

The Christian Life in the Mind of Jonathan Edwards

The Theology of Jonathan Edwards

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To grasp the entire corpus of Edwards' understanding of sanctification in a single paper such as this is almost impossible. The aim of this paper is to simply catch a glimpse of the significance of Edwards' teaching on sanctification, what fruit is desired of this paper is a clear understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the mind of Jonathan Edwards.

It is no mistake that the greatest and perhaps most profound of all of Edwards' writings and sermons seem to have come in the last fifteen years of his life, works such as, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections in Three Parts*, *The Life of David Brainerd*, *The Freedom of the Will*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and *The End for Which God Created the World*. *Religious Affections* deals with the nature of saving faith, *The Life of David Brainerd* is Edwards' edited work of David Brainerd's diary, while *Freedom of the Will* refutes Armenianism, but more

specifically shows the reader that it is God who saves. *The Nature of True Virtue* in which the title speaks for itself, but Edwards specifically deals with the exercise of virtue, *The End for Which God Created the World* deals with the purpose of all that exists (including God Himself), and finally his work on *Original Sin* – which is an explanation of the nature of sin. It seems that there is a common thread that runs through each of these works; might it be suggested that the thread which runs through the above works seems to be the purpose and disposition of man? Is it coincidental that these masterful gems are the product of a time in Jonathan’s life that was perhaps the most difficult days of his ministry?

In Edwards’ *The Religious Affections*, one can read the 1 Peter 1:8, the verse by which Edwards places the entire work: “Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” What is intriguing is the verses that precede verse eight, “In this you rejoice though not for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” One year after the publishing of *The Religious Affections*, the tested genuineness of Jonathan’s faith had come, for his esteemed friend, David Brainerd, died of tuberculosis under the care of his beloved daughter Jerusha who, in turn, died four months later of fever. Two years after the death of his daughter, Jonathan was dismissed from his church because of his convictions regarding who should or should not participate in the Lord’s Table. After twenty-four years of pastoring the same church, Jonathan settled in Stockbridge, Massachusetts as a missionary to Indians. In 1754, Edwards wrote *Freedom of the Will*; one year after writing *Freedom of the Will*, he drafted *The End for Which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue*. Jonathan’s final writing project was

Original Sin, the same year he died while president at Princeton of a smallpox inoculation. It would profit the Church well to take heed to the life and work of Edwards – especially the theological insight Edwards offers concerning the Christian’s journey from justification to glorification.

Edwards believed that all of creation existed for the glory of God and that it is the duty of all of creation to glorify God, including man; the idea that all that exists, exists for the glory of God is a theme that Edwards saw all throughout the Bible, “For it appears, that all that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works, is included in that one phrase, the glory of God; which is the name by which the ultimate end of God’s works is most commonly called in Scripture; as seems most aptly to signify the thing [the internal and external glory of God].”¹

Jonathan Edwards offers two suggestions in how God is glorified in the creature. First, God is glorified through the honor accorded to Him, by man, in that God is honored through man’s knowledge of the “dignity and excellency of him who hath the honor; and this is often more especially signified by the word glory, when applied to God.... And it is manifest in many places, where we read of God glorifying himself, or of his being glorified, that one thing, directly intended, is making known his divine greatness and excellency”²

Secondly, God is glorified in the praise he receives from His creation. How is God glorified in the praise he receives from the finite? He is glorified, according to Edwards, by the “high esteem and love of the heart, exalting thoughts of God, and complacency [i.e., satisfaction, delight] in his excellence and perfection.” Edwards further suggests that this praise by which God is glorified “also implies joy in God, or rejoicing in his perfections, as is manifest by Psalm

¹ Jonathan Edwards, “The End for Which God Created the World,” in *God’s Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998) 242.

² *Ibid.*, 237-38.

33:2. 'Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright.' How often do we read of singing praise! But singing is commonly an expression of joy. It is called, making a joyful noise. And as it is often used, it implies gratitude or love to God for his benefits to us."³

Surely, Edwards was familiar with Genesis 1:31, that God was VERY pleased after creating man, and the Psalmist explanation that "You [God] have made him a little lower than God, and You [God] crown him with glory and majesty!"⁴ Isaiah 43:7 even goes as far to refer to His people as being created for His glory. Edwards, in light of the above passages, suggests the following, "...God's value for and delight in the emanations of his fullness in the work of creation argues his delight in the infinite fullness of good in himself, and the supreme regard he has for himself (and that in making these emanations, he ultimately makes himself his end in creation) will more clearly appear by considering more particularly the nature and circumstances of these communications of God's fullness."⁵ The following statement by Edwards is helpful in understanding the motive of God in the creation of man,

This propensity in God to diffuse himself may be considered as a propensity to himself diffused, or to his own glory existing in its emanation. A respect to himself, or an infinite propensity to and delight in his own glory, is that which causes him to incline to its being abundantly diffused, and to delight in the emanation of it.... God looks on the communication of himself and the emanation of his infinite glory to belong to the fullness and completeness of himself, as though he were not in his most glorious state without it.

After the creatures are intended to be created, God may be conceived of as being moved by benevolence to them.... His exercising his goodness and gratifying his benevolence to them in particular, may be the spring of all God's proceedings through the universe; as being now the determined way of gratifying his general inclination to defuse himself. Here God acting for himself, or making himself his last end, and his acting for their sake, are not to be set in opposition; they are rather to be considered as coinciding one with the other, and implied on in the other.⁶

³ Ibid., 239.

⁴ Psalm 8:5

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," in *God's Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998) 156-7.

⁶ Ibid., 155-56.

So, in Edwards' thought, a person can only find real and lasting happiness (satisfaction) in functioning in the chief end for which God created him: "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."⁷ Edwards further writes,

The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted. Joy, or the exulting of the heart in God's glory, is one thing that belongs to praise. So that God is all in all with respect to each part of that communication of the divine fullness which is made to the creature. What is communicated is divine or something of God, and each communication is of that nature, that the creature to whom it is made is thereby conformed to God and united to him, and that in proportion as the communication is greater or less. And the communication itself is no other, in the very nature of it, than that wherein the very honor, exaltation, and praise of God consists.⁸

Edwards clearly thought that the purpose of man was to be found in the emanation of God's glory in life and conduct. From his observation of Scripture, Edwards concluded that the way a person glorified God was in "the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an emanation and remanation. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end."⁹

Edwards understood all too well that because of Adam's rebellion, it is impossible for man to function according to the purpose for which he was created. Man's condition is deplorable because of sin and its nature for which all of man is guilty, as Edwards states in *Charity and its Fruits*,

⁷ Edwards was very familiar with the Westminster Confession of Faith.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," in *God's Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998) 158-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

The ruin that the fall brought upon the soul of man consist very much in his losing the nobler and more benevolent principles of his nature, and falling wholly under the power and government of self-love... Sin like some powerful astringent, contracted his soul to the very small dimensions of selfishness; and God was forsaken, and fellow creatures forsaken, and man retired within himself, and became totally governed by narrow and selfish principles and feelings. Self-love became absolute master of his soul, and the more noble and spiritual principles of his being took wings and flew away.¹⁰

Sin is evil and that, “If God should open the window in the heart so that we might look into it, it would be the most loathsome spectacle that ever was set before our eyes.”¹¹ Edwards’

understanding of the condition of man’s heart was that it is beyond repair. Man’s sinful condition and the way it is manifested is only a symptom of a larger problem in Edwards’ mind, notice the great care Edwards takes in crafting the following statement,

The hearts of natural men are exceedingly full of sin. If they had but one sin in their hearts, it would be sufficient to render their condition very dreadful. But they have not only one sin, but all manner of sin. There is every kind of lust. The heart is a mere sink of sin, a fountain of corruption whence issue all manner of filthy streams.... Men have not only every kind of lust, and wicked and perverse dispositions in their hearts, but they have them to a dreadful degree. There is not only pride, but an amazing degree of it—pride whereby a man is disposed to set himself even above the throne of God itself.¹²

In Edward’ final work, *Original Sin*, he goes through great length to help the reader understand that man is incapable of doing any good. Not only has man’s sin rendered him impotent to glorify God in life and conduct, but he has no desire to do so. There is no ability in man to do any good whatsoever according to Edwards,

But if any should still insist on a notion of men’s good deed exceeding their bad ones, and that, seeing the good more than countervails the evil, they cannot be properly denominated evil; all persons and things being most properly denominated from that which prevails and has the ascendant in them; I would say further, that if there is in man’s nature a tendency to guilt and ill desert, in a vast

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000) 157-8.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition,” *The Wrath of Almighty God*, edited by Rev. Don Kistler (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996) 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

overbalance to virtue and merit; or a propensity to sin, the demerit of which is so great, that the value and merit of all the virtuous acts that ever he performs, are as nothing to it; then truly the nature of man may be said to be corrupt and evil.¹³

But what is it exactly that renders man in such a dreadful condition? On this point, Edwards' position is an interesting one. Man was created with a disposition towards righteousness and that disposition towards righteousness was resultant to man being created in the image of God. But in Edwards' mind, man's being created in the image of God is twofold, for when God created man in His image man was created both naturally in the image of God and morally in the image of God.

Resultant of the fall, man retained the natural image of God as it pertains to intellect, emotion, and will, but the moral image of God was completely destroyed, or as Edwards wrote it, "There in not one lust in the heart of the devil that is not in the heart of man. Natural men are in the image of the devil. The image of God is razed out and the image of the devil is stamped upon them."¹⁴ Because the moral image of God was destroyed in Adam when he sinned, so too the moral image of God in Adam's posterity. Therefore it is utterly impossible for man to do any moral good, for "all mankind are under the influence of a prevailing effectual tendency in their nature, to that sin and wickedness, which implies their utter and eternal ruin."¹⁵

Certainly, all of Edwards' works are not outweighed by his writings on hell, in fact, his writings and sermons on hell are just a small portion of the many themes encompassed in his works. But one thing is sure, Edwards was very clear about the condition, nature, and eternal

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, "Original Sin," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards v. 1.* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 1998) 152.

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition," *The Wrath of Almighty God*, edited by Rev. Don Kistler (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996) 8.

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "Original Sin," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards v. 1.* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 1998) 149.

prospect of the reprobate. Before Edwards doctrine of justification is observed, it is profitable to note one more excerpt from his sermon, *Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition*,

The hearts of natural men are dreadfully hard and incorrigible. There is nothing but the mighty power of God that will move them. They will cleave to sin, and go on in sin, let what will be done with them. Pro. 27:22, “Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.” There is nothing that will awe our hearts; and there is nothing that will draw them to obedience: let there be mercies or afflictions, threatenings or gracious calls and invitations, frowning, or patience and long-suffering, or fatherly counsels and exhortations. Isa. 26:10, “Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”¹⁶

What is Edwards’ response to the fact that natural men are in dreadful condition?

Christ will not refuse to save the gravest sinners, who in a right manner come to God for mercy; for this is his work. It is his business to be a Savior of sinners; it is the work upon which he came into the world; and therefore he will not object to it. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, Matt. ix. 13. Sin is the very evil which he came into the world to remedy: therefore he will not object to any man, that he is very sinful. The more sinful he is, the more need of Christ.—The sinfulness of man was the reason of Christ’s coming into the world; this is the very misery from which he came to deliver men.¹⁷

The means to have the above is faith in Jesus Christ. For Edwards, faith is that which causes the soul of man to be united to Christ. Faith begins in the understanding of biblical truth, truth that is present in the individual before it is illuminated through the power of the Holy Spirit and is immediately received at the moment true faith is exercised. For Edwards, faith was not something that the reprobate could just exercise, for the moral condition of man will not allow man to see his real need to be justified by God. In his sermon, *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine*,

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition,” *The Wrath of Almighty God*, edited by Rev. Don Kistler (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996) 10.

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “Pardon for the Greatest Sinners,” *Jonathan Edwards on Knowing Christ*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997) 270-1.

This light is such as effectually influences the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul. It assimilates our nature to the divine nature, and changes the soul into an image of the same glory that is beheld.... This knowledge will wean from the world, and raise the inclination to heavenly things. It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion. This light, and this only, will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ. It conforms the heart to the gospel, mortifies its enmity and opposition against the scheme of salvation therein revealed. It causes the heart to embrace the joyful tidings, and entirely to adhere to, and acquiesce in the revelation of Christ as our Savior. It causes the whole soul to accord and symphonize with it, admitting it with entire credit and respect, cleaving to it with full inclination and affection, and it effectually disposes the soul to give up itself entirely to Christ.¹⁸

It is, in Edwards' view, that God is the only being who can open the mind of man to see his need for salvation. God takes the truth that is in the mind of the reprobate (intellect), acquiesces the soul to what he understands (emotion), and brings the reprobate from his sins to Christ in repentance (will). God has done the above in every Christian; it is the Christian who is passive, and it is God who is aggressive in redemption, for "God, in mercy to miserable man, entered on the work of redemption, and, by the glorious gospel of his Son, began the work of bringing the soul of man out of his confinement and contractedness, and back again to those noble and divine principles by which it was animated and governed at first... it is through the cross of Christ that he is doing this."¹⁹

In Edwards' day, just as it is in this present day, Armenianism was a formidable foe to the Calvinistic tradition – today it is more or less excepted by the vast majority of Christians. The simple tenet of Armenianism simply "builds everything on the axiom that divine control of human action is incompatible with man's moral responsibility."²⁰ Man, according to the Armenians, had the ability to exercise the faith necessary for salvation out of his own will, and it was this idea that was poison in Edwards' mind; how was it possible for man, in the condition

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards v. 2.* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 1998) 17.

¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000) 158.

²⁰ J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990) 315.

that he was clearly in, to exercise any hint of the faith necessary for salvation? In Edwards's mind such conclusions proposed by the Armenianist position was a clear denial of Scripture and reason.

Edwards was thoroughly convinced that man is only free to make decisions within the framework of his moral disposition. So the reprobate can only and will only make reprobate choices that are framed and determined by his/her sinful disposition to sin. The unregenerate person can only chose sinfully; he/she is bound to make choices that are motivated by a "willful" desire to sin because Adam's sin affected his posterity. This is why it is utterly impossible for a person to choose God in his unregenerate condition, for his/her will is constrained to the bounds of his moral condition. Observe Edwards' argument concerning the above,

It is agreeable to the natural notions of mankind, that moral evil, with its desert of dislike and abhorrence, and all its other ill-deservings, consists in a certain deformity in the nature of certain dispositions of the heart and acts of the will; and not in the deformity of something else, diverse from the very thing itself; which deserves abhorrence, supposed to be the cause of it;—which would be absurd, because that would be to suppose a thing that is innocent and not evil, is truly evil and faulty, because another thing is evil. It implies a contradiction; for it would be to suppose, the very thing which is morally evil and blameworthy, is innocent and not blameworthy; but that something else, which is its cause, is only to blame. To say, that vice does not consist in the thing which is vicious, but in its cause, is the same as to say, that vice does not consist in vice, but in that which produces it.

It is true a cause may be to blame for being the cause of vice: it may be wickedness in the cause that it produces wickedness. But it would imply a contradiction, to suppose that these two are the same individual wickedness. The wicked act of the cause in producing wickedness, is one wickedness; and the wickedness produced, if there be any produced, is another. And therefore the wickedness of the latter does not lie in the former, but is distinct from it; and the wickedness of both lies in the evil nature of the things which are wicked.²¹

All choice is and must be framed by moral parameters for choice to be a choice – all decisions, according to Edwards, are morally framed and determined by moral circumstances.

This is why God, looking from His eternal now, sees fallen man and choose some from that vast

²¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, (Franklin Center, PA: The Franklin Library, 1984) 183-4.

pool of fallen man to save them, for it is impossible for man to choose any good in a deplorably immoral disposition – the reprobate can and will choose only evil because the will is under the controlling disposition of the person who is doing the willing. Man definitely had freedom of will, but, as Edwards put it in a letter to his friend, John Erskine, “I have abundantly expressed it as my mind, that man, in his moral actions, has true liberty; and that the moral necessity which universally takes place, is not in the least inconsistent with anything that is properly called liberty, and with the utmost liberty that can be desired, or that can possibly exist or be conceived of.”²²

Being that the will of unregenerate man is limited by the fact that he has taken on the moral image of the devil at conception, God must choose the reprobate and make him a saint in order to give him a holy disposition that enables him to make holy and right choices in the sight of God. It is helpful to note the following statement in Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will*,

If the beginning of true faith and holiness, and a man’s becoming a true saint at first, don’t depend on the self-determining power of the will, but on the determining efficacious grace of God; it may well be argued, that it is so also with respect to men’s being continued saints, or persevering in faith and holiness. The conversion of a sinner being not owing to a man’s self-determination, but to God’s determination, and eternal election, which is absolute, and depending on the sovereign will of God, and not on the free-will of man; as is evident from what has been said: and it being very evident from the Scriptures, that the eternal election which there is of saints to faith and holiness, is also an election of them to eternal salvation; hence their appointment to salvation must be also absolute, and not depending on their contingent, self determining will. From all which it follows, that it is absolutely fixed in God’s decree, that all true saints shall persevere to actual eternal salvation.²³

It is clearly understood that Edwards viewed the salvation of individuals as a work that God alone does, for the reprobate is passive while God is active in the salvation of a soul.²⁴

²² George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 445.

²³ Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, (Franklin Center, PA: The Franklin Library, 1984) 270-1.

²⁴ “And a person is to be *justified*, when he is approved of God as free from the guilt of sin and its deserved punishment, and as having that righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life. That we should

Thus, it is God who is altogether responsible for one's justification, but justification, according to Edwards, does not only consist of being pardoned, but...

...in an act of sentence approving of him as innocent and positively righteous and so having a right to freedom from punishment and to the reward of positive righteousness. Pardon as the word is used in other cases signifies a forgiving one freely though he is not innocent or has no right to be looked on as such. There is nothing of his own he has to offer that is equivalent to innocence, but he justly stands guilty; but notwithstanding his guilt he is freed from punishment. But the pardon we have by Christ is a freeing persons from punishment of sin as an act of justice and because they are looked upon and accepted as having that which is equivalent to innocence...

Justification consists in imputing righteousness. To pardon sin is to cease to be angry for sin. But imputing righteousness and ceasing to be angry are two things. One is the foundation of the other. God ceases to be angry with the sinner for his sin because righteousness is imputed to him...

Persons cannot be justified without a righteousness consistent with God's truth for it would be a false sentence. It would be to give sentence concerning a person that he is approvable as just that is not just and cannot be approved as such in a true judgment. To suppose a sinner pardoned without a righteousness is self contradictory.²⁵

Through this pardon, God poured out His wrath on His Son who himself was justified²⁶ by being perfectly righteous in His obedience to the moral law and dying for the sins He voluntarily took upon Himself on the cross. The believer is in turn justified by believing in the justification of Christ on the cross;

While God beholds the man as separate from Christ, He must behold him as he is in himself. And so his goodness cannot be beheld by God but as taken his goodness cannot be beheld by God but as taken with his guilt and hatefulness, and as put in the scales with it. And so his goodness is nothing because there is a finite item on the balance against an infinite one, whose proportion to it is

take the word in such a sense, and understand it as the judge's accepting a person as having both a negative and positive righteousness belonging to him, and looking on him therefore as not only free from any obligation to punishment, but also as just and righteous and so entitled to a positive reward, is not only most agreeable to the etymology and natural import of the word, which signifies to pass one for righteous in judgment, but also manifestly agreeable to the force of the word as used in Scripture" (Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*. [Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000] 5).

²⁵ A quote from Jonathan Edwards (John H. Gerstner, *A Mini-Theology*, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998).

²⁶ Edwards believed that Christ himself need to be justified, and He did this through perfect obedience to the moral law and paying the penalty of death by voluntarily taking the sin of the Church upon Himself.

nothing.... Though a respect to the natural suitableness between such a qualification and such a state goes before justification, yet the acceptance even of faith as any goodness or liveliness in the believer follows justification.... But to suppose that God gives a man an interest in Christ as a reward for his righteousness or virtue is inconsistent with his still remaining under condemnation till he has an interest in Christ...²⁷

It is through God's justifying act of mercy and grace, in the life of the one who has been transformed from death to life, that one finds purpose according to Edwards. The Christian, through justification, is able to live in a manor for which he was created, for on this point Edwards states, "And as the exercise of true religion and virtue in Christians is summarily expressed by their glorifying God, so, when the good influence of this on others is spoken of, it is expressed in the same manner."²⁸

Edwards further elaborates on the above point by suggesting, in light of 1Corinthians 6:20, that, "...not only is glorifying God spoken of, as what summarily comprehends the end of religion, and of Christ redeeming us; but the apostle urges, that inasmuch as we are not our own, we ought not to act as if we were our own, but as God's; and should not use the members of our bodies, or faculties of our souls, for ourselves, but for God, as making him our end."²⁹ In other words, the act of God justifying the Christian is the act of redemption, which renders the Christian as property to the God of the universe for whom he was created and therefore, "we should give ourselves as it were away from ourselves to God, and use ourselves as his, and not our own, acting for his sake, and not our own sakes."³⁰

Union with God through Christ, resultant of true justification, is the source of true joy in the life of the Christian, for, "There is in Christ provision for the satisfaction, and full

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000) 28-30.

²⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," in *God's Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998) 196.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 196-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

contentment, of the needy and thirsty soul.”³¹ So, in Edwards’ mind, justification is more than just being forgiven, it is also the receiving of a new disposition to function in the way for which man was created. The natural implications of a new and holy disposition of the Christian, according to Edwards, are good works; note carefully the following excerpt from Edwards’ *Justification by Faith*,

Faith unites to Christ, and so gives a congruity to justification not merely as remaining a dormant principle in the heart, but as being and appearing in its active expressions. The obedience of a Christian, so far as it is truly evangelical and performed with the Spirit of the son sent forth into the heart, has all relation to Christ, the Mediator, and is but an expression of the soul’s believing union with Christ. All evangelical works are works of that faith which works by love; and every such act of obedience, wherein it is inward and the act of the soul, is only a new, effective act of reception of Christ, and adherence to the glorious Savior... And hence we are directed, in whatever we do, whether in word or deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

This is the reverse of the scheme of our modern divines who hold that faith justifies only as an act or expression of obedience, whereas in truth obedience has no concern in justification in any other way than as an expression of faith.³²

When Jonathan Edwards was called to assist his grandfather Solomon Stoddard as, more-or-less, an associate pastor, he entered a culture where almost all of the townspeople professed faith in Christ. And regarding a particular practice that Edwards’ grandfather initiated, for some, being a Christian had more to do with culture than heart condition.

Solomon Stoddard initiated in Northampton a practice called communicant membership. In Stoddard’s plan, everyone in the church would be baptized and under the direct discipline of both the pastor and church. In his explanation of this new institution titled, *The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches*, he wrote, “If a Christian live in a town where there is a church, he is immediately bound to join with that church; and that church is bound to him to govern him.”³³

³¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Safety, Fullness, and Sweet Refreshment in Christ,” *Altogether Lovely: Jonathan Edwards on the Glory and Excellency of Christ*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications) 81.

³² Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000) 96-7.

³³ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 31.

Stoddard developed the above idea because of his concern for strengthening the roles of the clergy among the townspeople; Stoddard saw the role of the church as what Israel was to Palestine – a national covenant people. Although Stoddard’s position drew much concern early, was widely accepted by the time Edwards became full pastor after the death of his grandfather (about thirty years after the institution of communicant membership). So, despite the reading of 1 Corinthians 11:29, anyone was free to participate in the Lord’s Supper – even the unconverted townspeople.³⁴

Although Edwards did not attempt to correct the practice of communicant membership until 1750 (fifty years after communicant membership accepted) he worked very hard to help his parishioners understand the seriousness of participating in the Lord’s Table in an unworthy manner, for he was convinced that there were parishioners in his own church who had not experienced true saving faith.

It seems that Jonathan Edwards was particularly sensitive to how young men and women behaved, for while he was at Yale, he experienced that not all the students who were studying for the ministry behaved morally. When he came to Northampton, Edwards noticed similar behavior with the youth at Northampton that he had experienced while in Yale; these same youth were also participating in communion which bothered Edwards immensely. Throughout his ministry Edwards often took any opportunity he could find to challenge the young people of his audience to make sure their faith was saving faith; this is seen very clearly in his concluding remark of a sermon he preached to a still grieving congregation over the death of Solomon Stoddard, *The Death of Faithful Ministers: A Sign of God’s Displeasure*,

³⁴ Keep in mind that the participation of infant baptism and communion was a socially important practice given the religious culture of Edwards’ day, so most, if not all, attendees of a church service would take from the Lord’s Table.

God has taken away our Joshua, he that was our captain to lead us into the heavenly Canaan, and with him he has taken away many of the elders that were contemporary with him. It looks darkly upon us that those of that generation are taken away so fast, and that there is no more hopeful prospect from the rising generation.

Licentious and immoral practices seem to get great head amongst young people. And how little appearance is there of a spirit of seriousness and religion to be seen among them. How little concern about their salvation and escaping eternal misery. How few that seem to be earnestly inquiring what they shall do to be saved. How little is religion in credit amongst many of them, but [they] rather pursue those vanities, [in] which there is great danger that they will prove to the eternal ruin of their own souls and the ruin of the place.³⁵

As can be clearly seen, any hypocrisy among young and old who profess Christ was a real concern for Edwards. In a sermon, *Wicked Men Inconsistent with Themselves*, Edwards was clear concerning his thoughts concerning those who claimed to be Christians, but in practice profess nothing of the sort, “The outward show of wicked men disagrees with their hearts. They very often make an appearance that is exceedingly different and contrary to what they really are inwardly. They have the clothing of sheep, but the nature of wolves, Matt. 7:15. They are like whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward[ly], but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.”³⁶

Why would this be a concern for Edwards? Because true saving faith is evidenced by good works (the resultant outcome of a new and holy disposition), evidence that was certainly lacking among the younger generation in Northampton. Little did Edwards know that in about four more years the Great Awakening would take Northampton by storm, a time when many of the younger men and women would experience true saving faith resultant of his ministry in Solomon’s pulpit.

³⁵ Jonathan Edwards, “The Death of Faithful Ministers a Sign of God’s Displeasure,” *The Salvation of Souls*. Edited by Richard A. Baily and Gregory A. Wills (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002) 37.

³⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “Wicked Men Inconsistent with Themselves,” *Jonathan Edwards Memorial Library*. (Electronic sermon, 2003).

If it were not for the Stoddardian practice of communicant membership and the Great Awakening, Edwards most likely would not have written *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God, A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, and so many sermons which attempt to explain what a true work of God in the life of a reprobate looked like.

In the above works, Edwards argues that those who truly come to Christ receive Him as Lord. One could not come to Christ as Savior without also coming to Him as Lord. A simple profession of faith was no evidence of saving faith according to Edwards, for he writes in his sermon, *True Grace Distinguished*,

Therefore it is manifest from my text and doctrine that no degree of speculative knowledge of religion is any certain sign of true piety. Whatever clear notions a man may have of the attributes of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature of the two covenants, the economy of the persons of the Trinity, and the part which each person has in the affair of man's redemption; if he can discourse never so excellently of the offices of Christ, the way of salvation by him, the admirable methods of divine wisdom, and the harmony of the various attributes of God in that way; if he can talk never so clearly and exactly of method of justification of a sinner, of the nature of conversion, and the operations of the Spirit of God in applying the redemption of Christ, giving good distinctions, happily solving difficulties, and answering objections, in a manner tending greatly to enlighten the ignorant, to the edification of the church of God, the conviction of gainsayers, and the great increase of light in the world; if he has more knowledge of this sort than hundreds of true saints of an ordinary education, and most divines; yet all is no certain evidence of any degree of saving grace in the heart.³⁷

So what is the evidence of saving faith? Edward briefly defines saving faith with his concluding thought to the above sermon, “The infallible evidences of grace which are laid down in Scripture are of another kind. They are all of a holy and spiritual nature, and therefore are things of that kind which a heart that is wholly carnal and corrupt cannot receive or experience (1 Corinthians 2:14).”³⁸

³⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “True Grace Distinguished,” *The True Believer*, (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001) 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

In his book, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards goes into great length to define the “infallible evidences of grace” by listing what he calls “truly gracious and holy affections.” Take special note of his list of the gracious affections,

1. Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, go arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are spiritual, supernatural and divine.³⁹
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.⁴⁰
3. Those affections that are truly holy, are primarily founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things.⁴¹
4. Gracious affections do arise from the mind’s being enlightened, richly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.⁴²
5. Truly gracious affections are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things⁴³
6. Gracious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation.⁴⁴
7. Another thing, wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others, is, that they are attended with a change of nature.⁴⁵
8. Truly gracious affections differ from those affections that are false and delusive, in that they tend to, and are attended with the lamblike, dovelike 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.⁴⁶
9. Gracious affections soften the heart, and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.⁴⁷
10. Another thing wherein those affections that are truly gracious and holy, differ from those that are false, is beautiful symmetry and proportion.⁴⁸
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.⁴⁹
12. Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.⁵⁰

³⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 197.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 357.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 383.

Edwards' analysis of what saving faith looks like is striking. But the twelfth gracious affection seems to capture the whole corpus of Edwards' *Religious Affections*, "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."⁵¹ One can only wish that the clergy and townspeople of New England would have read Edwards' treatise, perhaps he would have never been dismissed in the manor that he was;⁵² at best, Northampton would have had some understanding of Edwards' concern regarding communicant membership.

At the heart of Edwards understanding that saving faith is evidenced by certain gracious affections, was his conviction that the new disposition of the Christian was one of intense affection towards God;

If believers are the chosen of God, here is a great argument for their love and gratitude towards Him. The consideration of the miserable condition in which God found you, and in which He left others, should move your hearts.... God has chosen you not merely to be His subjects and servants, but to be His children, to be His particular treasure. He has chosen you to be blessed forever in the enjoyment of Himself, and to dwell with Him in His glory. He has given you from all eternity to His Son, to be united unto Him, to become the spouse of Christ. He has chosen you that you might be holy and without blame, that you might have your filth taken away, that you might have the image of God put upon you, and that your soul might be adorned, to be the bride of His glorious and dear Son. What cause for love is here!⁵³

Edwards saw the Christian life illustrated in the marriage experience; he took Ephesians 5 and the allegorical view of Song of Solomon very seriously. As George Marsden points out in

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The aftermath of Edwards' challenge to the stoddardian practice of communicant membership was an experience that would ruin many pastors emotionally, psychologically, and physically. The abuse that he and his family received shortly before his dismissal is mind blowing (see Marsden's biography of Edwards, chapters 21-22).

⁵³ Jonathan Edwards, "Christians a Chosen Generation," *The True Believer*. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001) 115.

his biography on Edwards, “ Jonathan and Sarah celebrated sexuality in the context of viewing it as ultimately a spiritual experience, pointing to the much higher bliss of Christ’s relation to his church.”⁵⁴ So, in Edwards’ mind, just as it is unnatural for a husband to have no love for his wife, so it is for the person who claims to be married to Christ while having no love for Christ.⁵⁵

Oh how American evangelicalism can use a healthy dose of Edwards today! Jonathan Edwards understood very well how helpless and dreadful his condition was before his salvation, he understood very well that it was God who was the aggressor to render his cold, hard heart captive for the glory of God in order to make it beat for the Lord of glory. Edwards understood very well that his disposition was altogether changed from evil to holy when he first exercised saving faith in the God of the Bible. Edwards experienced the result of a new and holy disposition towards God – the highest of the gracious affections: love to God and all that He has created. This love for God is the opening of the eyes of the soul to see what is truly desirable and lovely, and in light of this truth, Edwards writes,

God’s nature, or the divinity, is infinitely excellent; yes 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? They whose affection to God is founded first on his profitableness to them, their affection begins at the wrong end; they regard God only for the utmost limit of the stream of divine good, where it touches them, and reaches their interest; and have no respect to that infinite glory of God’s nature, which is the original good, and the true fountain of

⁵⁴ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 111.

⁵⁵ Jonathan must have been very familiar with 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.”

all good, the first fountain of all loveliness of every kind, and so the first foundation of all true love.⁵⁶

What is the purpose of the Christian and the life he/she lives according to Jonathan Edwards? To prize the triune God above all things. Prizing God is what the reprobate cannot do, what he must do, what God enables him to do, and what true saving faith enables him to do. And as one final thought to close this paper appropriately, I leave the reader with the following reflection,

It is no solid objection against God aiming at an infinitely perfect union of the creature with himself, that the particular time will never come when it can be said, the union is now infinitely perfect. God aims at satisfying justice in the eternal damnation of sinners; which will be satisfied by their damnation, considered no otherwise than with regard to its eternal duration. But yet there never will come that particular moment, when it can be said, that now justice is satisfied. But if this does not satisfy our modern free-thinkers who do not like to talk about satisfying justice with an infinite punishment; I suppose it will not be denied by any, that God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 243.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," in *God's Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998) 251.

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