

An Examination of Selected Works by

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine and interact with the contents of two selected works of Jonathan Edwards: *Religious Affections* and *Freedom of the Will*. In a brief note to the reader of this work, you will find that Edwards quite often employs a punctuation style that is foreign to that which occurs in modern English. In order to maintain the authenticity of the original, in quotes attributed to the author, the writer has preserved this peculiar style.

Biographical Information

Jonathan Edwards was born on October 5, 1703 at Windsor, Connecticut to Reverend Timothy Edwards and his wife Esther Stoddard Edwards, daughter of celebrated Reverend Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, England. Reverend and Mrs. Edwards were married for more than sixty-three years, an incredible feat indeed given that the average life expectancy in eighteenth century America was only slightly more than 35 years. Equally astounding is the fact that Mrs. Edwards lived to be nearly ninety years old. Reverend and Mrs. Edwards had eleven children, one son (Jonathan) and ten daughters, four older than Jonathan and six younger.

Jonathan's father was a highly educated man who, like many other men of his profession in that day, had a grammar school in his home. In this school, young boys were prepared for entrance into the Collegiate School of Connecticut (which would later, in 1718, become Yale College). The Collegiate School, founded in 1701, served as an alternative to Harvard College for those of orthodox Congregationalist persuasion.

Young Jonathan received his education in his father's school (where Reformed theology and Puritan piety were among the chief influences) and, at the tender age of thirteen, went on to the Collegiate School in nearby Windsor at Wethersfield. It was there that he began his studies under Elisha Williams. Edwards' course of study included classical biblical languages, logic, and

natural philosophy. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1720, graduating at the top of his class. He then stayed at Yale to earn his master's degree.

In 1726, Northampton Congregational Church called Edwards to serve as assistant minister to his grandfather Solomon Stoddard. Only eight years later, in 1734, Edwards would be instrumental in ushering in the Great Awakening, an unprecedented period of revival that would last until approximately 1743. During this period, Edwards preached what is arguably his most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.

According to Marsden (2003), "The central principle in Edwards' thought, true to his Calvinistic heritage, was the sovereignty of God" (p. 4). Marsden (2003) further observed, "If the central principle of Edwards' thought was the sovereignty of God, the central practical motive in his life and work was his conviction that nothing was more momentous personally than one's eternal relationship to God" (p. 4). On a more contemporary note, the author rightly observes, "Many Christians affirm this proposition, yet most have not followed its implications for personal relationships with utter seriousness" (p. 4).

On March 22, 1758, only one year following his selection as president of the College of New Jersey (later known as Princeton), Jonathan Edwards died of smallpox contracted from an inoculation intended to protect him from the disease.

Religious Affections

Introduction

The first work under consideration in this paper is Edwards' *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections in Three Parts*. This work, originally published in America in 1746, was immediately reprinted in England and remains one of the author's most widely read and deeply admired works. According to Marsden (2003), Edwards wrote *Religious Affections* to address

“the misguided emphases of the extreme New Lights who had led many people into arrogant self-delusion” (p. 285). He then points out that “Satan’s essential stratagem...was to counterfeit true religious experience and thus to fatally corrupt religious movements. Simulated religious experiences could seduce the unregenerate into one of the most pernicious forms of self-aggrandizement” (p. 285). According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), “This work is often regarded as the leading classic in American history on spiritual life” (p. 226).

In Part One of this important work, Edwards (2009) addresses the nature of religious affections and their importance in religion. In Part Two, he seeks to show that religious affections can be categorized as gracious or ungracious. In Part Three, Edwards (2009) indicates the distinguishing signs of truly gracious and holy affections.

In the author’s preface, he begins his study of this matter with the following presupposition:

There is no question of greater importance to mankind, and that it more concerns every individual person to be well resolved in than this: What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God, and are entitled to his eternal rewards? Or, which comes to the same thing: What is the nature of true religion? And wherein lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue which is acceptable in the sight of God? (p. 4)

Lest his readers think that he is claiming to have discovered a kind of panacea with which to correct all erroneous thoughts in this regard, Edwards (2009) next offers a thoroughly detailed disclaimer in which he readily admits that professing Christians come in a wide variety in terms of their apparent maturity and sanctification. He writes:

There is indeed something very mysterious in it, that so much good, and so much bad, should be mixed together in the church of God: as it is a mysterious thing, and what has puzzled and amazed many a good Christian, that there should be that which is so divine and precious, as the saving grace of God, dwelling in the same heart, with so much corruption, hypocrisy, and iniquity in a particular saint. (p. 5)

In view of the historical record, the author maintains, every generation should expect to see this mixture. Wherever true faith exists, he maintains, false religions will also spring up beside it. Even during times of great revival, Edwards (2009) observes, there had been multitudes of hypocrites to spring up among the true saints. From Pentecost to the great Protestant Reformation, many, having initially made a commitment to Christ, ended up falling away, proving that they had never truly experienced the grace of God in salvation.

While this author is not so naïve as to believe that the church may never attain perfect purity this side of glory, he does agree with Edwards (2009) in his firm belief that there will come a time of much greater purity in the church:

And one great reason of it will be, that at that time, God will give much greater light to his people, to distinguish between true religion and counterfeits; Mal. iii.3, “And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.” (p. 5).

Edwards (2009) goes on to observe that the mixture of counterfeit and true religions gives the devil his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ. This toxic mixture in the visible church, he maintains, has had a much more profound effect on the church than even the most intense periods of persecution. He then graphically describes the effect that the admixture of true and false religion has had on the church:

It is by this means that the daughter of Zion in this land now lies on the ground, in such piteous circumstances, with her garments rent, her face disfigured, her nakedness exposed, her limbs broken, and weltering in the blood of her own wounds, and in no wise able to arise. (p. 6)

Simply stated, Edwards (2009) saw a great need for delineating between true and counterfeit religion through an examination of the various evidences on display in one’s religious affections. In other words, one of the surest ways of determining whether one is engaged in the pursuit of true religion is to examine the things he holds most dear or, better, the things to which

his soul is most inclined. On a contemporary note, this writer believes that there is nothing more important with regard to the church of the twenty-first century than for local churches, to the best of their ability, to maintain regenerate memberships. As Anyabwile (2006) has written, this assurance will have a tremendous impact on the corporate life of a church's membership in that it will (1) promote unity in the church; (2) protect the reputation of the local church; (3) advance the work of the local church; (4) spread love in the congregation; (5) cause the church to grow in the proper way; and (6) result in the church's submission to the word of God. Studying and applying what Edwards (2009) has written in this particular work could have a tremendous impact on reversing what is a centuries old problem of counterfeit Christianity in the church at-large.

Part I: Concerning the Nature of the Affections and Their Importance in Religion

One of the most helpful criteria for determining the authenticity of religion is for said religion to be tried. As Edwards (2009) notes, trials are especially useful in determining whether one's religion is of the "pure gold" variety or otherwise; whether it is altogether lovely or lovely in appearance only. "True virtue," the author observes, "never appears so lovely as when it is most oppressed: and the divine excellency of real Christianity is never exhibited with such advantage as when under the greatest trials" (p. 8). Trials also have a way of refining true religion, the author maintains, as well as delivering it from that which would hinder its growth and expression. As the apostle Peter indicates in his first epistle:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if 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 (1 Peter 1:6-8).

Likewise, as the apostle James wrote:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

Citing the apostle Peter, Edwards (2009) observes two things that were evident in the lives of those to whom Peter was writing. In the first place, they possessed a love for Christ. Although having never seen Him with physical eyes, they loved Him all the same because they had seen Him spiritually. The second thing evident in the lives of those possessing true religion was that, in addition to loving their unseen Savior, they also exhibited tremendous joy in Him. Despite what were undeniably very grievous sufferings and all manner of persecution, “their inward spiritual joys were greater than their sufferings.” Far from being a mere expression of carnal joy, the joy of those in possession of true religious affections was “a prelibation of the joy of heaven, that raised their minds to a degree of heavenly blessedness” and “filled their minds with the light of God’s glory, and made [them] to shine with some communication of that glory” (p. 9).

Sadly, to the modern (or postmodern, if you will) western mind, to include many professing believers, the idea of joy in the midst of persecution is a foreign concept. Many today, due to the rampant spread of false teaching in this regard, have become convinced that being a Christian has less to do with taking up one’s cross and following Christ and more to do with “living one’s best life now.” Evidence of this phenomenon can be seen in the bestselling book by Joel Osteen bearing this same title. Although the writer of this paper has, quite frankly, avoided this book like the plague, according to Challies (2014), it is “framed around seven steps meant to instruct the reader in living out God’s big dream for his life.” Among the stated goals of this million-selling bestseller, Challies (2014) observes, the believer should focus on (1) *Enlarging his vision*. God allegedly wants to make the believer’s life easier and provide only good things

for us; (2) *Developing a healthy self-image*. God sees believers as “strong and courageous, of great honor and value,” and they should see themselves in the same light; (3) *Discovering the power of his thoughts and words*. The believer’s thoughts and words have creative power and should not defeat him; (4) *Letting go of the past*. Focusing on the past will block God’s ability to bless the believer; (5) *Finding strength through adversity*. This principle is not as scriptural as the reader may be inclined to believe. Osteen suggests that “God has promised that He will turn your challenges into stepping-stones for promotion”; (6) *Living to give*. Again, this is simply Osteen’s way of promoting the modern health and prosperity gospel. According to Challies (2014), Osteen supports this contention by writing, “If you’re struggling financially, go out and help somebody who has less than you have. If you want to reap financial blessings, you must sow financial seeds in the lives of others. If you want to see healing and restoration come to your life, go out and help somebody else get well.” Finally, (7) *Choosing to be happy*. “If,” Osteen opines, “you will start taking care of what God has given you, He’ll be more likely to give you something better.” Given the popularity of Osteen and others of the same ilk, there can be little doubt that an increasingly large number of those calling themselves Christians today would benefit tremendously from Edwards’ (2009) teaching on the nature of true religious affections.

The proposition Edwards (2009) establishes from these preliminary observations is that “true religion in great part, consists in holy affections” (p. 9). To the modern reader, the word “affections,” as used in eighteenth century vernacular, requires further definition in order to be properly understood. Edwards (2009) defines affections as “the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul” (p. 10). According to the author, God has provided two principal faculties to the soul: (1) the perception and speculation necessary to judge and discern all things (referred to as the soul’s understanding), and (2) the soul’s inclination with

respect to whatever it perceives or considers by way of the former faculty. This inclination, Edwards (2009) maintains, is expressed by either approval or disapproval. In providing further definitional refinement, Edwards (2009) points out that although one may have an inclination of the will to like something, said inclination should not be confused with the *affection* of love. Similarly, while one may be inclined by the will to dislike something, that should not be confused with the *affection* of hatred. The difference, the author argues, lies in the degree to which the will is inclined:

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. (p. 11)

Edwards (2009) is also very careful to point out that passions also differ from affections as they are more sudden and have a more profound effect on the “animal spirits” as they become overpowered, sometimes violently.

Very often, Edwards (2009) argues, many speak of affections and passions as being the same thing. True religious affections, however, although they may in fact be accompanied by particular displays of passion from time to time, are more extensive as they originate, not in the body but in the heart and mind. How does one determine the difference between deceitful passions and true affections? Edwards (2009) maintains that true religion is that which “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” (p. 12). He goes on to indicate:

The 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. (p. 12)

The author cites several texts supporting this contention. They include, “Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11), “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?” (Deut. 10:12), and “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:4, 6). Only through this “fervent vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion” (p. 12) can one prove to possess the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart or true regeneration. Edwards (2009) notes that not everyone who is truly redeemed will immediately begin to display such fervent inclinations toward divine things as some are yet babes in Christ and are still comparatively weak. Everyone who is truly saved, however, will discover that his holy affections will prevail over all carnal or natural affections.

It only stands to reason that, having been born dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and thus being inclined by a fallen nature only to carnal affections, having been regenerated to newness of life by the Holy Spirit, one’s affections will change. As Edwards (2009) observes:

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 into 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. (p. 14)

From this change of heart, the author argues, springs a new perspective on Scripture’s emphasis on such affections as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and

zeal. One has to wonder how Edwards (2009), were he alive today, would react to the modern (and unbiblical) phenomenon of so-called “carnal-Christianity” which promotes the notion that it is quite possible for one to have been saved by the grace of God and yet not manifest any of the requisite fruits of that salvation. There can be no doubt that the current age of easy-believism and decisional regeneration has done significant damage to the once commonly held belief that where God has saved, there will be repentance from sin as well as a new nature which will be inclined, by a change of affections, to obey God and strive to achieve God-honoring purity in one’s life.

Part II: Showing What Are No Certain Signs That Religious Affections Are Gracious, or That They Are Not

In the second part of this work, Edwards’ (2009) stated purpose is to distinguish among religious affections in order to determine whether they are authentic evidence of one’s claims to true religion. He sets about this task by providing twelve indicators of the presence of religious affections, each of which may or may not prove the existence of true religion.

First, according to Edwards (2009), it is quite possible for one to misjudge whether or not true religion is present merely by examining the high degree of one’s display of religious affections. As then, even today, there are many who seem to possess a great deal of love for the things of the Lord and, given the right circumstances, their excitement in worship can hardly be contained. These emotional displays, in and of themselves, do not constitute true religion. As Edwards (2009) notes, “there may be religious affections, which are raised to a very high degree, and yet there be nothing of true religion” (p. 31). As his father-in-law similarly observed, “common affections are sometimes stronger than saving” (p. 31).

Secondly, Edwards (2009) observes that great effects on the body are not a reliable indication of the presence of true religious affections. In fact, he argues, “All affections whatsoever, have in some respect or degree, an effect on the body” (p. 31). These effects, he says, are simply in keeping with human nature. On the other hand, in Scripture, true religious affections are often accompanied by bodily effects. For example, the Psalmist says, “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Ps. 84:2). In another place, he writes, “My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Ps. 63:1). The prophet Habakkuk reported a similar effect on his body writing, “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself” (Hab. 3:16). These things, in and of themselves, are no sign of true religion.

One is inclined at this point to consider the effect that religion has on many who *profess* Christ but whose actual *possession* of Him remains questionable. In simple language, one can in fact be very excited about the things of religion and yet not be in genuine possession of it. By the same token, these same individuals may indeed be the genuine articles. As Edwards (2009) relates:

It is plain the Scripture often makes use of bodily effects, to express the strength of holy and spiritual affections; such as trembling, groaning, being sick, crying out, panting, and fainting. Now if it be supposed that these are only figurative expressions to represent the degree of affection, yet I hope all will allow, that they are fit and suitable figures to represent the high degree of those spiritual affections, which the Spirit of God makes use of them to represent; which I do not see how they would be, in those spiritual affections, let them be in never to high a degree, have no tendency to any such things; but that on the contrary, they are the proper effects and sad tokens of false affections, and the delusion of the devil. I cannot think, God would commonly make use of things which are very alien from spiritual affections, and are shrewd marks of the hand of Satan, and smell strong of the bottomless pit, as beautiful figures, to represent the high degree of holy and heavenly affections. (p. 33).

In the third place, Edwards (2009) indicates that speaking fluently, fervently, and abundantly about the things of religion is no sure indication of the presence of true religion. Many knowledgeable individuals possess a great deal of knowledge about a great number of things, including Christianity. To equate the knowledge of and the fluency to discuss the things of God with true saving faith is simply to make an improper assessment of that which, at best, indicates the possibility that one may be in possession of true religion. Quoting another, Edwards (2009) observes, “A Pharisee’s trumpet shall be heard to the town’s end; when simplicity walks through the town unseen.”

Fourthly, Edwards observes that even those affections that individuals do not manufacture themselves but ascribe to extrinsic causes, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to signify the presence of true religion. Many professing Christians today claim that their love for Christ and its various manifestations are completely born of the Holy Spirit. As the author is quick to point out, however, simply attributing these affections to the operation of the Holy Spirit is no indication that this is actually the case. Edwards elaborates as follows:

There are some who make this an argument in their own favor; when speaking of what they have experienced, they say, “I am sure I did not make it myself; it was a fruit of no contrivance or endeavor of mine; it came when I thought nothing of it; if I might have the world for it, I cannot make it again when I please.” And hence they determine that what they have experienced must be from the mighty influence of the Spirit of God, and is of a saving nature; but very ignorantly, and without grounds. What they have been the subjects of, may indeed not be from themselves directly, but may be from the operation of an invisible agent, some spirit besides their own: but it does not thence follow that it was from the Spirit of God. There are other spirits who have influence on the minds of men besides the Holy Ghost. We are directed not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they be of God. There are many false spirits, exceeding busy with men, who often transform themselves into angels of light, and do in many wonderful ways, with great subtlety and power, mimic the operations of the Spirit of God. And there are many of Satan’s operations which are very distinguishable from the voluntary exercises of men’s own minds. (p. 37)

The fifth point Edwards (2009) makes in positing that there are no certain signs that religious affections are either significant of true religion or not is that affections accompanied by or understood as the byproduct of Scripture that is suddenly brought to mind can be characteristic of both true believers and even Satan himself. Simply because one experiences certain affections as a result of having Scripture come to mind is neither an indication that said affections are true or not true. As the author queries, “What evidence is there that the devil cannot bring texts of Scripture to the mind, and misapply them to deceive persons? There seems to be nothing in this which exceeds the power of Satan” (p. 39). As can be seen in many churches today, there is a great deal of Scripture being read by those who consistently twist and malign it to their own ends in the hearing of those who, although they should know better, yet insist that the word has generated in them true religious affections.

In the sixth place, Edwards (2009) points out that because apparent love may accompany religious affections does not indicate the presence of true religion as such things can be easily counterfeited. As the author indicates, there are many who believe that the affection of love is sufficient evidence that one’s religious affections are indeed genuine. The reason, he writes, is that they believe Satan to be unable to exhibit love of any kind. When one couples this belief with the apostle Paul’s teaching that love is the most excellent of all virtues, many find it difficult to understand how Satan might be able to counterfeit it. On the contrary, says Edwards (2009):

It may be observed that the more excellent anything is, the more will be the counterfeits of it. Thus there be more counterfeits of silver and gold than of iron and copper...many false diamonds and rubies, but who goes about to counterfeit common stones? (p. 40)

It is quite possible, the author relates, for persons to seem to have a love for God and Christ and yet have no grace. Likewise, many have an apparent love for the brethren that is equally devoid

of grace. Indeed, there are many who see Christianity and everything associated with it as little more than a suitable network in which there is an increased opportunity to advance one's own agenda. In the absence of agenda-driven motives, others join themselves to the local church simply to gain a sense of belonging or the satisfaction that being a part of something larger than themselves fosters. In these cases, by all appearances, they may seem to love the Lord and His people and yet their hearts may know nothing of God's saving grace. Again, love being the chief of all virtues, it should come as no great surprise at all that Satan is able to successfully counterfeit it to meet his own destructive ends.

The seventh thing Edwards (2009) says in this regard is that the manifestation of multiple affections, any one of which may either genuine or not, is not sufficient to determine whether true religion is present. The author cites as evidence the joy, excitement, and initial dedication of the stony ground hearers who exhibited true affection for the things of Christ for a time but, lacking the roots necessary to anchor and hold him in Christ, when persecution arises, he immediately falls away (Matt. 13:20). The author goes on to refer to many of the followers of John the Baptist who were "willing to rejoice for a while in [Christ's] light" (John 5:45). In this writer's experience, he has known many over the years who profess Christ for a time, partaking of the fellowship and gifts of the brethren, participating in the various ministries of the church, etc., only to later abandon the church altogether, proving Edwards' (2009) contention to be true: one can manifest multiple affections for a time and yet not be in possession of true religion.

Eighthly, Edwards (2009) observes, "Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections, by this, that comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convictions of conscience, in a certain order" (p. 44). In other words, many who have gone through particularly difficult times experience comforts and joys without the aid of the Holy

Spirit. As such, they are no reliable indication of the presence of true religion. As can be shown repeatedly in Scripture, God does quite often preface periods of comfort and joy with intense periods of darkness and dread. This scenario is common even among those who know or care nothing for true religious affections.

Edwards' (2009) ninth observation in this regard is that the amount of time and energy one may put forth in attending to the external duties of worship does not necessarily demonstrate the presence of true religion. During the author's day, there were many who argued that too much reading, praying, singing, listening to sermons, and the like were all components of false religious affections. As is further argued, however, Scripture is replete with examples indicating just the opposite. The author provides several. Anna the prophetess, for example, according to "...departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Lk. 2:27). Similarly, the early Christians in Jerusalem continued "daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God" (Acts 2:46, 47). Likewise, Daniel delighted in the duty of prayer and attended to it three times daily:

Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. (Dan. 6:10)

David was also routinely engaged in prayer, saying, "Evening, morning, and at noon will I pray" (Ps. 55:17). So are these things always indicative of the presence of true religious affections? Not necessarily. As Edwards (2009) writes:

But yet, on the other hand, persons being disposed to abound and to be zealously engaged in the external exercises of religion, and to spend much time in them, is no sure evidence of grace; because such a disposition is found in many that have no grace. (p. 52)

One especially fitting example supporting the author's contention can be found in Isaiah's prophecy wherein the religious services of the Israelites were said to be abominable to God. They attended the "new moons and Sabbaths, and calling of assemblies, and spread forth their hands, and made many prayers" (Isaiah 1:12-15) and yet all of it was an abomination to the very One to whom it was directed. One cannot deny that the same sort of thing that was true of the Israelites is equally true among many in the church at-large today. Edwards (2009) provides valuable commentary in this regard writing:

Experience shows that persons, from false religion, may be inclined to be exceeding abundant in the external exercises of religion; yea, to give themselves up to them, and devote almost their whole time to them. Formerly a sort of people were very numerous in the Romish church, called recluses, who forsook the world and utterly abandoned the society of mankind, and shut themselves up close in a narrow cell, with a vow never to stir out of it, nor to see the face of any of mankind any more (unless that they might be visited in case of sickness), to spend all their days in the exercise of devotion and converse with God. (p. 52)

As the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col. 2:23).

In the tenth place, Edwards (2009) points out that even the most profuse verbal expressions of praise are not significant to indicate the presence of true religion. Simply stated, one's words do not alone prove the condition of the heart. Simply stated, man has always been able to "talk a good game" in an effort to impress others. The fact that it is impossible to differentiate between those who are in possession of true religious affections and those who are mere pretenders renders this particular litmus test inadequate in actually determining the truth of the matter. As the author clearly demonstrates, there are many instances recorded in Scripture which indicate that the unsaved multitudes were prone now and again to glorify God verbally after having witnessed His might deeds wrought in Christ. Perhaps the most telling of these

instances was when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey to a veritable cacophony of praise and adulation (Jn. 12:12-19). Not surprisingly, many of the same individuals would only weeks later be shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” (Jn. 19:6). Similarly, many today are perfectly willing to extol the greatness of God and the blessedness of their alleged salvation but only insofar as things are going well in their lives. However, the minute things fail to go as they might have imagined according to their erroneous understanding of such things, they no longer have any interest in the God for whom they previously had the highest praise and of whom they had the loftiest thoughts. Again, even the most profuse and enthusiastic verbal expressions of praise are not necessarily indicative of true religious affections.

Edwards’ (2009) eleventh proposition regarding the presence of true religion is that confidence itself is not necessarily a determining factor concerning whether the affections displayed are true or not. As Mead (1856) expressed, “A man may hope for heaven, and yet be doing the work of hell; he may hope for salvation and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences” (p. 45). Men with the greatest displays of confidence have often placed that confidence in erroneous doctrine which, in turn, will yield fruit inconsistent with that which is able to glorify God. Mead (1856) also offers this word of sage wisdom: “Satan will try us at one time or other. He will winnow us and sift us to the bottom; and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair” (p. 86). This is not to say that a man may not have confidence concerning his standing before God only that confidence itself is often misguided and is thus not a sure indication of the presence of true religious affections.

Finally, Edwards (2009) states that one’s ability to please others so as to win their hearts is no sure indication of the presence of true religion. As the author succinctly observes, “The true saints have not such a spirit of discerning that they can certainly determine who are godly and

who are not” (p. 63). This truth alone is sufficient to establish Edwards (2009) contention that one’s ability to please others and win their hearts is no reliable indicator as to whether or not he possesses true religious affections.

The whole point of the foregoing twelve points in which Edwards (2009) goes to such great lengths in conveying the truth that there are no certain signs which might be observed and weighed in order to determine whether or not someone possesses true religious affections is summarized by the author in this final observation:

This notion, of certainly discerning another’s state, by love flowing out, is not only not founded on reason or Scripture, but it is anti-scriptural, it is against the rules of Scripture; which say not a word of any such way of judging the state of others as this, but direct us to judge chiefly by the fruits that are seen in them. And it is against the doctrines of Scripture, which do plainly teach us, that the state of others’ souls towards God cannot be known by us (cf. Rev. 2:17; Rom. 2:29, 1 Cor. 4:5). (p. 67)

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

Having cited his twelve proofs illustrating that there are no certain signs which might be observed and evaluated in determining whether or not one’s religious affections are genuine, Edwards (2009) then turns his attention to providing twelve distinguishing signs which do indicate the presence of true religion and holy affections.

The first way to validate or verify truly gracious and holy affections is to determine if their source is spiritual, supernatural, and divine. In short, true religious affections have a divine source whereby the recipient of saving grace is changed. The New Testament, the author maintains, refers to those who have truly been sanctified by the Spirit of God as “spiritual persons.” This terminology sets them in opposition to natural or carnal men. To this end, Edwards cites Paul’s first Corinthian letter wherein the apostle writes, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things” (1

Cor. 2:14, 15). Spiritual persons possess a “spiritual mind” (Rom. 8:6-7), “spiritual wisdom” (Col. 1:9), and “spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3). Edwards (2009) is quick to point out that this reference to regenerate man as “spiritual” has nothing to do with the spirit of man but with his identification with the Holy Spirit of God. The author then commences with some twenty pages of discussion on the importance of the inner working of God in the life of a believer as evidence of the possession of true religion.

Edwards’ (2009) second point concerning the identification of true religious affections is that they are caused by a solemn reflection on the nature of God and not on God’s relation to oneself. Upon contemplating this at some length, this writer was impressed not only by Edwards’ (2009) stalwart defense of God Himself but by the profundity of his argumentation against the idea that self-love should be regenerate man’s motivation for loving and knowing God. Very often, man is tempted to view God through the lens of self-interest. In other words, as previously pointed out, any pursuit of the knowledge of God is seen as important only in terms of what God can do for man himself. As Packer (1973) surmised:

There is nothing more irreligious than self-absorbed religion...it is constantly needful to stress that God does not exist for our ‘comfort,’ or ‘happiness,’ or ‘satisfaction,’ or to provide us with ‘religious experiences,’ as if these were the most interesting and important things in life. (p. 35)

As Edwards (2009) observes:

It is unreasonable to think otherwise, than that the first foundation of a true love to God, is that whereby he is in himself lovely, or worthy to be loved, or the supreme loveliness of his nature. This is certainly what makes him chiefly amiable. (p. 97)

That God is to be loved on the sole basis of who He is and not what He is able to do for man is, sadly, a foreign concept to many even (perhaps *especially*) in the church of our day.

Thirdly, Edwards (2009) notes that true religious affections are based primarily on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things. Not only is true religious affection

characterized by a love for God solely on the basis of who He is, evidence of true religion will also be present in one's propensity to see the loveliness and moral excellency of all divine things. This evidence, Edwards (2009) posits is "the first beginning and spring of all holy affections" (p. 103). By "moral excellency," the author means "holiness." When one is truly redeemed of God, his natural excellencies (e.g., goodness, kindness, righteousness, faithfulness, strength, etc.) become his moral excellencies as they are joined with holiness. Expanding on this thought, Edwards (2009) writes:

Moral excellency is the excellency of natural excellencies. Natural qualifications are either excellent or otherwise, according as they are joined with moral excellency or not. Strength and knowledge do not render any being lovely, without holiness, but more hateful; though they render them more lovely, when joined with holiness. Thus the elect angels are the more glorious for their strength and knowledge, because these natural perfections of theirs are sanctified by their moral perfection. But though the devils are very strong, and of great natural understanding, they be not the more lovely: they are more terrible indeed, but not the more amiable; but on the contrary, the more hateful. The holiness of an intelligent creature, is the beauty of all his natural perfections. (p. 105)

Thus, once more, those in possession of true religious affections will recognize the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things. This writer would extend this notion to include recognition of the loveliness, not only of things directly pertaining to the divine, but of creation itself. He is reminded of the second stanza of a wonderful hymn penned by George Robinson in 1876 which beautifully reflects this particular truth:

Heav'n above is softer blue, Earth around is sweeter green!
 Something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen;
 Birds with gladder songs o'erflow, flowers with deeper beauties shine,
 Since I know, as now I know, I am His, and He is mine.

In the fourth place, Edwards (2009) contends that true religious affections arise from the mind's being enlightened to spiritually understand divine things. As cited previously, in 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually

discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things” (1 Cor. 2:14-15). As the author himself writes:

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from the information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. 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, and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel; he has some clearer and better view than he had before, when he was not affected: either he receives some understanding of divine things that is new to him; or has his former knowledge renewed after the view was decayed... (p. 111)

Fifthly, Edwards (2009) observes that true religious affections are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things. In other words, once one is truly redeemed, he will no longer doubt or dispute that which is revealed as truth in the word of God. Contrary to the views of some professing believers who feel that trepidation and doubt are perfectly normal characteristics for the Christian, Edwards (2009) posits that all matters of truth will be, in the mind of the one in possession of true affections, settled and indisputable. In his own words,

All those who are truly gracious persons have a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel; I mean, that they no longer halt between two opinions; the great doctrines of the gospel cease to be any longer doubtful things, or matters of opinion, which though probable, are yet disputable; but with them, they are points settled and determined, as undoubted and indisputable, so that they are not afraid to venture their all upon their truth. (p. 127)

Edwards’ (2009) subsequent statement makes it quite clear that this is not merely his opinion. He writes, “That all true Christians have such a kind of conviction of the truth of the things of the gospel, is abundantly manifest from the Holy Scriptures” (p. 127). He then cites several key passages to prove this bold contention (cf. Matt. 16:15, 16, 17; John 6:68, 69; John 17:6, 7, 8; Acts 8:37).

An important point of clarification is necessary in order to understand this fifth point fully. Although Edwards (2009) teaches that believers are to have a sure and certain conviction of the truth of these matters, he is not implying that we are to possess an exhaustive knowledge of the same:

The gospel was not given only for learned men. There are at least nineteen in twenty, if not ninety-nine in a hundred, of whose for whom the Scriptures were written, that are not capable of any certain or effectual conviction of the divine authority of the Scriptures by such arguments as learned men make use of. If men who have been brought up in Heathenism, must wait for a clear and certain conviction of the truth of Christianity, until they have learning and acquaintance with the histories of politer nations, enough to see clearly the force of such kind of arguments; it will make the evidence of the gospel to them immensely cumbersome, and will render the propagation of the gospel among them infinitely difficult. Miserable is the condition of the Houssatunnuck Indians, and others, who have lately manifested a desire to be instructed in Christianity, if they can come at no evidence of the truth of Christianity, sufficient to induce them to sell all for Christ, in any other way but this. (p. 134)

The sixth point Edwards (2009) makes concerning one's possession of true religious affections is that humility and not pride characterizes true religious affections. The author defines evangelical humiliation as: "...a sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart" (p. 139). One must make a distinction, he writes, between a legal and evangelical humiliation. The former concerns what man is subject to while yet in an unregenerate state; the latter is peculiar to true saints. To summarize Edwards' (2009) point, only those who have experienced the grace of God in salvation, having been given the ability to recognize such divine characteristics as God's greatness, His terrible majesty, etc. are genuine subjects of evangelical humiliation, having been made so "by a discovery of the beauty of God's holiness and moral perfection" (p. 139).

In the seventh place, Edwards (2009) notes that a change of the believer's nature will always accompany true religious affections. This change is, in this writer's opinion, one of Edwards' (2009) more obvious points. As the apostle Paul indicates in 2 Corinthians, "Therefore,

if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17). As the author observes:

A man may be restrained from sin before he is converted; but when he is converted, he is not only restrained from sin, his very heart and nature is turned from it unto holiness: so that thenceforward he becomes a holy person, and an enemy to sin. (p. 158)

Despite this clear teaching of Scripture, many claim to have been converted and yet manifest no great change in their behavior. These, the author maintains, simply cannot be in possession of true religious affections.

Eighthly, Edwards (2009) posits that there is a difference between false and delusive affections and true religious affections in that the latter bear the marks of the gentle, lamb-like, dove-like temperament of Jesus Christ. True believers, he writes, “naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy, as appeared in Christ” (p. 160). Edwards (2009) challenges those who might be inclined to disagree with this simple observation saying pointedly, “Christians are Christlike; none deserve the name of Christians, that are not so in their prevailing character” (p. 161). Though many in today’s easy-believism culture would no doubt reject this observation, the author makes yet another very pointed observation writing:

The Scripture knows of no such true Christians, as are of a sordid, selfish, cross, and contentious spirit. Nothing can be invented that is a greater absurdity than a morose, hard, close, high-spirited, spiteful, true Christian. We must learn the way of bringing men to rules, and not rules to men, straining and stretching the rules of God’s word to take in ourselves, and some of our neighbors, until we make them wholly of none effect. (p. 168)

Ninthly, the author indicates that true religious affections will cause the heart and soul to be tender. As Edwards (2009) notes:

False affections, with the delusions that attend them, finally tend to stupefy the mind, and shut it up against those affections wherein tenderness of heart consists: and the effect of them at last is, that persons in the settled frame of their minds, become less affected with

their present and past sins, and less conscientious with respect to future sins, less moved with the warnings and cautions of God's word, or God's chastisements in his providence, more careless of the frame of their hearts, and the manner and tendency of their behavior, less quicksighted to discern what is sinful, less afraid of the appearance of evil, than they were while they were under legal awakenings and fears of hell. (p. 168)

Simply stated, a true believer cannot continually express a false love to Christ and be unaffected.

A repeated refusal to submit to Christ and to obey Him will lead to an even greater hardening of the heart.

In the tenth place, Edwards (2009) remarks that true religious affections are expressed in a beautiful symmetry and proportion. There can be no doubting that God is a God of beautiful symmetry and proportion. Everywhere one looks, he is able to see evidence after evidence that the God of creation is a Master of good order and balance in all things. Given that God is this way, the author suggests, the true believer will likewise seek to emulate Him. How does this affection manifest itself practically? Christians should take care not to focus on one aspect of their Christianity over and above or to the exclusion of other important aspects. One example Edwards (2009) provides is that there should always be proportion between the joy and sorrow of the true believer. Another example is contained in the author's observation that:

Some men show a love to others as to their outward man, they are liberal of their worldly substance, and often give to the poor; but have no love to, or concern for the souls of men. Others pretend a great love to men's souls, that are not compassionate and charitable towards their bodies. The making a great show of love, pity and distress for souls, costs them nothing; but in order to show mercy to men's bodies, they must part with money out of their pockets. But a true Christian love to our brethren extends both to their souls and bodies; and herein is like the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. (pp. 174-175)

Another very common imbalance in the lives of many who profess Christ can be seen in the willingness to focus more on negative aspects of their brothers' and sisters' walks with Christ than with those in their own lives. Speaking to this issue, Edwards (2009) writes:

It is a sign that affections are not of the right sort, if persons seem to be much affected with the bad qualities of their fellow Christians as the coldness and lifelessness of other saints, but are in no proportion affected with their own defects and corruptions. (p. 175)

This observation should provide ample warrant for self-examination even in the most confident of saints. As the author writes concerning false believers:

They are like the waters in the time of a shower of rain, which, during the shower, and a little after, run like a brook, and flow abundantly; but are presently quite dry; and when another shower comes, then they will flow again. Whereas a true saint is like a stream from a living spring; which, though it may be greatly increased by a shower of rain, and diminished in time of drought, yet constantly runs. (p. 177)

The eleventh sign Edwards (2009) provides indicating the presence of true religious affections is that those possessing true affections will long to increase in their sanctification. In proving this crucial point Edwards writes:

The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, 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, the more he desires to hate it, and laments that he has so much remaining love to it; the more he mourns for sin, the more he longs to mourn for sin; the more his heart is broke, the more he desires it should be broke; the more he thirsts and longs after God and holiness, the more he longs to long, and breathe out his very soul in longings after God. (p. 179)

Tragically, the doctrine of sanctification seems to be grossly underemphasized these days. In today's consumeristic culture, more and more people view salvation as simply something they have chosen to appropriate for themselves for the express purpose of keeping them out of hell. Sadder still is the fact that so many pastors and evangelists have decided to disseminate this brand of the gospel because it attracts many more inquirers than a gospel that calls for sinners to repent and believe and then to see themselves as embarking on a lifelong journey of self-denial.

As MacArthur (2003) opined on this issue:

The true gospel is a call to self-denial. It is not a call to self-fulfillment. And that puts it in opposition to the contemporary evangelical gospel, where ministers view Jesus as a utilitarian genie. You rub the lamp, and He jumps out and says you have whatever you want; you give Him your list and He delivers. (p. 2)

As Peter exhorted his readers in his first epistle, believers are to “like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it [we] may grow in respect to salvation, if [we] have tasted the kindness of the Lord” (1 Pe. 2:2-3). This individual growth will, in turn, promote the corporate growth and strength of the body of Christ. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

Finally, in his twelfth point, Edwards (2009) observes that those who are in possession of true religious affections will be more Christlike in terms of the fruit they produce and the actions they perform. While the author spends some 50 pages on this particular point alone, such an exhaustive treatment far exceeds the limitations of this present work. Much of what the author writes on this point, however, can be summarized in this statement:

Christian practice, or a holy life, is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace. But I may go farther, and assert, that it is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also their own consciences...Christian practice is the principal sign by which Christians are to judge, both of their own and others' sincerity of godliness. (p. 193)

Freedom of the Will

This seminal work, published in 1754 and originally entitled *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*, is divided into four parts, each of which will be examined in the remainder of this paper. It is critically important to note at the outset that, although it may appear to be the case from the title, Edwards (2013) was not a proponent of free will. On the contrary, his careful choice of words actually reflects a much more thorough and thought-provoking thesis concerning man's utter inability to will anything that is contrary to his sin nature, a highly controversial subject during

his own day and one which remains so today. As Piper (1997) remarked, Edwards' (2013) treatment of this subject is "probably the greatest defense and explanation of the Augustinian-Reformed view of the will which exists today...it is simply without peer. We would live in a different world of evangelicalism if Christians would read it." Similarly, Beeke and Pederson (2006) have written that this work "is the most important argument against Arminianism published in America" (p. 219).

Part I: Wherein are explained and stated various terms and things belonging to the subject of the ensuing discourse

Edwards (2013) begins this work with a very necessary definition of the word "will." As he suggests, had not philosophers, metaphysicians, and polemic divines obscured the meaning of this simple word over the years, this would not be necessary. They did, however, and so clarification was, and is, very much warranted. Edwards (2013) defines the will as:

That by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will, is that power, or principle of mind, by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice. (p. 1)

While those of an Arminian persuasion would likely find nothing inherently wrong with this definition, Edwards' (2013) expansion on the subject puts considerable distance between his position and theirs. According to Edwards (2013), man is indeed free to choose that which he most desires, however, being, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), man consequently desires only sin. Because of the fall of man's federal head, Adam, every man is:

By nature in a state of total ruin, both with respect to the moral evil of which they are the subjects, and the afflictive evil to which they are exposed, the one as the consequence and punishment of the other.

The doctrine of original sin and its effects is demonstrated in passages like the following in Paul's letter to the Romans which concludes with a sobering indictment against mankind's

natural condition: “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32). In what is perhaps the best known portion of Scripture addressing this issue, Paul also writes that “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God... There is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:10). The apostle also provides an explanation for this pervasive condition, writing, “...just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin... so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). This verse explains Paul’s aforementioned remarks wherein he declares that, before salvation, men are spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

That man is innately prone to sin and not to righteousness is also easily demonstrated from a purely anecdotal observation of society at-large. A simple glance at the headlines of today’s newspapers is sufficient to corroborate this reality as wars, rumors of wars, murder, vice, greed, corruption, sexual perversion and a host of other societal ills are commonplace.

At this point, it is important to note the difference between what Edwards (2013) refers to as “natural inability” versus “moral inability.” To argue that man is *naturally* unable to do something implies that he is limited by some natural defect or obstacle that prevents him from doing even that which he may desire to do. No matter how much he may desire to fly, for example, his nature limits him from doing so. This type of limitation, Edwards (2013) maintains, is one that is actually extrinsic (comes from outside) of man’s actual will. To say, on the other hand, that man is *morally* unable to do something is to imply that his inability stems, not from external factors, but from that which is internal in “either the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of

the Will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary” (p. 17). Stated more simply,

Edwards (2013) notes that:

Moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect of motives, or prevalence of contrary motives, it is the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination, in such circumstances, and under the influence of such views. (p. 17)

In short, while fallen man does in fact possess the *natural* ability to make choices of all kinds,

His fallen nature renders him *morally* unable to choose anything that is contrary to that nature.

The author goes on to discuss the differences between the associated concepts of liberty and moral agency. He writes:

The will itself is not an Agent that has a Will: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing. That which has the power of volition is the man, or the soul, and not the power of volition itself. And he that has the Liberty of doing according to his will, is the Agent who is possessed of the Will; and not the Will which he is possessed of. We say with propriety, that a bird let loose has power and liberty to fly; but not that the bird's power of flying has a power and Liberty of flying. To be free is the property of an Agent, who is possessed of powers and faculties, as much as to be cunning, valiant, bountiful, or zealous. But these qualities are the properties of persons; and not the properties of properties. (p. 19)

The point Edwards (2013) is making is that, contrary to the belief of many during Edwards' day (and no doubt many today as well), the choices man makes are not determined by the will itself but by the mind.

Many proponents of free will defend their belief on the premise of what they define as liberty. According to Edwards (2013), liberty is most often understood as “that power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice” (p. 19). Those in opposition to Calvinistic doctrine, however, have modified this meaning of liberty to include the following:

(1) That it consists in a self-determining power in the Will, or a certain sovereignty the Will has over itself, and its own acts, whereby it determines its own volitions; so as not to

be dependent, in its determinations, on any cause without itself, nor determined by any thing prior to its own acts. (2) Indifference belongs to Liberty in their notion of it, or that the mind, previous to the act of volition, being in equilibrio. (3) Contingence is another thing that belongs and is essential to it; not in the common acceptation of the word, as that has been already explained, but as opposed to all necessity, or any fixed and certain connexion with some previous ground or reason of its existence. They suppose the essence of Liberty so much to consist in these things, that unless the will of man be free in this sense, he has no real freedom, how much soever, he may be at Liberty to act according to his will. (p. 20)

Part II: Wherein it is considered whether there is or can be any sort of freedom of will, as that wherein Arminians place the essence of the liberty of all moral agents; and whether any such thing ever was or can be conceived of

According to Arminian doctrine, a man can only be regarded as a moral agent to the extent that it is understood that his will (in and of itself) is capable of determining all of its free acts. Edwards (2013) refers to this capability as the “self-determining Power in the Will” (p. 23) and reiterates that it cannot be so purely on the basis that “actions are ascribed to *agents*, and not properly to the *powers* of agents” (p. 23). He elaborates on this critical concept, writing:

In all cases when we speak of the powers or principles of acting, or doing such things we mean that the agents which have these Powers of acting, do them, in the exercise of those Powers. So where we say, valor fights courageously, we mean, the man who is under the influence of valor fights courageously. Where we say, love seeks the object loved, we mean, the person loving seeks that object. When we say, the understanding discerns, we mean the soul in the exercise of that faculty. So when it is said that the will decides or determines, this meaning must be, that the person, in the exercise of: Power of willing and choosing, or the soul, acting voluntarily, determines. (p. 24)

As Storms (2009) explains:

The libertarians whom Edwards encountered insisted that the will must exercise a certain sovereignty over itself whereby it determines or causes itself to act and choose. Whereas the will may be influenced by antecedent impulses or desires, it always retains an independent power to choose contrary to them. The will is free from any necessary causal connection to anything antecedent to the moment of choice. (p. 203)

In short, Edwards (2013) believed that, while it is perfectly acceptable to believe that a *person* is able to do as he or she pleases, it simply makes no sense whatsoever to suggest that the will is

itself able to freely act as it wills. Only agents are able to act in this way. Furthermore, he reasons, if the will itself is able to act on its own accord, then it must, of necessity, have been the cause for the very first act of volition. Following this logic, the first act of volition cannot actually be referred to as the first act at all but merely a result of another volition going before it which, in turn, must include a prior act of volition as well. How is this obvious tension resolved?

As Edwards (2013) notes:

But if that first volition is not determined by any preceding act of the Will, then that act is not determined by the Will, and so is not free in the Arminian notion of freedom, which consists in the Will's self-determination. And if that first act of the will which determines and fixes the subsequent acts, be not free, none of the following acts which are determined by it can be free. If we suppose there are five acts in the train, the fifth and last determined by the fourth, and the fourth by the third, the third by the second, and the second by the first; if the first is not determined by the Will, and so not free, then none of them are truly determined by the Will; that is, that each of them are as they are, and not otherwise, is not first owing to the will, but to the determination of the first in the series, which is not dependent on the will, and is that which the will has no hand in determining. (p. 25)

The author goes on to point out that the Arminians would no doubt disagree quite vehemently with this explanation, insisting that the will is free and its various volitions are not dependent on any preceding act. This understanding, he insists, is simply absurd from a purely philosophical point of view. No act is free from cause or consequence, rather, every act is necessarily connected to motives.

Part III: Wherein is inquired whether any such liberty of will as Arminians hold, be necessary to moral agency, virtue, praise, and dispraise, etc.

Edwards (2013) begins this section of his work with a “consideration of the virtue and agency of the Supreme moral Agent, and Foundation of all Agency and Virtue” (p. 91).

Referring to one Dr. Whitby, author of a book entitled *Discourse on the Five Points*, Edwards (2013) cites him as contending that:

If all human actions are necessary, virtue and vice must be empty names; we being capable of nothing that is blameworthy, or deserveth praise; for who can blame a person for doing only what he could not help, or judge that he deserveth praise only for what he could not avoid. (p. 91)

This argument, of course, is actually little more than a resurfacing of the argument made by the apostle Paul's imaginary antagonist in Romans 9:19ff. If God has sovereignly created us to be either objects of His love or objects of His wrath, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" Of course, Paul's response ("...who are you, O man, who answers back to God") would have been an equally appropriate retort for Dr. Whitby, Edwards (2013) argues that since Whitby himself agrees that God is necessarily holy and necessarily does good, His actions would similarly be rendered unpraiseworthy, an absurd proposition even to the Arminian himself who finds God entirely praiseworthy. As Edwards (2013) explains:

It were to be wished, that Dr. Whitby and other divines of the same sort, had explained themselves, when they have asserted, that that which is necessary, is not deserving of praise; at the same time that they have owned God's perfection to be necessary, and so in effect representing God as not deserving praise. (p. 92)

Edwards (2013) next returns his attention to the question of whether obedience to God's commands is consistent with man's moral inability to obey. Once again, it is important to understand the difference between moral inability and natural inability. Because man has a moral inability to do that which is in accordance with God's commands, it does not render him free of the responsibility for doing so. Only natural inability does this. As the author states, "Natural inability, arising from the want of natural capacity, or external hindrance, (which alone is properly called Inability), without doubt wholly excuses, or makes a thing improperly the matter of command" (p. 113). According to Arminian doctrine, God cannot and does not command or even invite men to do things that they are disinclined to obey. This contention actually predates Arminianism, as it was the primary argument posited by Pelagius in the fifth century. According

to Harnack (1961), “Pelagius preached that God commanded nothing impossible, that man possessed the power of doing the good if only he willed, and that the weakness of the flesh was merely a pretext” (p. 174). Pelagius’ argument is most popularly represented in his disagreement with Augustine who famously prayed, “Commandest what Thou will and grant what Thou commandest.” While Augustine believed that man was incapable of obeying any of God’s commands without divine assistance, Pelagius believed that man possessed both the moral and natural ability to do so if he would only incline his will accordingly.

Arminians sometimes argue that a sincere desire to repent from sin and love God is sufficient to excuse him from the penalty of disobedience. Edwards (2013), however, argued that if man possessed such sincerity (which indeed would be the byproduct of regeneration), he would in fact love God and strive to obey His commands.

Arminians also argue that indifference is a key component to liberty and moral agency. What they are unable to explain satisfactorily, however, is how one moves from a state of indifference to a particular preference one way or the other. This change, they contend, occurs entirely accidentally. Edwards (2013), however, argues that such an assertion is both inconsistent with moral agency and defies common sense as well.

Part IV: Wherein the chief grounds of the reasonings of Arminians, in support and defense of the aforementioned notions of liberty, moral agency, etc. and against the opposite doctrine, are considered

In this final section of his work, Edwards (2013) enumerates the ways in which Arminians support their ideas and oppose Calvinism. Given the limited scope of this paper, the writer will forgo any further discussion of the support Arminians use to justify their ideas and address their particular objections to Calvinistic doctrine. There are seven of these in Edwards’

(2013) work, each of which he answers in keeping with the information already addressed in his treatise on the subject. They include (1) the contention that all means toward righteousness and against sin are in vain when men act by necessity; (2) the belief that Calvinism is fatalistic and teaches doctrines which are no different from that of the Stoics; (3) that the God of Calvinism is Himself incapable of being free; (4) that God Himself did not act from necessity; (5) that God acted with regard to merit rather than on the basis of grace; (6) that Calvinism makes God the author of sin; and (7) that Calvinism is purely metaphysical.

While it is simply beyond the scope of this paper to address each of these a word, however, is however warranted concerning what this writer considers to be the most persistent of the objections to Calvinistic doctrine addressed by the author. The first of these is the allegation that, if one's choices are determined, people are little more than machines or, to use a more modern term, "automatons." In response to this particular allegation, Edwards (2013) argues that, unlike machines, people possess the faculty of reason; they are capable of exercising a will, are capable of moral acts worthy of praise. In his exact words:

I would say, that notwithstanding this doctrine, man is entirely, perfectly, and unspeakably different from a mere machine, in that he has reason and understanding, and has a faculty of will, and is so capable of volition and choice; and in that his will is guided by the dictates or views of his understanding; and in that his external actions and behavior, and in many respects also his thoughts, and the exercises of his mind, are subject to his will; so that he has liberty to act according to his choice, and do what he pleases; and, by means of these things, is capable of moral habits and moral acts, such inclinations and actions, as, according to the common sense of mankind, are worthy of praise, esteem, love, and reward; or, on the contrary, of disesteem, detestation, indignation, and punishment. (p. 154)

In addressing the allegation that Calvinism is fatalistic, Edwards (2013) argues that fate does not control a man if, in defining fate as the Stoics understood it, it involves limitations on human liberty. He wrote:

If any of [the Stoics] held such a fate as is repugnant to any liberty, consisting in our doing as we please, I utterly deny such a fate. If they held any such fate as is not consistent with the common and universal notions that mankind have of liberty, activity, moral agency, virtue and vice; I disclaim any such thing. (p. 156)

As for the allegation that Calvinists make God to be the author of sin, Edwards (2013) argues that such an allegation is horribly misleading. His subsequent explanation of the Calvinistic view is as enlightening as it is profitable:

Those who object that the Calvinist doctrine makes God the ‘author of sin’ ought to explain clearly what they mean by that phrase. I know that the phrase in its common meaning signifies something very bad. If ‘the author of sin’ is being used to signify the sinner, the agent, the performer of the sin, the doer of the wicked thing, it would be a reproach and a blasphemy, to suppose God to be the author of sin. I utterly deny that God is the author of sin in this sense, rejecting such an accusation against him as something to be infinitely to be abhorred; and I deny that any such thing follows from what I have said. But if ‘the author of sin’ means “the permitter of sin, one who could but does not hinder sin, and, at the same time, one who—for wise, holy, and most excellent ends and purposes—arranges states of affairs in such a way that sin will most certainly and infallibly follow if it is permitted, i.e. not hindered, I don’t deny that God is the ‘author of sin’ in that sense (though I dislike and reject the phrase, because use and custom make it likely to carry another sense). It is no reproach for God to be in that sense the author of sin. It doesn’t involve him in performing any sin; on the contrary, it involves him in performing holiness. What he does in this is holy, and is a glorious exercise of the infinite excellency of his nature. I agree that God’s being in that sense ‘the author of sin’ follows from what I have laid down; and I assert that it follows just as much from the doctrine maintained by most of the Arminian theologians. (p. 165)

Finally, Edwards (2013) foresaw that his arguments might be thought of as overly metaphysical (philosophical) and abstruse (extremely difficult to comprehend; obscure). As many who have read his writings may be inclined to agree, Edwards (2013) can indeed be difficult to digest without considerable cognitive effort. That being said, however, simply because something appears to be overly philosophical or difficult to understand does not render it false or unnecessary. In his own defense, Edwards (2013) argued that, when it comes to understanding “the nature of our own souls” (p. 174), it is impossible to achieve precision without metaphysical arguments and terminology. The author also reminds his reader that, when

he was able, he did in fact attempt to appeal to the ordinary person. What is more, he argues that it was the Arminians themselves who were guilty of using words “from which it is impossible to derive any meaningful ideas...and so they are the ones whose language is abstruse” (p. 174). He goes on to point out that:

Instead of the plain vulgar notion of liberty, which all mankind, in every part of the face of the earth, in all ages, have; consisting in the opportunity to do as one pleases, they have introduced a new strange liberty, consisting in indifference, contingency, and self determination, by which they involve themselves in gross inconsistency. (p. 175)

Conclusion

To summarize Edwards' view of free will is actually much simpler than was the contemplation of his exhaustive treatment of the subject in this treatise. Edwards believed that man is indeed free in that he can and does choose things based on his strongest inclinations or desires. This seemingly “free” will, however, is not free at all given that, because of original sin resulting from the fall of Adam, no one is inclined by nature to do that which is pleasing in God's sight. In statement of fact, every man is born in a condition of enmity toward God, that is, in accordance with his fallen nature, man hates God and, being dead in sin, exhibits no inclination whatsoever to love or follow Him. According to Edwards (2013), while we may possess the natural ability to please Him, we lack the moral ability. Pink (1984) wrote the following concerning natural versus moral ability:

By nature man possesses natural ability but lacks moral and spiritual ability. The fact that he does not possess the latter does not destroy his responsibility because his responsibility rests upon the fact that he does possess the former. (p. 154)

As Sproul (1997) observed:

For Edwards, the greatness of the gospel is visible only when viewed against the backdrop of the greatness of the ruin into which we have been plunged by the fall. The greatness of the disease requires the greatness of the remedy. (p. 148)

The theological impasse between Arminians and Calvinists will undoubtedly continue

and nothing short of sweeping revival will ever bring doctrinal unity between the two camps. As has been previously noted, however, a renewed interest in and emphasis on the writings of men like Jonathan Edwards could go a considerable distance in solving many of the issues surrounding the debate over whether salvation is all of God's grace or whether it is a cooperative effort between man (who, if he is to be saved, must exercise his alleged free will) and God (who is duty-bound to oblige man's decision to be saved).

Edwards' (2013) treatise on this issue is especially applicable today because those who are unfamiliar with or unaccepting of the doctrines of grace – the belief that God and God alone sovereignly determines who will be saved and when – are often quite insistent that they do know how salvation happens. In the minds of many, salvation takes place when one decides, by an act of his own free will, when and where he will be saved. What is most needed is a return to the clear teaching of Scripture with regard to the many illustrations that support that truth that man is utterly incapable of affecting his own salvation. Blind men, according to biblical precedent and example, do not decide that they will see; deaf men do not decide to hear; and dead men most certainly do not decide to live. In addition to these analogies or illustrations of this particular truth, we have the direct teaching of Scripture itself. In John chapter 3, for example, we find Jesus talking with Nicodemus about this very thing. Nicodemus approaches Him under the cover of darkness, and what is the first thing Jesus tells him? He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born [*anōthen*; not “again” but “from above”] he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3) Nicodemus asks, “How does that work?” Jesus responded speaking to him about the mystery of God's grace in salvation. He said, “Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born [from above]. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit’” (John

3:7). He was confirming to Nicodemus that God's working of salvation is a mysterious thing, explaining that, just as no one is able to understand the movement of the wind, neither can the man who is born of the Spirit understand how he is saved. This point is made by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans where he wrote that God's grace in salvation, "...does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Rom. 9:16). In his letter to the Ephesians he similarly writes that it is "...by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). If, as Arminian doctrine teaches, every man born has a free will and actually chooses when and where he is saved, then he owes the glory for his salvation, not to God but to himself. He owes his salvation to his own intellect, cunning, and wisdom. If that is the case, he does indeed have something about which to boast. In all fairness, this does not mean that he will be boastful, but he would indeed have every right to boast if he believes that his salvation is the byproduct of his own free will.

Many today continue to be taught to view their salvation in terms of the day they chose to trust Christ; the day they walked the proverbial aisle; the day they repeated every word of the sinner's prayer and "invited Him into [their] heart" (which, whether intentional or not, is to imply that they gave Him permission to save them). Some can perhaps point to the day and the time of their salvation, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that as long as they do not credit their salvation to their own decision. Speaking about this understanding of salvation in relation to the man born blind as recorded in the ninth chapter of John's gospel; Gill offers this invaluable insight relevant to the subject at hand:

So it is with persons enlightened in a spiritual sense, whatever things they may be ignorant of, though they may not know the exact time of their conversion, nor have so much Gospel light and knowledge as others, or be so capable of expressing themselves, or giving such a distinct and orderly account of the work of God upon them as some can,

nor dispute with an adversary for the truths of the Gospel, or have that faith of assurance, and discoveries of God's love, and the application of such great and precious promises as others have; yet this they know, that they were once blind, as to the knowledge of spiritual things, as to a saving knowledge of God in Christ, as to a true sight and sense of themselves, their sins and lost estate, as to the way of righteousness and salvation by Christ, or the work of the Spirit of God upon their souls, or as to any true and spiritual discerning of the Scriptures, and the doctrines of grace in them: but now they are comfortably assured, they see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the plague of their own hearts, the insufficiency of their righteousness to justify them before God, and the beauty, fullness, suitableness, and ability of Christ as a Saviour; and that their salvation is, and must be of free grace; and that they see the truths of the Gospel in another light than they did before, and have some glimpse of eternal glory and happiness, in the hope of which they rejoice.

Just as the blind man's receiving his sight was (and forever would be) a mystery to him, so will God's grace in salvation forever be a mystery to those who are saved. To the extent that the believer takes any credit whatsoever for his salvation, he glorifies himself and robs God of that which belongs exclusively and deservedly to Him alone. May God alone receive the glory for salvation and may those who are saved give up the need to know those secrets that belong to Him alone. As the hymn writer, Daniel Whittle, appropriately rejoiced (as should every child of God):

*I know not why God's wondrous grace To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love Redeemed me for His own.*

*I know not how this saving faith To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word Wrought peace within my heart.*

*I know not how the Spirit moves, Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word, Creating faith in Him.*

*I know not what of good or ill May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days, Before His face I see.*

*I know not when my Lord may come, At night or noonday fair, Nor if I walk the vale with
Him, Or meet Him in the air.*

***But I know Whom I have believed, And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed Unto Him against that day.***

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