the answers,  
the two men could've become allies  
instead of opponents.

Are there any questions  
before we close?

Next week will be our last class.

My plan is to do two main things:

One, discuss applications  
at a higher level  
than we've discussed so far,  
concentrating on some  
dangers to avoid when making application;  
and  
Two, answer some questions  
that some folks have asked  
during the course.

I'll close today's class  
with a short reading from "The Mind",  
Number 18, titled WORDS.

We are used to  
apply the same words  
a hundred different ways;  
and ideas being so much tied  
and associated with the words,  
they lead us into  
a thousand real mistakes;  
for where we find  
that the words may be connected,  
the ideas being by custom tied with them,  
we think the ideas may be connected likewise,  
and applied every where,  
and in every way,  
as the words.