

**THE WORKS OF
JONATHAN EDWARDS**

SECTION 4

THOUGHTS ON REVIVAL

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A. A GLORIOUS WORK OF GOD

1. We should not judge it by the supposed causes, but by its effects.
 - a) We are in error if we judge whether the work is a work of the Spirit of God or not, if we judge it a priori i.e. the way it began, the instruments employed, the means used and the methods that have been used.
 - b) A work of revival ought to be judged a posteriori i.e. by examining the effect that it has brought about (is it in agreement with God's Word? - **Isa 10:13-14, John 3:8**)
 - c) God uses methods which man would not always advise (**Isa. 2:17**)
 - d) His purpose is always to show His own glory, exalt His own sovereignty, power and all-sufficiency.
2. We should judge by Scripture
 - a) Some use philosophy (instead of Scripture) to judge this work.
 - i) They think that the affectations of the soul are something diverse from the will (not relevant to the noblest part of the soul).
 - ii) They doubt that such powerful and often violent affections can be the Spirit of God.
 - iii) But the Spirit can and does operate in this way (**Luke 1:35. 1 Cor. 2:4 Eph.1:19**)
 - b) Some don't regard the Scriptures as sufficient and whole.
 - i) They judge the "unscriptural" signs and marks, rather than the state of the persons mind and their moral conduct
 - ii) God sometimes not only fills the cup with spiritual blessings but makes their cup run over (**Ps. 28:8, Mal.3:10, 2 Cron. 20:25-26**).
 - c) Some judge this work by history (former observation) (not the Scriptures)
 - i) If anything extraordinary occurs, which has not happened before, this work is rejected.
 - ii) They compare some external, accidental circumstances of this work with what has appeared, sometimes in enthusiasts (falseness)
 - d) They judge this work by their own experience (rather than Scripture) - they reject things that are professed and experienced because they themselves never felt them.

3. We should not judge the whole by a part, and should not distinguish the good from the bad.
 - a) The Bible teaches the state of true Christians in this world, and that their own hearts experience the conflicts or corruption.
 - b) i.e. we should not judge the validity of a revival, by looking at and judging the weaknesses of individual Christians - which often run into extremes at a time of revival and get into confusion e.g. enthusiasm, superstition and intemperate zeal.
4. The nature of the work in general.
 - a) Although there has been much impudence during the Revival in New England, there has also been:
 - i) A great increase in seriousness.
 - ii) A sober consideration of eternal things.
 - iii) A disposition to listen to those things, to treat matters of religion with solemnity.
 - iv) Multitudes of vain, thoughtless, regardless people are quite changed, and have become serious and considerate.
 - v) Multitudes have had their consciences awakened to sin, guilt, and anger of God, etc.
 - vi) Young people, by a powerful invisible influence on their minds, have been brought to forsake those things of which they were extremely fond (frolicking, lewd songs, impure language, etc.
5. The nature of the work in a particular instance.
 - a) Edwards tells of folk who experienced **“the soul at the same times was so strongly drawn towards God and Christ in heaven, that it seemed to the person as though soul and body would, as it were of themselves, of necessity mount up, leave the earthly, and ascent thither”**
 - b) These effects on the body arose during the preaching of Mr. Whitfield and Mr. Tennant.
 - c) At such times there was no notion that they were perfectly free from sin, but rather, how loathsome and polluted the soul is.
6. The work is very glorious.
 - a) There is evidence of the fruit of the Spirit during times like these.

- b) **“It is very great and wonderful and exceeding glorious work... a strange revolution, an unexpected, surprising overturning of things, suddenly brought to pass”**
- c) It is the work of redemption, the new creation, the conversion of one soul’s latter-day glory- it is glorious in its nature, degree and circumstance.

B. OBLIGATIONS TO ACKNOWLEDGE, REJOICE IN AND PROMOTE THIS WORK.

1. Indifference to God’s Work is dangerous.

At a time when God manifests himself in such a great work for His Church, there is no such thing as being neutral - of necessity one must either be for or against the King.

2. The probability that the latter-day glory will begin in America.

- a) America was discovered around the time of the Reformation
- b) Edwards speculates that as this “new world” began, God did a great thing to make way for the introduction of the church’s latter-day glory.
- c) A new work of God always begins where no foundation has yet been laid - so that the power of God might be more conspicuous

3. The danger of not acknowledging and encouraging the work, but rather deriding and slighting it.

- a) The great temporal deliverances wrought for Israel or old, were typical of the great spiritual works of God for the salvation of souls, and the deliverance and prosperity of the church in the latter days (see **Zech. 14:16-19**).
- b) Let us not be like the son of the bondwoman, born after the flesh, that persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, and mocked Isaac when he was weaned
- c) For people to arise, readily acknowledge God, honour Him in such a work, and cheerfully and vigorously exert themselves to promote it, will mean that they put themselves “much in the way of divine blessing”.

4. Obligations of rulers, ministers and others to promote the work

- a) God expects His visible people, without exception, to openly appear to acknowledge Him in such a work, bow before Him and join with Him - and especially civil rulers.
- b) If they neglect this duty, they will expose themselves to God's great displeasure.
- c) Ministers of the gospel ought to take heed of what they do and how they behave at times like these.
- d) Edwards says , "If we are silent, saying little about the work in our public prayers and preaching, or seem carefully to avoid speaking about it in conversation, it will be interpreted by our people, that we, who are their guides, to whom they are to have their eye for spiritual instruction, are suspicious of it"

C. **WHAT THE ZEALOUS PROMOTERS OF THIS WORK HAVE BEEN INJURIOUSLY BLAMED FOR.**

- 1. Ministers address the affections (passions) of their hearers rather than their understanding.
- 2. Ministers speak terror to their people (pricking their consciences), instead of comforting them.
- 3. Holding frequent religious meetings and spending so much time on religion (excessive!)
- 4. Minister make "too much" of outcries, fainting and other bodily effects, speaking of them as "tokens of presence of God" and arguments of the success of preaching.
- 5. Ministers are blamed for keeping people together - affecting each other and causing confusion.
- 6. Under great affections, people speak so much, with such wonder and importance of divine and eternal things - passionately warning, inviting, and entreating others.
- 7. Too much singing in religious meetings - they doubt the pretended extraordinary love and joys, and so find fault with the manifestations of them.
- 8. They dislike the religious meetings of children - reading and praying together, performing religious exercises by themselves.

D. WHAT THINGS ARE TO BE CORRECTED AND AVOIDED

1. Un-discerned spiritual pride.

- a) This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of religion - the chief mischief which the devil uses to “clog or hinder” a work of God.
- b) He has too high a thought of himself - of his light and his humility (He that thinks himself most out of danger, is indeed most in danger!)
- c) It speaks of the other person’s sins, their enmity against God and His people, the miserable delusion of hypocrites, the deadness of some saints (with bitterness, laughter and levity, and an air of contempt), suspecting others, finding fault with others (and their deficiencies).
- d) Pure Christian humility, rather, is silent about them or speaks of them with grief and pity, suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart, sees so much evil in his own heart and is so concerned about it, that he is not worried about other hearts. (see further information pp.400-403)

2. Adopting wrong principles

- a) Some teach that God reveals Himself by special inspiration and revelation, making known to them what will happen, what they should do, etc (which is not revealed in the Bible).
 - i) Makes a person “incorrigible and impregnable in all his misconduct.
 - ii) Lay themselves open to a delusion by expecting direction from heaven in this way and waiting for it.
- b) Some dray false calculations from true premises.
 - i) They argue that they have prayed in faith, God will answer.
 - ii) But if it not a thing promised in God’s Word, they cannot conclude that it will be most for the good of God’s church and the advancement of God’s Kingdom
- c) They say a person ought always to do whatever the Spirit of God inclines him to.
 - i) But if one did this each time, it would sometimes tend to confusion.

- ii) These inclinations must therefore often be restrained, using discretion (**1 Cor. 14:31-33**)
- d) They feel that whatever is found to be of present and immediate benefit, may and ought to be practiced, without looking forward to future consequences.
 - i) But the wise steward will require a wise foresight of, and provision for, future events and consequences.
 - ii) They glory in persecution - they lift up themselves instead of Christ.
- e) They look upon the success that God gives as an attestation of Divine Providence - if God is with them, who can be against them?
- f) They “reject” external order and use of the means of grace in religion - they say God does not look at the outward form, but at the heart.
 - i) Yet a multitude cannot act in union with one another without order.
 - ii) Confusion separates and divides them.
- g) Ministers because they speak as Christ’s ambassadors, assume the same style and authority that the prophets of old did.

3.. Ignorance of inward experiences.

- a) The ways the devil uses our inward experiences.
 - i) The experiences of a true Christian are often mixed (the spiritual with the unspiritual/natural).
 - ii) Therefore sometimes defects in a Christian’s experiences.
 - iii) Experiences degenerate - gradually vanishing, growing worse and worse, becoming corrupt.
- b) The devil also uses our outward experiences - people will under a kind of necessity make a great “ado”, with less and less affection of soul, till eventually almost any slight emotion will set them going.

4. Censuring professing Christians.

- a) Claiming that they are unconverted - to judge them according to their religious “talk” and then to treat them accordingly.
- b) This is against the plain, frequent and strict prohibitions of the Word of God.

5. Errors relative to lay-exhorting.

- a) Exhorting one another by lay-men is not unlawful or improper, but rather a Christian duty.
- b) But it is not right for common people to clothe themselves with the authority of a minister.
- c) Only a called minister ought to teach

6. Errors relative to singing.

- a) Edwards objects to a lack of reverence and solemnity during all acts of worship.
- b) He mentions companies singing in the streets, going to or coming from the place of public worship.
- c) But it is not to be ostentatious and hypocritical (**Matt.6:5**)
- d) The “governing bodies” and the ministers of the congregations/societies involved must give their consent.

E. WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE TO PROMOTE THIS WORK.

1. We should remove stumbling blocks.

- a) We need to repent of our faulty reactions to the revival.
- b) God calls His people to extraordinary meekness and mutual forbearance.
- c) There ought to be great moderation in our behaviour towards others.
- d) Those that have been zealous for this work, and have erred and been injurious with their zeal, ought not to be treated with bitterness.

2. What should be done to advance it?

- a) One must look into one’s own heart, and see to it that he be a partaker of the benefits of the work himself, and that it be promoted in his own soul i.e. that he is truly saved himself.

- b) Ministers should act as fellow-helpers in their great work - they ought to be animated, exerting themselves with one heart and soul and with united strength, to promote the present glorious revival of religion.
- c) Ministers need zeal and resolution - they have great influence and power.
- d) Students should be trained up in vital religion, and practical godliness - they should be, in the midst of the land, fountains of piety and holiness (nurseries)
- e) Laymen and rich men can greatly encourage and promote this work (laying up for themselves treasures in heaven) e.g. by establishing funds for the support and propagation of religion, by supporting ministers, etc.

3. Some things that concern all.

a) Fasting and prayer

- i) This should be one great and principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ's kingdom in the world
- ii) When God is about to bestow some great blessing on His church, he often shows the church their great need of it, and He brings them into distress because they lack it, so making them cry aloud for it!
- iii) We need to be praying for the outpouring of the Spirit upon ministers in the land.

b) External worship.

- i) Apart from the great increase in preaching, social prayer and singing praises, there ought to be an increase in administering the Lord's Supper.
- ii) Christians ought to abound in moral duties (e.g. acts of righteousness, truth, meekness, forgiveness and love towards our neighbour).

c) Internal worship

- i) The essence of all religion - the worship of the heart, in love and fear, trust in God and resignation to Him.
- ii) There ought to be solemn, public renewing of our covenant with God.