

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Teaching Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

Treatise on Religious Affections, Part 1

Jonathan Edwards

Historical Context

A. The Great Awakening (1742)

1. Revival past its early, opening stages

Was: “the present revival”... Now: “the late, extraordinary season” or “the late, great revival”

2. Early spring blossoms vs. mature fruit

Edwards: “It is with professors of religion, especially such as become so in a time of outpouring of the Spirit of God, as it is with blossoms in the spring; there are vast numbers of them upon the trees, which all look fair and promising; but yet many of them never come to anything.... It is the mature fruit which comes afterwards, and not the beautiful colors and smell of the blossoms, that we must judge by.”

3. Key question: “How are we to judge genuine Christian experience?” or “What is the nature of true religion? And wherein lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue which is acceptable in the sight of God?”

B. Charles Chauncy and the “Old Lights”

1. Totally disdained the Great Awakening as something evil and destructive
2. For them: true religion consisted in “reason and judgment” and in “dutiful behavior”

C. BUT Some Wild Supporters of the Awakening:

1. The more passion the better
2. Applauded public displays of enthusiasm uncritically
3. Assumed that great displays of emotion were proof positive of conversion
4. Greatly dismayed when later, those “converts” seemed to have little or no interest in Christ

D. Thus Edwards Battling on Two Fronts... Submitted the *Treatise on Religious Affections* in Three Parts in 1746

Part I. Concerning the Nature of The Affections, and Their Importance in Religion

Part II. Showing What Are No Certain Signs That Religious Affections Are Gracious (i.e Saving Grace from God), Or That They Are Not

Part III. Showing What Are the Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

I. Concerning the Nature of The Affections, and Their Importance in Religion

A. Section I: Introductory Remarks Concerning the Affections

Opening Text: 1 Peter 1:8

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen [Christ], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy

1. Three-fold benefit of trials
2. How the trials benefited the people to whom Peter was writing
3. Two great outcomes of the trials:
 - I) Love for Christ
 - II) Joy in Christ
4. Edwards Central Treatise:

True Religion, in Great Part, Consists in Holy Affections

5. Definition of Affections of the Mind

Affections of the Mind = Sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul

- a. soul's two principal faculties (endowed by God)
 - i) perception (understanding) by which it discerns and judges all things
 - ii) inclination (will, heart) by which it is *inclined* or *disinclined* to every single thing
- b. exercises of the inclination comes in two sorts

- i) approving
 - ii) disapproving
- c. approval/disapproval comes in degrees
 - i) from perfect indifference
 - ii) to greater degrees, positive or negative
[from pure absolute hatred through dislike to like to pure absolute love]
- d. “affections” come when the will involves the body in sensible (i.e. noticeable) responses to its inclination... you “feel” what your will inclines to or disinclines against

“In everything we do, wherein we act voluntarily, there is an exercise of the will and inclination; it is our inclination that governs us in our actions; but all the actings of the inclination and will, in all our common actions of life, are not ordinarily called affections. Yet, what are commonly called affections are not essentially different from them, but only in the degree and manner of exercise. **In every act of the will whatsoever, the soul either likes or dislikes, is either inclined or disinclined to what is in view:** these are not essentially different from those affections of love and hatred: that liking or inclination of the soul to a thing, if it be in a high degree, and be vigorous and lively, is the very same thing with the affection of love; and that disliking and disinclining, if in a greater degree, is the very same with hatred. In every act of the will for, or towards something not present, the soul is in some degree inclined to that thing; and that inclination, if in a considerable degree, is the very same with the affection of desire. And in every degree of the act of the will, wherein the soul approves of something present, there is a degree of pleasedness; and that pleasedness, if it be in a considerable degree, is the very same with the affections of joy or delight. And if the will disapproves of what is present, the soul is in some degree displeased, and if that displeasedness be great, it is the very same with the affection of grief or sorrow.”

- e. from this come all our emotions and actions
 - i) desire and passion OR fear and revulsion
 - ii) joy and delight OR grief and sorrow
 - iii) motions of choosing OR motions of rejection

“As all the exercises of the inclination and will, are either in approving and liking, or disapproving and rejecting; so the affections are of two sorts; they are those by which the soul is carried out to what is in view, cleaving to it, or seeking it; or those by which it is averse from it, and opposes it. Of the former sort are *love, desire, hope, joy, gratitude, complacence*. Of the latter kind are *hatred, fear, anger, grief*, and such like.”

B. Section II: Proofs That True Religion, in Great Part, Consists in the Affections

Proof #1: Obvious Nature of Religion

a. religion cannot be religion if it is lukewarm

“Who will deny that true religion consists in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart? That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, “fervent in spirit,” and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion.”

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Deuteronomy 10:12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

b. such true vigorous exercises of the heart are only possible when God circumcises the heart by His Spirit:

Deuteronomy 30:6 The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

c. vigorous exercise in Christ is the essence of the **power** of true religion

“If we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious. True religion is evermore a **powerful** thing; and the **power** of it appears, in the first place in the inward exercises of it in the heart, where is the principal and original seat of it.”

[for true believers] ***2 Timothy 1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of **power**, of love and of self-discipline.***

[for hypocrites] ***2 Timothy 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its **power**.***

Internal “burning of the heart” is the power of godliness and of the Holy Spirit... as on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:32 They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

d. strong efforts in following Christ

Thus the “business of religion” (i.e. of following Christ) is sometimes likened to running, wrestling, agonizing for a great prize or crown, fighting an enemy that seeks our life, or taking a city by force... in other words, things in which every fiber of our being (body and soul) are fully engaged

e. varying degrees based on maturity:

“And though true grace has various degrees, and there are some that are but babes in Christ, in whom the exercise of the inclination and will, towards divine and heavenly things, is comparatively weak; yet everyone that has the power of godliness in his heart, has his inclinations and heart exercised towards God and divine things, with such strength and vigor that these holy exercises do prevail in him above all carnal or natural affections, and are effectual to overcome them.”

“From hence it follows, that wherever true religion is, there are vigorous exercises of the inclination and will towards divine objects: but by what was said before, the vigorous, lively, and sensible exercises of the will, are no other than the affections of the soul.”

Proof #2: Affections are the spring of actions

- a. without affections of some sort, we remain motionless
- b. the greater the affection, the stronger the motion
- c. affections the root of all worldly energy and pursuit

“We see the world of mankind to be exceeding busy and active; and the affections of men are the springs of the motion: take away all love and hatred, all hope and fear, all anger, zeal, and affectionate desire, and the world would be, in a great measure motionless and dead; there would be no such thing as activity amongst mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever. ... the world continues, from age to age, in a continual commotion and agitation, in a pursuit of these things, but take away all affection, and the spring of all this motion would be gone, and the motion itself would cease.”

- i) affection drives the covetous man to pursue profits
- ii) affection drives the voluptuous man to pursue sensual pleasures
- iii) affection drives the ambitious man to pursue power
- iv) affection drives the prideful man to pursue human praise
- d. so it is also for true pursuit of Christ... without it, there's only cold formalism

“So in religious matters, the spring of their actions is very much religious affection: he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.”

Proof #3: True religion takes hold in the soul no further than they *affect* them

- a. many can hear fiery preaching of hell and be totally unmoved
- b. many can hear alluring descriptions of heaven and be totally unmoved
- c. many can hear the clear exposition of the commands of God and be totally unmoved

d. no positive motion in religious occurs without the affections first being moved

“Never was a natural man engaged earnestly to seek his salvation; never were any such brought to cry after wisdom, and lift up their voice for understanding, and to wrestle with God in prayer for mercy; and never was one humbled, and brought to the foot of God, from anything that ever he heard or imagined of his own unworthiness and deserving of God's displeasure; nor was ever one induced to fly for refuge unto Christ, while his heart remained unaffected. Nor was there ever a saint awakened out of a cold, lifeless flame, or recovered from a declining state in religion, and brought back from a lamentable departure from God, without having his heart affected. And in a word, there never was anything considerable brought to pass in the heart or life of any man living, by the things of religion, that had not his heart deeply affected by those things.”

Proof #4: Scripture places religion very much in the affections

a. godly fear

“The Scriptures place much of religion in godly fear; insomuch, that it is often spoken of as the character of those that are truly religious persons, that they tremble at God's word, that they fear before him, that their flesh trembles for fear of him, and that they are afraid of his judgments, that his excellency makes them afraid, and his dread falls upon them, and the like.”

Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

b. hope

Psalms 33:18 But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love

Romans 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

c. love (more later)

d. hatred

Proverbs 8:13 To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Psalms 97:10 Let those who love the LORD hate evil

Psalms 101:3 I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.

Psalms 119:104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

Psalms 119:128 and because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path.

Psalm 139:21-22 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

e. desire

Isaiah 26:8 Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.

Psalm 27:4 One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

Psalm 84:1-2 How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

f. joy

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen [Christ], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Be joyful always

g. sorrow

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

James 4:9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

h. gratitude

Colossians 2:7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

i. mercy

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

j. zeal

Titus 2:14 [Christ] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

[the very lacking from the despised church at Laodicea] ***Revelation 3:16 So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.***

Proof #5: Scripture presents LOVE as the summation of all true religion

a. love fulfills the whole law of God

“The Scriptures do represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in love, the chief of the affections, and fountain of all other affections.”

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Galatians 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

b. the goal of all Biblical instruction is love

1 Timothy 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

c. without love, all other acts are worthless

1 Corinthians 13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

d. love is the fountain of all other affections

“From hence it clearly and certainly appears, that great part of true religion consists in the affections. For love is not only one of the affections, but it is the first and chief of the affections, and the fountain of all the affections. From love arises hatred of those things which are contrary to what we love, or which oppose and thwart us in those things that we delight in: and from the various exercises of love and hatred, according to the circumstances of the objects of these affections, as present or absent, certain or uncertain, probable or improbable, arise all those other affections of desire, hope, fear, joy, grief, gratitude, anger, &c. From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love to God, will necessarily arise other religious affections; hence will arise an intense hatred and abhorrence of sin, fear of sin, and a dread of God's displeasure, gratitude to God for his goodness, complacency and joy in God, when God is graciously and sensibly present, and grief when he is absent, and a joyful hope

when a future enjoyment of God is expected, and fervent zeal for the glory of God. And in like manner, from a fervent love to men, will arise all other virtuous affections towards men.”

Proof #6: The religion of eminent saints in the Bible consisted of affections

a. David

- i) a “man after God’s own heart”
- ii) deeply passionate for the glory of God and His reputation (Goliath, building a temple)
- iii) singer and writer of psalms to God
- iv) zealous dancer before the Lord
- v) brokenhearted over his sin
- vi) man of passionate prayer

b. Paul

- i) esteemed everything in his life a LOSS compared to knowing and loving Christ
- ii) pursued Christ passionately though it cost him his life
- iii) zealous for the building up of Christ’s church and for its holiness
- iv) passionate in worship and in prayer
- v) deeply moved with compassion for Christ’s people and their needs
- vi) constantly rejoicing yet constantly sorrowful

c. John

- i) fervent in love toward Christ, laying his head on Christ’s bosom
- ii) lived passionately for the building of the church
- iii) wrote constantly of love

Proof #7: The Lord Jesus Christ displayed constant affections, of the deepest sort

“He was the greatest instance of ardency, vigor and strength of love, to both God and man, that ever was.”

- a. fiery zeal for the purity of God's house

John 2:17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

- b. grieved at human sin

Mark 3:5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart

- c. filled with grief for Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-42 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-- but now it is hidden from your eyes.

Luke 13:34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

- d. filled with desire to eat the Passover with His disciples

Luke 22:15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

- e. moved with compassion for Martha and Mary over the death of Lazarus

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

- f. filled with joy over the disciples' successful mission

Luke 10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth..."

- g. filled with tenderness and love for His disciples the night before His death

John 13-17

No one ever lived on earth with more passion and holy affections than Christ. From this it is clear that cold indifference in religion is as far from Christ as can be imagined.

Proof #8: The religion of heaven consists much in holy affection

- a. to find true nature, go to the pure gold, not the mined ore
- b. heaven is filled with passionate affections, of constant praise for God

Proof #9: Religious duties commanded by God focus much on affections

- a. prayer: cold prayer is no prayer at all...prayer is meant to be fervent

- b. worship
- c. singing praises to God
- d. sacraments
- e. preaching

Proof #10: Sin of the heart = “hardness of heart”... proof that affection is the core of true religion

If “hardening of the heart” means to be unyielded to Christ and to His Kingdom, to have a heart that resists and hates and opposes the word... then to be saved means to have a heart drawn in its affections to Christ, His Kingdom, His word

- a. what grieved Christ the most

Mark 3:5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart

- b. what God will judge the most

Romans 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

- c. what God warns most against

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion

- d. what God says was the essence of the rejection of Christ

Acts 19:9 But some of them became hardened; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them.

- e. God's leaving of the power of sin in men's hearts = “hardening”

Romans 9:18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

- f. repentance a matter of a soft, yielded heart full of affection

[to Josiah] ***2 Kings 22:19 because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD.***

Summary:

Upon the whole, I think it clearly and abundantly evident, that true religion lies very much in the affections. Not that I think these arguments prove, that religion in the hearts of the truly godly, is ever in exact proportion to the degree of affection, and present emotion of the mind: for undoubtedly, there is much affection in the true saints which is not spiritual ... But yet it is evident, that religion consists so much in affection, as that without holy affection there is no true religion; and no light in the understanding is good, which does not produce holy affection in the heart: no habit or principle in the heart is good, which has no such exercise; and no external fruit is good, which does not proceed from such exercises.

C. Part III: Some Inferences Deduced from this Doctrine

1. It is great error to say religion has nothing to do with affection
 - a. false affections are a very great problem, and a great attack of the devil, so as to confuse us in this vital matter
 - b. proper balance must be kept: “head knowledge & heart affections”

“He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. 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. As on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart; where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart; so on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things”

2. Since affections are so vital, then all religious duties should be done in such a way as to move the affections maximally

We should preach, pray, read the Bible, go to church, have conversations with other Christians... etc. all in such a way that our affections for Christ will be maximally stirred and deepened. **AWAY WITH PASSIONLESS LIVING!!!**

3. We have a great cause for SHAME that we are not more affected with Christ and with the things of God

But how insensible and unmoved are most men, about the great things of another world! How dull are their affections! How heavy and hard their hearts in these matters! Here their love is cold, their desires languid, their zeal low, and their gratitude small. How they can sit and hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of his giving his infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, and holy, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in his dying agonies, his bloody sweat, his loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory; and yet be cold, and heavy, insensible, and regardless! Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here?

