

**THE WORKS OF**

**JONATHAN EDWARDS**

**SECTION 3**

**Religious Affections**

**Treatise**

**On**

**Religious**

**Affections**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

***“Though you have not seen Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8)***

1. Paul is here writing to Christians under persecution. He says that trials are of benefit to true religion:
  - a) They distinguish between true and false religion - they try the faith of “professors”.
  - b) They show its genuine beauty and amiableness - true virtue never appears so lovely as when it is most oppressed.
  - c) They purify (refine) and increase true religion - as gold that is tried in the fire is purged from its alloy and dross, and comes forth more beautiful, so true faith, being tried as gold, is tried in the fire and becomes more precious.
2. **Characteristics which emerge from trials** (1 Peter 1 : 8)
  - a) Love to Christ - even though we have not seen Him, they loved Him Spiritually.
  - b) Joy in Christ. - though their outward sufferings were very grievous, yet their inward spiritual joys were greater than their sufferings: and these supported them and enabled them to suffer with cheerfulness.
    - i) The manner of this joy - “by faith”
    - ii) The nature of it - “unspeakable and full of glory”
      - It was a most worthy, noble rejoicing that did not corrupt the mind, but greatly beautified and dignified it.
      - It filled their minds with the light of God’s glory, and made .  
Themselves to shine with some communication of that glory.
3. True religion, therefore, in great part consists of holy affections.

A. **TRUE RELIGION, IN GREAT PART, CONSISTS IN THE AFFECTIONS**

1. It consists in victorious and lively actions of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercise of the heart.
  - a) God insists that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion (**Rom 12:11; Deut.10:11 30:6**)
  - b) True religion is powerful - the power of it appears, firstly, in the exercises in the heart, (its principal and original seat) - hence true religion is called the power of godliness, not just having an external form of godliness (**2 Tim.3:5**)
2. God has given us our affections and made them the spring of our actions true religion is practical.
  - a) Man's nature is influenced by either love/hatred/desire/hope/ fear, etc - these are the moving springs in all the affairs of life, which engaged men in all their pursuits - take away these "affections". and the world would be in great measure, motionless and dead
  - b) He, therefore, that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.
3. The things of religion take hold of men's souls no further than they affect them.
  - a) Multitudes often hear the Word of God (things infinitely great and important, which concern them) yet it seems wholly ineffectual upon them, making no alteration in their disposition or behaviour. The reason? - they are not affected by what they hear.
  - b) Nothing considerable has ever been brought to pass in the heart or life of any man living, by the things of religion, that had not affected his heart deeply.
4. The Holy Scriptures place religion very much in the affections.
  - a) e.g. fear (of God), hope (**1 Cor. 13:13. Jer. 17:7**), love (to God, Jesus, His people, the world), hatred (**Prov. 8:13, Psl. 101:2-3**), desire (**Isa. 26:8, Psl 27:4**), Joy (**Psl 37:4, 33:1**) Sorrow **Matt.5:4, Psl 34:8**), gratitude (to God), compassion (**Psl 37:21, Prov.14:31**) and zeal **Titus 2:14. Rev.3:15, 16, 19**).
  - b) These are all characteristics of true saints of God.

5. The Scriptures represent true religion as being summarily comprehended in love, the chief of affections and the fountain of all others (Matt. 22:37-40, Rom. 13:8) - the essence.
  - a) From love arises hate of those things which are contrary to what we love.
  - b) From the various exercises of love and hatred, according to the circumstances of the objects of these affections (present/absent, certain/uncertain, probable/improbable, arise all those other affections (e.g. hope, desire, fear, joy, grief, gratitude, anger, etc.)
6. The religion of most eminent saints in Scripture, consisted much in holy affections e.g.
  - a) David - “man after God’s own heart” - the Psalms are expressions of devout and holy affections (i.e. his love for God, his admiration of His glorious works, his desires/pantings after Him, His delight in God etc.
  - b) Paul - the chief instrument of propagating and establishing the Christian church in the world - his ardent love for his Lord (counting all things loss in order to know Him better) compelled to go forward in His service (through difficulties and sufferings), overflowing affection towards fellow-Christians, much joy, earnest expectation, godly jealousy, many tears,
  - c) John - the beloved disciple inexpressibly tender and pathetic, fervent love for others.
7. The Lord Jesus Christ - tender and affectionate heart, full of love to God and man, earnestness (e.g. when praying), grief (exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death), full of zeal, anger (grieved by the hardness of their hearts), compassion on the weak, sick, lonely, rejected) etc.
8. The religion of heaven (where religion is found in its purity and perfection) - expressions of love and joy, praises.
9. We see holy affections in our prayers, singing praises to God, the sacraments, preaching.
10. The hardening of hearts - God’s leaving men to the power of the sin and corruption of the heart (**John 12:40, Acts 19:9, Rom 9:18**) - an unaffected heart, not easily moved with virtuous affections (opposed to a heart of flesh) a heart void of affection.
11. Comments:
  - a) We see therefore that those who say religious affections have nothing solid or substantial in them, are in error.
    - i) They have been influenced by those whose “high affections” have soon come to nothing, who have seemed to be mightily raised and

swallowed with joy and zeal for a while, yet seem to have returned like a dog to its vomit.

- ii) The devil saw that affections were the vogue; he mingled false affections with the works of God's Spirit.
  - iii) This has deluded and eternally ruined many souls, greatly wounding religion and bringing it into disrepute.
  - iv) He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influence of the Spirit of God upon his heart.
  - v) As there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection - if the great things of religion are understood, they will affect the heart (a man having much affection, does not prove that he has any true religion
- .
- b) If true religion lies much in the affections, we may infer that one ought to desire those things which move the affections - e.g. books, preaching the Word, administration of ordinances, worshipping God in prayer and praises.
  - c) We ought to be ashamed and confounded before God that we are not more affected by the great things of religion - this arises from our having so little true religion.

## **B. CERTAIN SIGNS SHOWING THAT RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS ARE NOT TRULY GRACIOUS.**

### **1. When raised very high**

- a) If there is a great deal of true religion, there will be great religious affections i.e. love for God, hatred of sin gratefulness to God, strong desires after holiness.
- b) Yet, just because one's religious affections are great, does not mean they are spiritual or gracious e.g. the children of Israel were greatly affected with God's mercy to them when He brought them through the Red Sea (they sang His praises), yet they soon forgot His works!, the golden calf at Mt. Sinai, those who welcomed and praised Jesus when He entered Jerusalem, left Him in the end.

### **2. When there are great effects on the body.**

- a) There is great power in spiritual affections - they may sometimes overbear the body (**Psl.84:2,63:1,Dan 10:8**)
- b) But great effects on the body are no sure evidence that affections are spiritual - we often see them arise from great affections about temporal things.

3. When there is fluency and fervour

- a) People talking abundantly and fervently about the things of religion, can be evidence that they are very much affected with the things of religion - but this may be without grace e.g. those initially reacting to the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- b) A person may be overfull of talk of his own experiences - a tree that is overfull with leaves, seldom bears much fruit (**Prov. 25:14**)

4. When they are not excited by us

- a) It is God's manner in the great works of His power and mercy, to make His hand visible, and His power conspicuous, and men's dependence on Him most evident, that no flesh should glory in His presence - that God alone might be exalted - e.g. redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage, Gideon's victory, deliverance from Goliath.
- b) But there are many false spirits who often transform themselves into angels of light, with great subtlety and power, mimicking the operations of the Holy Spirit.

5. When they come with texts of Scripture

- a) Some see this as a good evidence that their affections are saving, but affections may arise on occasion of the Scripture and not properly from, as the genuine fruit of the Scripture, but from an abuse of it.
- b) The devil can also bring texts to mind and misapply them to deceive people - they pervert Scripture to their own and other's damnation (**2 Pet.3:16**).

6. When there is an appearance of love.

- a) Love is the chief of graces of God's Spirit and the life, essence and sum of all true religion.
- b) Yet - the more excellent anything is, the more will be the counterfeits (especially with Christian virtues and graces like humility and love - **Matt.24:12-13, Eph 6:24, Gal 4:11,15**).

7. When there are religious affections of many kinds.

- a) The various faculties, principles, and affections of the human nature are as it were, channels from one fountain.
- b) If sweet water is in the fountain, sweet water will flow out into those various channels, but if the water is poisonous, poisonous streams will flow into all channels.
- c) So the channels and streams will be like, corresponding with one another, but the great difference will lie in the nature of the water.



8. When joys follow in a certain order.
- a) God brings men into distress, to see the dreadfulness of their sin, their own helplessness, and absolute dependence on God's power and grace, before He appears to work any great deliverance for them.
  - b) God commonly first manifests Himself in a way which is "terrible", and they by those things that are "comfortable" e.g. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel.
  - c) The devil can counterfeit and imitate these things too.
9. When there is much time and zeal in duties.
- a) The tendency of true grace causes people to delight in much time in reading, praying, singing, hearing sermons, etc (**Luke 2:37, Acts 2:47-47, Ps.55:17**).
  - b) Yet people zealously engaged in the external exercises of religion, is no evidence of grace (**Isa. 1:12-15, Ezek.33:31-32**) e.g. false religions.
10. When there is much expression of praise.
- a) When one is affected by God's unmerited mercy to him that is so unworthy - leading to greatly extol and magnify His free grace (e.g. **1 Sam.25:16-19**)
  - b) There are instances in Scripture of these attributes in those that were graceless e.g. (**Mark 2:12. Matt. 9:8, 15:31, Luke 7:16**).
11. When there is great confidence
- a) Christians are people who ought to be assured of the favour of God.
  - b) But one cannot determine whether a person is a saint and his affections gracious, because he has confidence that his state is good and his affections divine.
12. When there are affecting relations
- a) Judging people by outward appearances is uncertain and liable to deceit (**1 Sam. 16:7**)
  - b) When people appear pious, we must receive them cordially, love them, and rejoice in them as brothers - it is not for us to judge, although we must be discerning!
  - c) God will judge every man according to his works.

**C. DISTINGUISHING SIGNS OF TRULY GRACIOUS AND HOLY AFFECTIONS**

**1. They are from divine influence**

- a) They arise from those influences and operations of the heart which are spiritual, supernatural, and divine.
- b) The Spirit of God dwells in the true saints - He is in them and lives in them (His holiness is expressed through them)
- c) They arise from divine illumination:
  - i. The spiritual application of the promises of Scripture enlightens their minds to see the whole excellency and sweetness of the blessings promised, of God, His faithfulness, and sufficiency.
  - ii) The Spirit bears witness with our spirit (**Rom.8:16**) that we are God's children.

**2. Their object is the excellency of divine things (not self or self-interest)**

- a) Christian love is the fountain of all gracious affections.
- b) The divine excellency of God and Jesus Christ, the Word of God. His, works etc is the primary reason why a true saint loves these things.

**3. They are founded on the moral excellency of objects.**

- a) Holy people, in the exercise of holy affections, love divine things primary for their holiness e.g. God, angels, God's Word, etc.
- b) Grace enables men to see these things in a better manner than natural men do.

**4. They arise from divine illumination**

- a) The child of God is graciously affected because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ
- b) The Scriptures are opened to their understanding (**Luke 24:32**) - this understanding is peculiar to Christians.

**5) They are attended with a conviction of certainty.**

- a) All gracious persons have a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel - there is no longer any doubt (**Matt.16:15 – 17, 1 Pet. 1:8, 2Tim.1:12**)
- b) Yet there is a great variety in degrees of strength of this faith/spiritual conviction.

6. They are attended with evangelical humiliation.
  - a) A sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, odiousness, etc, with an answerable frame of heart - a great and most essential thing in true religion.
  - b) For a man to be highly conceited of his spiritual knowledge, is for him to be wise in his own eyes (**Prov.3:7**) - a proud person often thinks his humility to be great.
7. They are attended with a change of nature
  - a) All spiritual discoveries are transforming ("conversion") - being born again, becoming new creatures, rising from the dead, renewed in spirit and mind, dying to sin, living in righteousness, etc
  - b) Divine power reaches the bottom of the heart, affecting and altering the very nature of the soul - this continues to the end of life, until it is brought to perfection in glory.
8. They beget and promote the temper of Jesus.
  - a) A spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness, mercy (**Prov.17:27** **Matt. 5, Col. 3:12-13**)
  - b) These things are the very nature of the Christian spirit, the spirit which works in Christ and in His members
  - c) When people are fierce and violent, exerting their sharp and bitter passions, it shows weakness instead of strength and fortitude.
9. They soften the heart.
  - a) The heart is filled with a dread of sin or whatever might displease and offend God - resulting in watchfulness, care, and strictness.
  - b) This tenderness is compared to a little child - true grace tends to promote convictions of conscience, increases the convictions of sin.
10. They have beautiful symmetry and proportion.
  - a) They have the whole image of Christ upon them - they have put off the old man, and have put on the new man (**John 1:14,16**).
  - b) There is symmetry and beauty in God's workmanship - the image of a true image, consisting of various graces and affections.
11. False affections lie satisfied in themselves.
  - a) The more a true saint loves God, 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 and laments that he has so much remaining love for sin; the more his heart is

broken, the more he thirsts and longs after God and holiness (**1 Pet.2:2-3, 2 Cor.1:22, 1 Cor.13:10-11**)

- b) With false affections, there comes an end to their earnestness in seeking these things - they act as though their work is done.

**12.** Their fruit is Christian practice.

- a) He is conformed to and directed by Christian rules, that he makes it his work and business to practice these rules, and he persists to the end of his life in doing so.
- b) Every true Christian perseveres in this way of universal obedience, diligent and earnest service of God, through all the various kinds of trials that he meets with, to the end of life - i.e. a holy life.

**13.** Christian practice is the chief sign to others

- a) Jesus said, "**You shall know them by their fruits**" (**Matt. 7:16, 12:33**) - the proper evidence of the nature of the tree is the fruit (not by its leaves or flowers).
- b) Godliness is a light that shines in the soul, which should shine out before men, that they may see - i.e. by our good works
- c) Men's deeds are better and more faithful interpreters of their minds, than their words (**John 14:21**).
- d) Yet, no external appearances whatsoever that are visible to the world, are infallible evidence of grace.

**14.** Christian practice is the chief sign to ourselves.

- a) Acts alone, without the right motives or intentions, are purely external - we speak here not only the acts of the body, but the obedience of the soul, consisting in the acts and practice of the soul.
- b) "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep His commandments" (**1 John 2:3, 3:18-19, Heb. 6:9**)