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Teaching Notes

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## **Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), part 2: *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections***

### I. Context of the *Treatise*

A. Waning revival

B. Two equal and opposite errors

1. Religion is ONLY in the extreme displays of emotion, turbulent outward experiences
2. Religion is NEVER in these displays, but is ONLY in “reason and judgment, and in dutiful behavior” [Opposition from “Old Lights”... Charles Chauncy]
3. Satan’s scheme: push unstable souls into excesses, create a backlash effect

“Thus we easily run from one extreme to another. A little while ago we were in the other extreme; there was a prevalent disposition to look upon all high religious affections as eminent exercises of true grace, without much inquiring into the nature and source of those affections and the manner in which they arose.... But of late, instead of esteeming and admiring all religious affections without distinction, it is a thing much more prevalent to reject and discard all without distinction. Herein appears the subtlety of Satan... This he knows is the way to bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality, and effectively shut out the power of godliness, and everything which is spiritual, and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors.”

C. Excesses abating, people “falling away”

D. Sermon series on 1 Peter 1:8

### II. Thesis & Theme

A. Edwards’s thesis statement

“True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”

1. True religion as opposed to false or counterfeit

2. Affections = “the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul”

#### B. Recurring theme

The love and pursuit of holiness is the enduring mark of the true Christian.

*Hebrews 12:14 “Make every effort to live at peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord.”*

### III. Human Personality

#### A. Two great faculties in human souls

1. Understanding: perceives, views, speculates, discerns, judges
2. Heart (inclination):
  - a. affection: liking or disliking, approving or disapproving
  - b. will: moves in response to what the heart inclines toward, what the affections relate

#### B. Religion consists in great part, in the affections

### IV. Biblical Data

#### A. Scriptural statements

“He that hath doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion... The Holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affections: such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, gratitude, compassion, and zeal.”

- Key Scriptures: Two Great Commandments (love God, love neighbor); 1 Cor. 13; “yearning, panting, desiring” Psalms; “broken and contrite heart”; “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”; hatred of evil: Prov. 8:13, Psalm 97:10, etc.

#### B. Scriptural examples: eminent Biblical saints... David, Paul, John all had powerful affections after God

#### C. Highest proof: Heaven itself

“The religion of heaven consists very much in affection—There is doubtless true religion in heaven, and true religion in its utmost purity and perfection. But according to the Scripture representation of the heavenly state, the religion of heaven consists chiefly in holy and mighty **love** and **joy**. (joy unspeakable and full of glory)”

## V. Why People “Fall Away”: [Distinguishing Between Saving and Common Works of the Spirit]

### A. Testimony of the fact

“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 colours and smell of the blossoms that we must judge by.”

### B. Issue of “Distinguishing Marks” Vital for External Observers

- Edwards distinguished between “saving operations” of the Holy Spirit and “common operations” of the Holy Spirit

“By common, he meant such influences of God’s power as may sober, arrest, and convict men, and which may even bring them to what at first appears to be repentance and faith, yet these influences fall short of inward, saving renewal.” Iain Murray, p. 255

- Biblical passages: Herod Antipas (Mark 6:20), “stony-ground” hearers of the word (Matt. 13:20), “tasters of the powers of the world to come” (Hebrews 6:5); those free from pollution by knowing Christ (2 Peter 2:20)

### C. Satan’s Revival-Time Counterfeit

1. No one would counterfeit rocks, but rather diamonds
2. These people DID NOT relapse into the world, but sought to “prolong” the revival
3. Tended toward censoriousness, “sudden impulses of the Spirit,” needless divisions, arrogance, unseemly boldness toward God
4. “Seven demons with it;” “last is worse than the first” (open immorality forsaken, religion of the Pharisees has taken its place)
5. Clinging to a key past experience with no present life in the Spirit

## VI. Holiness

### A. Key issue: What is “regeneration” or the “new birth”?

### B. Edwards’s definition

Grace planted in the heart at the new birth is “a principle of holy action or practice” and it always produces an abiding change of nature in a true convert.

C. Wesley's Attack

## VII. "Things Missing"

A. Counterfeit religion always has elements missing

B. These are (among others)

1. Humility
2. Abiding sense of sin

"All gracious affections are broken-hearted affections." [Repentance from sin is life-long]

3. Reverential fear before God

4. Proper balance

- Profound sense of salvation WITH deep abiding sense of personal sinfulness
- Unshakable assurance WITH deep humility
- Firm comfort WITH soft heart
- Richer than others YET the poorest in spirit
- Tallest and strongest saint YET least and tenderest of all

C. Lasting Pursuit: Personal Holiness

1. Early Christian experiences scattered and confused
2. Holy Spirit always settles the child of God down to true, lasting pursuit of holiness
3. YET holiness seen directly as attribute of God, not separate from Him