

**THESIS: TRUE RELIGION, IN GREAT PART, CONSISTS IN HOLY AFFECTIONS**  
**PART I – CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE AFFECTIONS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN RELIGION**  
**PART II – SIGNS WHICH NEITHER PROVE NOR DISPROVE GENUINE EXPERIENCE**

**PART III – SHOWING WHAT ARE DISTINGUISHING SIGNS OF TRULY GRACIOUS AND HOLY AFFECTIONS**

### Introductory Remarks

#### 1.) It is not his intention to give signs that give certainty in others' affections

- the Word does give direction as to how to judge the fruit of others as far as is necessary for our own safety, to prevent from being led away by false teachers and pretenders
- however, final judgment is the Lord's, and to make absolute statements about others is to do His work

#### 2.) No signs can be given to give assurance to those who are in a low state of grace, have departed from God, or have fallen into a dead, carnal, and unchristian disposition

- It is not God's purpose to give assurance to those in such conditions; it is His purpose to give warning, that they may put their hope in Christ and flee from sin and be revived
- It is not even possible to do so because (1.) a defect in the object – small grace, like other immature things (embryos, small birds), cannot be rightly judged (2.) a defect in the eye – an inability to see oneself rightly  
*It is not God's design that men should obtain assurance in any other way, than by mortifying corruption, increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercises of it... Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as action.*

#### 3.) There will be no attempt to lay down marks to expose particularly hardened hypocrites who will not even examine their graces, and are certainly settled and deceived by false affections.

*Some of this sort seem to be most out of the reach of means of conviction and repentance.*

### Section 1 – Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are spiritual, supernatural, and divine.

- This section touches on some particular problems he was dealing with in the recent revivals of the 1740's, explaining why it is 11 pages, the longest of all the sections
- In this section he will deal thoroughly with some of the most distinctive issues about Christianity, and what we called a Reformed view of salvation
- This section has to do with the issue of “what do we call “spiritual” influences?
- There are two kinds or groups of people spoken about in Scripture, “spiritual” and “carnal/natural”
- Two important passages found in 1Corinthians 2:14-16; Romans 8:6-9
- What makes the difference is not religion, even “Christian” religion, but something much deeper
- The distinction between the two isn't between immaterial and material (soul/spirit and body), but a supernatural principle
- What is meant by “spiritual”? that which is in relation to the Holy Spirit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity
- It doesn't mean “non-material”, but rather that which is brought about by the influences of the Holy Spirit's work  
*Thus, Christians are called spiritual persons, because they are born of the Spirit, and because of the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in them.*
- 1Cor2:12-13 teaching of the Spirit to the one who is spiritual; Rom8:1, 5-7
- Edwards here points out that not all of the influences of the Spirit on people are “gracious” (or saving), but there is frequently in Scripture the work of the Spirit which he calls “common” – what we call “common grace”
- He helpfully distinguishes between the “gifts” of the Spirit and the “virtues” of the Spirit'
- Anyone, including the unconverted, can be the recipients of supernatural gifts; only true Christians have the virtues
- He gives examples of Balaam (a prophet), Judas (an apostle), the gifts of 1Corinthians 13:1ff without love
- He lists here an example of what he will flesh out more later, namely “meekness”; also other fruit of the Spirit
- There is natural wisdom and natural understanding, as well as spiritual wisdom and understanding
- Colossians 1:9 James 3:17
- It isn't that the source is different, as all gifts and abilities come from God – rather, it is their nature

The difference between “natural” or “common” working of the Spirit and “gracious” are seen in:

#### 1.) The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell *in them*, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action.

- Here is some of the astounding realities of Christianity, including the indwelling of the believer by the Holy Spirit - 1Cor3:16 2Cor6:16 Jn14:16-17  
*He is represented as being there so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of a new nature and life.*

- They not only drink living water, but become springs of living water in them – Jn4:14

Illustration: given sap not like a tree into a bowl, but a tree to a branch.

- the Holy Spirit may greatly influence an unconverted person, but He is not a principle of life in them

2.) **The Spirit of God produces those effects in which he exerts and communicates Himself in his own proper nature – i.e. holiness.**

- The Spirit is, above all, called “Holy” throughout Scripture - as heat is the nature of fire, sweetness the nature of honey, so holiness is the nature of the Spirit
- Natural men are in Scripture likened to those who have no spiritual light and no spiritual life. It is the work of the Spirit that gives light and life, and not only “externally”, but becomes a living light and life in them
- This is what makes conversion supernatural, and one distinguishing mark between Calvinism and Arminianism
- From this (in Edwards) it follows that this work of the Spirit includes new spiritual perceptions, beginning to work off of new principles
  - 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.*
- Here Edwards digs into some distinctions that are quite deep and difficult, and which I had to plow through and ask how to present it most helpfully
- He is basically wrestling with what this “new” perception is; it is not completely new, yet there is something completely new about it

Illustration: a man without taste and another without it; they may both have love for the same object (an apple), but yet desire it for different reasons; many things seem similar, but their reasons for desire are different

- In the following section (about 4 pages!) Edwards deals with the issue of “impressions on the imagination.” The reason for his dealing with this at such length is that it had been such a problem during and in the after effects of the revival
- There were many who (during and after) based their hopes for salvation on various experiences, including texts of Scripture coming powerfully to the mind, or fantastical visions
- In summary, he explains how those things in and of themselves cannot be depended on apart from the truth of the Gospel
- This is certainly the case when there is the absence of the following things that he will lay out in the coming points
- One example of the problem was someone having a text of Scripture come “powerfully” to them that their sins were forgiven, before they believed the Gospel; this, he writes, is a problem because there is no assurance of forgiveness before believing on Christ
- The big problem was people trusting in the experience of the “immediate communication from God” rather than an ongoing trust and transformed life as a follower of Jesus Christ
- Just because these things came powerfully into the “imagination” (the ability to strongly experience what is not tangible) is no sure sign
- From here he moves into the last section, discussing a related matter – the “witness of the Spirit”
  - That which many call the witness of the Spirit, is no other than an immediate suggestion and impression of that fact, otherwise secret, that they are converted, or made the children of God, and so that their sins are pardoned, and that God has given them a title to heaven.*
- Key texts - [Rom8:16](#) (witness) [2Cor1:22](#) (guarantee) [Eph1:13](#) (sealed) [4:30](#) (sealed)
- Many (even in our own day) take this to be a personal, secret, and subjective assurance from God, a kind of direct revelation, that they are His child
- Edwards goes at length to show that, while peace, confidence, assurance, and boldness with God are commonly experienced by Christians, this is not what these verses are talking about
- Rather, they are the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person, and that being the evidence of holiness
- These three ideas taken together (witness, guarantee, seal) are like a royal seal which carries the image of the king, put on a person to guarantee them future inheritance
  - And this holy stamp, or impressed image, exhibiting clear evidence to the conscience, that the subject of it is the child of God, is the very thing which in Scripture is called the seal of the Spirit, and the witness, or evidence of the Spirit. And this image stamped by the Spirit on God’s children’s hearts, is his own image; that is the evidence by which they are known to be God’s children, that they have the image of their Father stamped upon their hearts by the Spirit of adoption...That kind of influence of the Spirit which gives and leaves this stamp upon the heart, is such as no natural man can have....This the devil cannot imitate.*
- This holiness, conformity to the likeness of God, is a part of the promised inheritance granted now, in taken of full possession of the whole hereafter.*
- A fundamental and essential part of this holiness is that of love – love for God and love for fellow sinners
- It is certainly the work of the Spirit that can give us confidence, but not by private or personal revelations, not by supernatural and extraordinary gifts, but by His work in progressive holiness, loving the holy character of God and seeing that love bear fruit of love in our life toward God and others