

# JONATHAN EDWARDS & AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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Who was the Jonathan Edwards who was born three hundred years ago on the coming October 5? No doubt he is familiar to many of us, and in many ways. Perhaps we know him as the promising young student of spiders; God's instrument in the Great Awakening; the Reformed systematician who gave us landmark treatments of original sin and free will; the minister expelled by his people after more than twenty years of faithful toil for them; the husband of the remarkable Sarah; the president of the New Jersey college; or, finally, the victim of small pox vaccine.

But in the literature of academic church history Edwards is also widely known for two quite different contributions. First, he is thought to have produced a Christian theology cast in the mould of the empiricism of John Locke. And in so doing, secondly, he is thought to have been one of the founders of Evangelicalism. Now perhaps some of you think you misheard me? Surely, you might react, Edwards was a theologian not a philosopher. And surely Evangelicalism pre-dates Edwards? Must we not, with E J Poole-Connor, date it back at least to the Fifteenth Century (and that's not to mention the apostles!).<sup>1</sup> No you did not mishear me. For many historians, for many Evangelical historians, the peculiar mix of Christian theology with Enlightenment philosophy which we get in Edwards (and for the matter in John Wesley), is the start of Evangelicalism.

Who, then, is *this* Jonathan Edwards? It is the Edwards of Perry Miller, the Edwards who drank so deeply at the wells of John Locke that he produced a theology that emphasised the *senses*. Let me unpack their argument. The confidence that Edwards had in the senses is so strong that it brought a new religious certainty to him. Just as the empiricists taught the reliability of the physical senses, so Edwards taught the reliability of the spiritual sense. It was this stress on the reliability of spiritual sense that convinced the early Evangelicals that they could be confident of their salvation. God gave them a sure spiritual sense of being his children. Thus, the argument runs, Evangelicalism was born of the Enlightenment emphasis on the senses and came into the world with a new, more confident doctrine of assurance that grounded its activism.

So, for example, we read this from David Bebbington in his seminal history of Evangelicalism

The activism of the Evangelical movement sprang from its strong teaching on assurance. That, in turn, was a product of the confidence of the new age about the validity of experience. The Evangelical version of Protestantism was created by the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup>

This is how many historians view Edwards, but not all. It is not how I view him. Our first question this evening is thus *Who was this Jonathan Edwards?*

This question will occupy the first half of our consideration this evening. In the second half we will look at a tiny fragment of what we can learn from him concerning authentic Christian experience. Was he a thoroughly Lockean, Enlightenment thinker? Was he therefore one of the very first Evangelicals? Or was he, as Conrad Cherry called him, 'first and last a Puritan theologian'?<sup>3</sup> Was he one in a long line of Evangelical thinkers far pre-dating the Eighteenth Century?

There is an ever-swelling argument in reply to the Enlightenment thesis which stresses that all of Edwards' thought is accountable in terms of Reformation and Puritan rather than Enlightenment origins. It is certainly true that Edwards often speaks in terms of sense and sensation; it would be possible to cite many passages as examples. But the idea that the theology of Edwards was decisively generated by the Enlightenment is untenable. Edwards was very willing to disagree with Locke on major issues. For example, his whole idea of a spiritual sense which perceives the excellency of God would have been anathema to the philosopher. Similarly, Locke denied any role for the affections in true knowledge, whereas Edwards was clear that when

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelicalism in England* (London: Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, 1951)

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p 74

<sup>3</sup> *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1966, reprint 1990), p xxiii

we know God truly our affections are, must be, *inclined* to him. This highlights that for Edwards the spiritual sense is definitely not just another sense like taste or smell. Rather it is a sense resulting from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, a unique sense relating uniquely to God, not an empirical sense relating merely to the physical world.

Not only could Edwards disagree with Locke on fundamental questions, he was also aware of his own heritage, and he did not trace it to Locke. When he explained where his emphasis on the spiritual sense came from, he turned to the language of the Bible, not the language of the philosophers

Hence the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration is often in Scripture compared to the giving a new sense, giving eyes to see, and ears to hear, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and opening the eyes of them that were born blind, and turning from darkness unto light.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, then, Edwards was following a biblical emphasis. But he was also echoing his Puritan predecessors, as the footnotes in the *Religious Affections* show.

I want to commend for your reading a recent work on this issue which has done a very thorough job of demonstrating the Puritan background to Edwards, and which ought to hammer the final nail into the coffin of Miller's Edwards. The book is by Brad Walton, and is entitled *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety*. Walton has worked his way through a wide range of Puritan texts to find precursors of the kind of religious psychology that Edwards gives. Time is short and he has page upon page of evidence, but let me give you just two examples of what he has found. The first is from Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), writing on the subject of a new, spiritual sense

whenas God regenerateth any man, and constitutes him a new creature, lo, that man hath a new eye to see, an ear to hear, and all sorts of new senses to take in all sorts of spiritual things.<sup>5</sup>

The second is from John Flavel (1630-91), who writes that among true believers,

you will find also tasting as well as enlightening: so that they seem to abound not only in knowledge, but in sense also; i.e., in some kind of experience of what they know: for experience is the bringing of things to the test of the spiritual sense.<sup>6</sup>

With an array of such evidence Walton clearly demonstrates that there is an eminently sufficient explanation of the emphasis on sense in Edwards which does not require turning to Locke. Moreover, where Edwards does use the language of philosophers, it is for apologetic ends, to cast his thought in terms accessible to them; it is not because he has allowed them to dictate their thoughts to him.

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I take it, then, that the Edwards we are discussing tonight was an heir of the Reformers and the Puritan of Puritans. His thought was not derived from Locke. He was not the founder of a new movement with a new sense of assurance, because both the Reformers and many of the Puritans had held to such confidence. But these introductory remarks should not be taken to imply that there is nothing distinctive in Edwards. Far from it. He has in fact many distinctive things to say, and we will turn in a moment to glean some of them from his *Treatise on Religious Affections*.

We do so with a contemporary interest. That is to say, unlike some historians (some Evangelical historians) who eschew learning from the past for the sake of the present, I wish to learn from Edwards for our own times. This is an important point about the nature and purpose of church history, and I wish to dwell on it for a moment before we return to Edwards himself. I believe that all of our church historical study should in the end work its way through into contemporary application. My interest in Edwards is thus not antiquarian or purely historical, it is theological and it is practical.

Now that is not to say that we must squash him into a contemporary agenda. Historical writing is littered with plenty of examples of people trying to make someone say what they want him to say. Let me illustrate to show you what I mean. A striking case has been noted by my colleague Michael Ovey in Nineteenth

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<sup>4</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2 ed J E Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p 206

<sup>5</sup> *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual sensation and Heart Religion* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p 85

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p 120

Century writing on Justin Martyr.<sup>7</sup> The writers of the 1889 volume *Lux Mundi*, the early founders of liberal Anglo-Catholicism, were very keen on Justin as someone who affirmed the positive elements in non-Christian thought systems. They made enthusiastic reference to his doctrine of the *logos spermatikos*, the seed of the Word scattered among all men. This allowed them to hold to a developmental view of truth in which the Incarnation is the culmination of a positive widespread historical progress. But here they squashed Justin into their agenda. For much more extensive than his doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* is his relentless critique of idolatry. Again and again he explains that the world is held captive by idolatrous thought patterns. The pagan myths, he argues, are the fruit of demons imitating the Gospel in order to discredit it before it was even preached. The debauched wine-god Bacchus, for example, was intended to discredit the association of the Messiah with wine which Justin thought was taught by Genesis 49:10-11. Put this critique of pagan idolatry alongside the *logos* doctrine, and you have a far less affirmative account of human development than the Anglo-Catholics wished to find. A more recent example would be the well-known misreading of Reformation and Patristic doctrines of Scripture by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim.<sup>8</sup> In their eagerness to prove that the Reformed Scholastic and Nineteenth Century Princetonian view of the Bible was a novelty they give a warped account of the earlier evidence.

Squashing into a contemporary agenda is one danger of reading the past for the present. Another is trying to make people answer questions that they never asked (though it is true that there are few such questions with Edwards!). No, we must read the past in its context and be careful to do so. But when we have done that, we can - we must - seek to learn from it for the present. If we do not, then we are pretending that the interests of the kingdom somehow do not count when we put our historians' hats on, which cannot be true.

Now very often such learning from the past does take the form of seeking to claim prominent figures from the past as supporters of our own causes. There are bad examples of this such as the ones I have just mentioned, and there are better examples of it. Probably anyone involved in theological polemics does this from time to time. The Reformers did it shamelessly with Augustine and to some extent with Bernard of Clairvaux. In a small way I myself have done it with people like Augustine in my argument that the theology of Rowan Williams deviates from catholic orthodoxy.<sup>9</sup> I am not for a moment criticising the practice, so long as it is well done. I think it is right to be concerned to know what godly figures of the past have said. Indeed, what they have said should have some weight with us, should give us reason to pause and think, though clearly they do not compete with the authority of the Scriptures. So I am not criticising this approach to learning from the past. And Edwards is no exception to it. In recent years, especially since the so-called Toronto blessing, he has featured quite prominently in debates between charismatic and conservative Christians. But we must never let this approach become our sole approach. If we do that, then we may miss some of the treasures that are to be found on other issues, and our horizons will never be stretched beyond the limits that our own circumstances set.

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So for this lecture I have sought to reread the *Religious Affections* with an eye on what he is saying to us, rather than on what we look for in him. The first striking point is the brute fact that Edwards writes about and is concerned with affections. That is, he thinks that they matter. Now before we go further, we must pause to ask what he means by religious affections. What is an affection for Edwards? We need to begin a stage back with another question which is this: What is the heart according to Edwards? The heart is his favoured term for the human soul. Edwards viewed the heart as the whole person, including mind and will. Now this is important, since it reminds us that Edwards would not have us divide the soul up into different parts; these are conceptual distinctions, not real ones. Walton has a phrase for the heart which sums all of this up nicely: it is the 'cognitive-volitional-affective complex'.<sup>10</sup> That sounds complex indeed. What does it mean? It is a way of saying that the heart is the whole person understood as mind and will responding to something which it perceives.

This brings us to the location of affections in the soul. An affection is a strong inclination of the heart toward (or away from) an object which it perceives, for example the delight of the heart in something. As Edwards puts it, 'the affections are no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will

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<sup>7</sup> See the papers from the 2002 Oak Hill School of Theology, just published as *The Word Became Flesh: Evangelicals and the Incarnation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), pp 30-31

<sup>8</sup> *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1979), decisively refuted by various writers in *Scripture and Truth*, ed D A Carson and J D Woodbridge (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983)

<sup>9</sup> G J Williams, *The Theology of Rowan Williams: An Outline, Critique, and Consideration of Its Consequences* (London: Latimer Trust, 2002)

<sup>10</sup> See *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 147-165. The description is used on p 165 and elsewhere.

of the soul'.<sup>11</sup> Affections are thus not a separate faculty of the soul; they are a particular activity of the will, which is in turn to be held together with the mind by the concept of the heart. Edwards writes

The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and inclination of the soul, but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise.<sup>12</sup>

The affections are therefore crucial in deciding the direction that the heart takes: that which we are inclined towards we will pursue. As Owen put it (cited by Walton), 'affections are in the soul as the helm of a ship' – they give direction.<sup>13</sup> Edwards thus rejects the idea of a neutral intellectual perception with no inclination, but believes that the whole person is involved in perceiving. The heart, the whole person, either loves or hates that which is perceived, and love and hate are affections, as, for example, are fear, hope, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal.<sup>14</sup>

This conviction meant that Edwards defended the revival against rationalist criticism, in particular the criticism which came from Charles Chauncey, minister of First Church in Boston. Chauncey attacked the revival in his 1743 work *The Late Religious Commotions in New England Considered*, and he argued that even Satan could have produced the 'enthusiastic' phenomena of revival. Edwards was concerned by contrast to show that affections are an authentic and indeed necessary part of the religious life. Further, he argued that knowledge without positive inclination would be sinful knowledge, so that true affections are a necessary part of true religion. You cannot rightly know God and not be inclined toward him. Given his greatness, attraction to him is necessary. To be un-inclined to God would be to deny who he is. It would be to sin. Hence Edwards argues that the greatness of God requires the exercise of strong affections as we know him

The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful.<sup>15</sup>

There are some marvellous examples of this in the treatise, where Edwards preaches passionately the affection-evoking character of the Gospel. Here is a passage concerning the affections evoked by considering Jesus as the Lamb of God:

In things which concern men's worldly interest, their outward delights, their honor and reputation, and their natural relations, they have their desires eager, their appetites vehement, their love warm and affectionate, their zeal ardent; in these things their hearts are tender and sensible, easily moved, deeply impressed, much concerned, very sensibly affected, and greatly engaged; much depressed with grief at worldly losses, and highly raised with joy at worldly successes and prosperity. But how insensible and unmoved are most men, about the great things of another world! How dull are their affections! How heavy and hard their hearts in these matters! Here their love is cold, their desires languid, their zeal low, and their gratitude small. How they can sit and hear of the infinite height and depth and length and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of his giving his infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, holy and tender Lamb of God, manifested in his dying agonies, his bloody sweat, his loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory; and yet be cold, and heavy, insensible, and regardless! Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? What is it that does more require them? And what can be a fit occasion of their lively and vigorous exercise, if not such an one as this? Can anything be set in our view, greater and more important? Anything more wonderful and surprising? Or more nearly concerning our interest? Can we suppose the wise Creator implanted such principles in the human nature as the affections, to be of use to us, and to be exercised on certain proper occasions, but to lie still on such an occasion as this? Can any Christian who believes the truth of these things, entertain such thoughts?<sup>16</sup>

It is no surprise then that Edwards judges that 'True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections'.<sup>17</sup> He took this argument to the extent that he defended the role of bodily manifestations too, and he gave examples

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<sup>11</sup> *Works*, p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> *Works*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>16</sup> *Works*, pp 122, 123

<sup>17</sup> *Works*, p 95

from Scripture. Since the person acts as a whole we should not be surprised to find that inner states will manifest themselves outwardly. Moreover, he saw the divinely ordained means of grace such as the sacraments, the Scriptures and preaching as themselves aimed toward the cultivation of the affections. In fact, deny the place of affections, Edwards argues, and you may as well throw out your Bible.<sup>18</sup> Be unaffected in your own life, he warns, and you have nothing better than a hardened heart.

So Edwards was the great proponent of the place of the affections in the life of God's people. Against the likes of Chauncey he stood as the defender of the affectionate life. Here we may draw a lesson from him. It is a lesson that we must not over-react into a denial of human integrity. Let me explain that statement. We must not over-react. By this I mean that we must not deny the role of the affections simply because we hear from some an emphasis on them at the expense of the mind or at the expense of diligent perseverance and constancy. For this would be to over-react into a denial of human integrity, that is, human wholeness. At root Edwards emphasises the affections in order to express the oneness of the person, and a failure to follow him is to divide the person whom God has made a whole. Do we, then, in our own lives and our own ministries, seek to use the means of grace to cultivate godly affections? Let me put the point to you in Edwards's words: 'If it be so, that true religion lies much in the affections, hence we may infer, that such means are to be desired, as have much of a tendency to move the affections. Such books, and such a way of preaching the Word, and administration of ordinances, and such a way of worshipping God in prayer, and singing praises, is much to be desired, as has a tendency deeply to affect the hearts of those who attend these means.'<sup>19</sup> This is a reminder for many of us.

I was interested only last week to read an editorial in a publication of the English Presbyterian Church which agrees with my impression that the rejection of the affections is a contemporary problem. Before reading it, I should note that there is a difference between an affection and what many moderns mean by a feeling, but there is also a significant overlap.

Reformed people today, in reaction to the theology of the Charismatic movement, are in danger of merely encouraging the growth of that movement by practising liturgical forms ... that are so austere as to squeeze out any expression of spiritual feeling. One even gets the impression that any minister who manages to get his congregation to *feel* something during the worship service is to be criticised for so doing because he has sunk into *entertainment*. People who *feel* nothing in our services may well flee to those places where they will be helped by the liturgy to feel some response to God and his grace, even if the truth is diminished.<sup>20</sup>

A sentiment with which Edwards would have agreed wholeheartedly.

But there is another side here too. The Reformers attacked the formalism of Rome but they also attacked the enthusiasm of the Radicals, the *Schwärmer*, Luther's buzzing bees. So Edwards attacked the rationalist deniers of the affections, but he also looked the other way towards the empty enthusiasts of his day. As he looked back at the revivals, he himself warned against the dangers of an unquestioning emphasis on the affections. Indeed, John Wesley, who edited a version of the *Religious Affections*, thought that the whole work arose from the fact that Edwards needed to explain why the revival had proved to be a flash in the pan for so many who professed conversion during it. For Wesley, this posed a problem with the Calvinist doctrine of grace, and he thought that Edwards wrote the treatise to explain that many who appeared to have genuine saving affections in fact never had them. In other words Edwards attacked a great deal of the apparent manifestations of religious affection in the Revival. He did so, Wesley argued, 'to serve his hypothesis', to defend the Calvinist view that those who do not persevere were never saved in the first place.<sup>21</sup>

This meant that Wesley had a very mixed attitude to the work. He liked it enough and saw enough insight in it to reprint it in his *Christian Library*, but he also hated parts of it. Hence he took a knife to it and performed a pretty thorough piece of textual butchery, leaving only a sixth of the original text. He wrote in his preface that Edwards

heaps together so many curious, subtle, metaphysical distinctions, as are sufficient to puzzle the brain, and confound the intellects, of all the plain men and women in the universe; and to make them doubt of, if not wholly deny, all the work which God had wrought in their souls.

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<sup>18</sup> *Works*, p 106

<sup>19</sup> *Works*, p 121

<sup>20</sup> *Presbyterian Network* (Autumn, 2002), p 1

<sup>21</sup> *The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Human Heart*, by The Rev. Jonathan Edwards MA [...] *Being Two Tracts on that Subject Abridged by Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. T O Summers (Salem, Ohio: Schmull Publishing, 1998), p 49

In all, Wesley wrote, the treatise was a ‘dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison’.<sup>22</sup>

Wesley is right to say that Edwards spends a great deal of the treatise dismantling those things that are taken to be signs of genuine saving affections but which are not. It is this which makes the treatise a very uncomfortable read. Again and again we may find as we read it that our places of refuge, our points of repose for confidence, have been taken apart by Edwards. He is painfully clear that affections can appear to be real but have no true saving knowledge of God behind them. Indeed, the whole point of the *Religious Affections* is to distinguish true from false, saving from non-saving affections. Hence while Edwards defends affection itself, he does not defend all examples of the outward manifestations of affections. Many of the outward signs *may* go with true affections, but they may equally go with false ones. So what we find is what we might term (to steal a label) a ‘critical realism’ with regard to the affections. ‘Realism’, because Edwards was clear that affections are a real and indeed necessary and potentially God pleasing part of a person. ‘Critical’, because this did not translate into an unequivocal endorsement of *any* sign of affection without further enquiry. Rather, Edwards sets out to distinguish signs of what he terms ‘common’ from ‘saving operations’ of the Holy Spirit. We find him, then, defending affections, and urging a radical self-suspicion with regard to many things that are commonly taken to be signs of saving affections. Bodily effects, much talk, texts of Scripture coming to mind, the appearance of love, religiosity, praise, visions of the cross, assuring words in the mind seemingly from God, immediate impressions that we are saved, all count for nothing when it comes to confirming genuine affections.

For what it is worth, I think that Edwards goes too far in denying an immediate witness of the Spirit. By the end of the *Affections*, it is really only childlike obedience in perseverance that Edwards will admit as a sure sign of true affections. He thinks that Paul in Romans 8 teaches only such a witness: the Spirit witnesses to us through his fruit in our lives. But if I have understood Romans 8, then Paul does indeed teach a direct witness there, a witness mediated via good works. I do not mean that I hear a voice which says ‘Garry Williams you are saved’. I mean rather a sense created in the individual believer’s heart by God, through his Word, ‘rubbing in’ his promises directly. This is in fact a widespread Reformed understanding. John Murray, for example, comments on Romans 8:16

In verse 16 it is the witness borne by the Holy Spirit himself. And this latter witness is conceived of as working conjointly with the witness borne by the believer’s own consciousness. The Spirit’s witness must, therefore, be distinguished from the witness of our filial consciousness. It is a witness given *to* us as distinct from the witness given *by* us. The witness thus given is to the effect that ‘we are children of God’. We are not to construe this witness of the Spirit as consisting in a direct propositional revelation to the effect, ‘Thou art a child of God’. It is to us indeed the witness is given and it is “to our spirit”, but there are many respects in which this witness is borne. Particularly is it made manifest in sealing to the hearts of believers the promises which are theirs as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ and the generating in them of the assurance of the great love the Father has bestowed upon them that they should be called children of God.<sup>23</sup>

Now this is not to deny the witness of works to a genuine faith (the words of the Lord Jesus on trees and fruit, Matt. 7:15-20 suggest that, as do several statements in 1 John). But it is to couple that witness with a direct sense created by the work of the Spirit in the heart.

Despite the lengthy digression, that is really an issue for another day, and my purpose here is to learn positively from Edwards more than it is to critique him. We are concerned here more with what Edwards says about the *place* of the affections, than with his account of the witness of the Spirit. Leaving that aside then, we note simply that Edwards is highly critical in his comments on many of the manifestations of religious affections. He is, for example, negative about any emphasis on exciting experiences. Such emphasis, he argues, can be a sign of hypocrisy, since hypocrites, he writes: ‘keep thinking with themselves, What a good experience is this! What a great discovery is this! What wonderful things have I met with! And so they put their experiences in the place of Christ, and his beauty and fullness; and instead of rejoicing in Christ Jesus, they rejoice in their admirable experiences’.<sup>24</sup>

Here then, alongside the warning to remember the importance of the affections, is a second warning to us, a warning not to accept just *any* sign of an affection as a good thing. I have read to you a powerful text urging the importance of affections against the rationalists. Let me draw toward a close by reading you one of the

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<sup>22</sup> *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, p 49

<sup>23</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1967), p 297, 298

<sup>24</sup> *Works*, p 251

strongest passages which looks the other way, and warns instead against the dangers of un-self-questioning enthusiasm. Edwards here deals with evangelical humiliation, the sixth sign of true affections, and he shows how very serious he is about self-scrutiny. Though this is a sign of genuine affection, he thinks that it is hard to discern whether or not we have it.

Let not the reader lightly pass over these things in application to himself. If you once have taken it in, that it is a bad sign for a person to be apt to think himself a better saint than others, there will arise a blinding prejudice in your own favor; and there will probably be need of a great strictness of self-examination, in order to determine whether it be so with you. If on the proposal of the question, you answer, 'No, it seems to me, none are so bad as I.' Don't let the matter pass off so; but examine again, whether or no you don't think yourself better than others on this very account, because you imagine you think so meanly of yourself. Haven't you a high opinion of this humility? And if you answer again, 'No; I have not a high opinion of my humility; it seems to one I am as proud as the devil'; yet examine again, whether self-conceit don't rise up under this cover; whether on this very account, that you think yourself as proud as the devil, you don't think yourself to be very humble.<sup>25</sup>

The impression we are left with is one of the believer returning again and again to question the sincerity of his own humility. Now no doubt there are some parts of Evangelicalism today where such self-questioning is taken too far. No doubt some are left in a paralysis of doubt which is far from the confidence of Romans 8. But it is also clear that radical self-questioning is entirely absent from much Evangelicalism today. A brief profession of faith in an evangelistic course and we settle the question of our sincerity forever, with a resulting absence of church discipline. Edwards would remind us that Scripture itself enjoins constant vigilance. 'let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall' urges Paul (1 Corinthians 10:12). Again, 'Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith' (2 Corinthians 13:5) and such alone can be the consequence of the chilling words of the Lord Jesus himself: 'On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Having seen Edwards look in both directions, against the rationalists and against the enthusiasts, we are left poised in the middle of his two-way critique. If we heed his warning in both directions, we will, God willing, be preserved from the errors of both affection denial and affection presumption in our own day.

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<sup>25</sup> *Works*, p 336