

captivity TO GLORY

Celebrating the Vision and Influence
of Jonathan Edwards

JOHN PIPER

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

My heart abounds with thankfulness for the gifted content team at Desiring God. In this case, Jonathan Parnell did most of the heavy lifting, but my gratitude overflows to all. They conceived of this collection and, along with Justin Taylor's gracious contributions, made it a reality. All I did was help title the chapters and write this preface. They gathered my thoughts from many sources and put them together here.

When I look back over the years covered by this collection, I realize with fresh intensity the pervasive impact on me of Edwards's vision of God. Without Edwards, I am not sure the phrase "God-entranced" would have the meaning for me it does. This is an indictment of my soul. For someone should ask, *Isn't the Bible enough to make you God-entranced?* The true answer is that it *should* be.

But is it not typically God's way to waken our souls to his glory by some parent or teacher or preacher or student worker or writer? God told Timothy, "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). He did not say, "Don't preach; hand out Scriptures."

To be sure, he also said, “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Tim. 4:13). But he also said, “Teach these things” (1 Tim. 4:11); “Command these things” (1 Tim 5:7); “Urge these things” (1 Tim. 6:2); “Remind them of these things” (2 Tim. 2:14); “Declare these things” (Titus 2:15); “Put these things before the brothers” (1 Tim. 4:6); and, “Insist on these things” (Titus 3:8).

Why? Why should we not just read Scriptures? Why teach and preach and remind and exhort and urge and command and write? Because God intends to get glory horizontally as well as vertically.

He could reveal his glory to us vertically with no human mediator. But that is not why he made the world. That is not why he bought the church with his own blood. He made the world so that every creature would reflect some of his glory, and others would see it. He purchased the church so that every member of the body would reflect some of the glory of God’s grace, and others would see it and be moved by it. He knows what he is doing. He is maximizing the communication of his glory and he knows how to do it better than we do.

Therefore, there are millions of ordinary reflectors of God’s glory. And there are some whom God has favored with unusual capacities to see and show the majesty of God in the Scriptures. Edwards is one of those. I can dip into almost anything he wrote and before long I am in a God-entranced world. The God of the Bible—not another God—explodes with brilliance. There is no one who does this for me like Edwards.

So I look at this little book of collected writings as a

tribute to my much-loved teacher. And even more, as a tribute to the God who entranced the soul of Jonathan Edwards all his life. I pray that you would taste and see what he saw—perhaps, by God’s great grace, even more.

John Piper

Advent 2013

EDITOR'S PREFACE

J.I. Packer has written a few book endorsements during his long, fruitful ministry, but he's only mentioned the ghost of Jonathan Edwards once. Back in 1986, commending the first edition of John Piper's *Desiring God*, Packer remarked, "Jonathan Edwards, whose ghost walks through most of Piper's pages, would be delighted with his disciple."

If Edwards would be delighted, it's because the focus of *Desiring God*, and Piper's entire vision for ministry, is the glory of God. Edwards's theology is complex, and has been the subject of years of seemingly endless scholarship on its details, but his passion for the supremacy of God is crystal clear. And this is palpable in anything Piper has to say.

A few publications already exist to highlight this influence of Jonathan Edwards—the main one being Piper's own tribute in *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Crossway, 1998). Then there is *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Crossway, 2004), a compilation of

essays edited by Piper and Justin Taylor. Add to this that Edwards is mentioned for this influence in virtually every one of Piper's more than 50 books, and on occasion these include a chapter that bears his name. Note also that desiringGod.org, with its nearly 10,000 online resources (and growing), has a special topic named "Jonathan Edwards." When you read or hear any of John Piper, you are encountering a vision of God's greatness he draws from Jonathan Edwards.

This book is a collection of the best snapshots of that influence in Piper's corpus.

Thanks to the generous partnership of three publishers—Multnomah, Baker, and Crossway—we've corralled into one volume the best Edwards excerpts from Piper's main writings. Thanks to Justin Taylor, we've added two helpful appendices. The first appendix features a chronology compiled by Taylor of Edwards's influence on Piper, beginning in seminary in 1968. The second appendix is an impressive bibliography of all things Edwards and Piper.

Since each chapter is a selection from a different book, there's no necessary order the reader must follow, though the hope is that he can trace the movement from the most fundamental theology to its practical implications in the life of the church. In fact, a miniature version of the entire book is captured in the first chapter.

Feel free to jump around, depending on what interests you most. If you were to read this book from front to back, you'll see some consistent themes and repeated quotes. This means two things: 1) you may think, "Have I read this before?" (likely the answer is yes); and 2) by the time you've read the whole thing, you should be able to

fill in the blank from this sentence straight from Edwards:
“*God is glorified not only by his glory’s being seen, but by its
being _____ in.*”

The fill-in-the-blank word above is what the aim of this book is all about. It’s not that you can merely observe the influence of Edwards in Piper, or that you are inspired to read more primary sources, or even that you just *see* God’s glory. The aim is that you *delight* in God’s glory—that you are overcome by God’s grace in Christ to remove every obstacle that stands in the way of you enjoying him forever.

Jonathan Parnell
desiringGod.org

IF GOD IS GLORIFIED IN US WHEN WE ARE SATISFIED IN HIM: FIFTEEN IMPLICATIONS

God's Passion for His Glory (*Wheaton: Crossway, 1998*),
31-47.

The vision of God displayed in Jonathan Edwards's *The End for Which God Created the World* took me captive over thirty years ago and has put its stamp on every part of my life and ministry. I believe and love its message. My personal reason for writing the book *God's Passion for His Glory* is to make Edwards's work more accessible, and in so doing to join God in pursuing the invincible end for which he created the world. That end, Edwards says, is, first, that the glory of God might be magnified in the universe, and, second, that Christ's ransomed people from all times and all nations would rejoice in God above all things.

God's Glory Manifest in the Happiness of the Saints

But the depth and wonder and power of Edwards's *The End for Which God Created the World* is the demonstration that these two ends are one. The rejoicing of all peoples in God, and the magnifying of God's glory are one end, not two. Why this is so, how it can be, and what difference it makes is what my life and Jonathan Edwards's theology are about. The first biographer of Edwards describes *The End* like this: "From the purest principles of reason, as well as from the fountain of revealed truth, he demonstrates that the chief and ultimate end of the Supreme Being, in the works of creation and providence, was the manifestation of his own glory in the highest happiness of his creatures."¹

"The manifestation of his own glory in the highest happiness of his creatures." Virtually everything I preach and write and do is shaped by this truth: that the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing. It has been a more-than-thirty-year quest, since I was first awakened to this vision through C.S. Lewis² and Daniel Fuller.³ The quest goes on. But, over time, my most experienced and reliable guide in the Himalayas of Holy Scripture has been Jonathan Edwards. He said it like this: "The end of the creation is that the creation might glorify [God]. Now what is glorifying God, but a rejoicing at that glory he has displayed?"⁴ "The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted."⁵

The implications of this vision are far-reaching. After spending over thirty years pursuing the high paths of God's written revelation, I feel like I am just beginning to

breathe the air of this lofty reality. Not to make you ferret out all the implications for yourself, I will mention in what follows fifteen of them. Keep in mind what I am illustrating. The further up you go in the revealed thoughts of God, the clearer you see that God's aim in creating the world was to display the value of his own glory, and that this aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of his people in that glory.

How Does Edwards Say It?

Let Edwards speak again for himself on this issue. How are God's glory and your joy related? He says it in many ways:

God in seeking his glory seeks the good of his creatures, because the emanation of his glory... implies the... happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself, because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused... he seeks their glory and happiness.⁶

Thus it is easy to conceive how God should seek the good of the creature... even his happiness, from a supreme regard to himself; as his happiness arises from... the creature's exercising a supreme regard to God... in beholding God's glory, in esteeming and loving it, and rejoicing in it.⁷

God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself.⁸

This Truth in Fifteen Marvelous Implications

Thus the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing. The implications of this are breath-taking. I mention fifteen in acorn-form. Any one of them could become a great oak tree with book-length branches.

Implication #1.

God's passion for his own glory and his passion for my joy in him are not at odds. God's righteousness⁹ is not the enemy of his mercy. His commitment to uphold the worth of his name does not consign me to destruction, though I have besmeared his name by indifference and distrust. Rather, in the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, God conspired to vindicate his righteousness and justify sinners in one act. Which means that his zeal to be glorified and his zeal to save sinners are one.¹⁰

Implication #2.

Therefore, God is as committed to my eternal and ever-increasing joy in him as he is to his own glory. This gives us a glimpse into the massive theological substructure beneath some of the sweetest promises in the Bible—the ones that say God exerts omnipotent zeal to do us good. For

example, 2 Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him” (RSV). Psalm 23:6, “Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue¹¹ me all the days of my life” (author’s translation). Zephaniah 3:17, “The Lord your God... will exult over you with joy, he will be quiet in his love, he will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.” Luke 12:32, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (RSV).¹²

Implication #3.

The love of God for sinners is not his making much of them, but his graciously freeing and empowering them to enjoy making much of him. As Edwards says, “God is their good.” Therefore if God would do us good, he must direct us to his worth, not ours. The truth that God’s glory and our joy in God are one radically undermines modern views of self-centered love. God-centered grace nullifies the gospel of self-esteem. Today, people typically feel loved if you make much of them and help them feel valued. The bottom line in their happiness is that they are made much of.

Edwards observes, with stunning modern relevance,

True saints have their minds, in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delighted with... the things of God. But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order: they first rejoice... that they are made so much of by God; and then on that ground, he seems in a sort, lovely to them.¹³

In other words, in his view, the bottom line of happiness is that we are granted to see the infinite beauty of God and make much of him forever. Human beings do, in fact, have more value than the birds (Matt. 6:26). But that is not the bottom line of our happiness. It simply means that we were created to magnify God's glory by enjoying him in a way birds never can.

Implication #4.

If the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then *all true virtue among human beings must aim at bringing people to rejoice in the glory of God*. No act is truly virtuous—that is, truly loving—that does not come from and aim at joy in the glory of God. The ground for this truth is laid in Edwards's *The End*, but the exposition of it was given in *The Nature of True Virtue*, which Edwards wrote at the same time (1755) and intended to publish bound together with *The End* in one volume. There he said, "If there could be... a cause determining a person to benevolence towards the whole world of mankind... exclusive of... love to God, ... it cannot be of the nature of true virtue."¹⁴

The reason for this sweeping indictment of God-neglecting "virtue" is not hard to see in Edward's God-centered universe: "So far as a virtuous mind exercises true virtue in benevolence to created beings, it chiefly seeks the good of the creature, consisting in its knowledge or view of God's glory and beauty, its union with God, and conformity to him, love to him, and joy in him."¹⁵ In other words, if God's glory is the only all-satisfying reality in

the universe, then to try to do good for people, without aiming to show them the glory of God and ignite in them a delight in God, would be like treating fever with cold packs when you have penicillin. The apostle Paul warns that I can “give all my possessions to feed the poor, and... deliver my body to be burned,” and still “not have love” (1 Cor. 13:3). The final reason for this is that man is not the center of true virtue, God is. So “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Implication #5.

It also follows that sin is the suicidal exchange of the glory of God for the broken cisterns of created things. Paul said, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sinning is a “falling short” of the glory of God. But the Greek word for “falling short” (*husterountai*) means “lack.” The idea is not that you shot an arrow at God’s glory and the arrow fell short, but that you could have had it as a treasure, but you don’t. You have chosen something else instead. This is confirmed in Romans 1:23 where people “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image.” That is the deepest problem with sin: it is a suicidal exchange of infinite value and beauty for some fleeting, inferior substitute. This is the great insult.

In the words of Jeremiah, God calls it appalling. “Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate, declares the Lord. For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:12–13). What is the essence

of evil? It is forsaking a living fountain for broken cisterns. God gets derision and we get death. They are one: in choosing sugarcoated misery we mock the life-giving God. It was meant to be another way: God's glory exalted in our everlasting joy.

Implication #6.

Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory with greater and ever-greater joy in him. If God's glory and our joy in him are one, and yet we are not infinite as he is, then our union with him in the all-satisfying experience of his glory can never be complete, but must be increasing with intimacy and intensity forever and ever. The perfection of heaven is not static. Nor do we see at once all there is to see—for that would be a limit on God's glorious self-revelation, and therefore, his love. Yet we do not become God. Therefore, there will always be more, and the end of increased pleasure in God will never come.

Here is the way Edwards puts it:

I suppose it will not be denied by any, that God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good [which is] infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed.¹⁶

Moreover, he says, our eternal rising into more and more of God will be a "rising higher and higher through that

infinite duration, and... not with constantly diminishing (but perhaps an increasing) celerity [that is, velocity]... [to an] infinite height; though there never will be any particular time when it can be said already to have come to such a height.”¹⁷ This is what we see through a glass darkly in Ephesians 2:7, “[God seats us in heaven with Christ] so that in the ages to come he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” It will take an infinite number of ages for God to be done glorifying the wealth of his grace to us—which is to say he will never be done.

Implication #7.

Hell is unspeakably real, conscious, horrible and eternal—the experience in which God vindicates the worth of his glory in holy wrath on those who would not delight in what is infinitely glorious. If infinitely valuable glory has been spurned, and the offer of eternal joy in God has been finally rejected, an indignity against God has been committed so despicable as to merit eternal suffering. Thus, Edwards says,

God aims at satisfying justice in the eternal damnation of sinners; which will be satisfied by their damnation, considered no otherwise than with regard to its eternal duration. But yet there never will come that particular moment, when it can be said, that now justice is satisfied.¹⁸

Of the love of God and the wrath of God, Edwards says simply, “Both will be unspeakable.”¹⁹

The words of Jesus and the words of his apostle confirm this: it will be unspeakable. Thus the Lord said, “Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... . These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:41, 46). And Saint Paul said that when Jesus returns, he will come “dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus [which means joyfully trusting the all-sufficient love of God in Christ]. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:8–9).

Implication #8.

If the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then *evangelism means depicting the beauty of Christ and his saving work with a heartfelt urgency of love that labors to help people find their satisfaction in him*. The most important common ground with unbelievers is not culture but creation, not momentary felt-needs but massive real needs.²⁰ Augustine’s famous prayer is all-important: “You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace till they rest in you.”²¹ If a person realizes that the image of God in man is man’s ineffably profound fitness to image forth Christ’s glory through everlasting joy in God, then he will not gut the great gospel of its inner life and power.

The gospel is not the good news that God makes much of me; it is “*the gospel of the glory of Christ.*” And

evangelism, Paul says, is the outshining of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). And when, by the agency of prayer and witness and the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, unbelievers suddenly see the glory of God in Christ and rejoice in hope, it is because the Creator of the universe “has shone in [their] hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Our evangelistic task is not to persuade people that the gospel was made for their felt-needs, but that they were made for the soul-satisfying glory of God in the gospel.

Implication #9.

Similarly, Christian preaching, as part of the corporate worship of Christ’s church, is an expository exultation over the glories of God in his word, designed to lure God’s people from the fleeting pleasures of sin into the sacrificial path of obedient satisfaction in him. If preaching should aim to magnify God, and if God is magnified when his people prefer him over all “the riches and pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14), then preaching must aim to expose the suicidal pleasures of sin and waken fullness of joy in God. The ever-present refrain will be,

*Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;
And you who have no money, come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without cost.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And delight yourself in abundance.*

*Incline your ear and come to Me.
Listen, that you may live. (Isaiah 55:1-3)*

When Edwards pondered the aims of preaching for the glory of God he said,

I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.²²

High affections rooted in, and proportioned by, the truth—that is the goal of preaching. The truth is the manifold glory of God in his word; and the high affections are the delight of knowing God and the dread of not being happy in him. “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart... therefore you shall serve your enemies” (Deut. 28:47-48).

Implication #10.

The essence of authentic, corporate worship is the collective experience of heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, or a trembling that we do not have it and a great longing for it. Worship is for the sake of magnifying God, not ourselves—and God is magnified in us when we are satisfied in him. Therefore, the unchanging essence of worship (not the outward forms which do change) is heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, the trembling when we do not have it and the longing for it.

The basic movement of worship on Sunday morning is

not to come with our hands full to give to God, as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25), but to come with our hands empty, to receive from God. And what we receive in worship is the fullness of God, not the feelings of entertainment. We ought to come hungry for God. We should come saying, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1–2). God is mightily honored when a people know that they will die of hunger and thirst unless they have God.

Nothing makes God more supreme and more central in worship than when a people are utterly persuaded that nothing—not money or prestige or leisure or family or job or health or sports or toys or friends—nothing is going to bring satisfaction to their sinful, guilty, aching hearts besides God. This conviction breeds a people who go hard after God on Sunday morning. They are not confused about why they are in a worship service. They do not view songs and prayers and sermons as mere traditions or mere duties. They see them as means of getting to God or God getting to them for more of his fullness—no matter how painful that may be for sinners in the short run.

If the focus in corporate worship shifts onto our giving to God, one result I have seen again and again is that subtly it is not God that remains at the center but the quality of our giving. Are we singing worthily of God? Do the instrumentalists play with a quality befitting a gift to God? Is the preaching a suitable offering to God? And little by little the focus shifts off the utter indispensability of God himself onto the quality of our performances. And we even start to define excellence and power in worship

in terms of the technical distinction of our artistic acts. Nothing keeps God at the center of worship like the biblical conviction that the essence of worship is deep, heartfelt satisfaction in him, and the conviction that the trembling pursuit of that satisfaction is why we are together.

Furthermore, this vision of worship prevents the pragmatic hollowing out of this holy act. If the essence of worship is satisfaction in God, then worship can't be a means to anything else. We simply can't say to God, "I want to be satisfied in you so that I can have something else." For that would mean that we are not really satisfied in God but in *that something else*. And that would dishonor God, not worship him.

But, in fact, for thousands of people, and for many pastors, the event of "worship" on Sunday morning is conceived of as a means to accomplish something other than worship. We "worship" to raise money; we "worship" to attract crowds; we "worship" to heal human hurts; to recruit workers; to improve church morale; to give talented musicians an opportunity to fulfill their calling; to teach our children the way of righteousness; to help marriages stay together; to evangelize the lost; to motivate people for service projects; to give our churches a family feeling.

In all of this we bear witness that we do not know what true worship is. Genuine affections for God are an end in themselves. I cannot say to my wife: "I feel a strong delight in you so that you will make me a nice meal." That is not the way delight works. It terminates on her. It does not have a nice meal in view. I cannot say to my son, "I love playing ball with you—so that you will cut the grass." If your heart really delights in playing ball with him, that delight cannot

be performed as a means to getting him to do something.

I do not deny that authentic corporate worship may have a hundred good effects on the life of the church. It will, just like true affection in marriage, make everything better. My point is that to the degree that we do “worship” for these reasons, to that degree it ceases to be authentic worship. Keeping satisfaction in God at the center guards us from that tragedy.

Implication #11.

If the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then *world missions is a declaration of the glories of God among all the unreached peoples, with a view to gathering worshippers who magnify God through the gladness of radically obedient lives.* “Tell of his glory among the nations,” is one way to say the Great Commission (Ps. 96:3). “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,” is another way (Ps. 67:4). They have one aim: the glory of God exalted in the gladness of the nations.

The apostle Paul combined the glory of God and the gladness of the nations by saying that the aim of the Incarnation was “to show God’s truthfulness... in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written... ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people’” (Rom. 15:8–10, RSV). In other words, rejoicing in God and glorifying God are one, and that one thing is the aim of world missions.

Implication #12.

Prayer is calling on God for help; so it is plain that he is gloriously resourceful and we are humbly and happily in

need of grace. The Giver gets the glory. We get help. That is the story of prayer. “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps. 50:15, RSV). Jesus said to aim at two things in prayer: your joy and God’s glory. “Ask and you will receive, so that *your* joy may be made full” (John 16:24). “Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that *the Father may be glorified* in the Son” (John 14:13). These are not two aims, but one. When we delight ourselves in God, God is glorified in giving the desires of our heart (Ps. 37:4).

Implication #13.

The task of Christian scholarship is to study reality as a manifestation of God’s glory, to speak about it with accuracy, and to savor the beauty of God in it. I think Edwards would regard it as a massive abdication of scholarship that so many Christians do academic work with so little reference to God. If all the universe and everything in it exists by the design of an infinite, personal God, to make his manifold glory known and loved, then to treat any subject without reference to God’s glory is not scholarship but insurrection.

Moreover, the demand is even higher: Christian scholarship must be permeated by spiritual affections for the glory of God in all things. Most scholars know that without the support of truth, affections degenerate into groundless emotionalism. But not as many scholars recognize the converse: that without the awakening of true spiritual affections, seeing the fullness of truth in all things is impossible. Thus Edwards says, “Where there is a

kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things.”²³

One might object that the subject matter of psychology or sociology or anthropology or history or physics or chemistry or English or computer science is not “divine things” but “natural things.” But that would miss the first point: to see reality in truth we must see it in relation to God, who created it, and sustains it, and gives it all the properties it has and all its relations and designs. To see all these things in each discipline is to see the “divine things”—and in the end, they are the main things. Therefore, Edwards says, we cannot see them, and therefore we cannot do Christian scholarship, if we have no spiritual sense or taste for God—no capacity to apprehend his beauty in the things he has made.

This sense, Edwards says, is given by God through supernatural new birth, effected by the word of God. “The first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration, is to give the heart a divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the divine nature.”²⁴ Therefore, to do Christian scholarship, a person must be born again; that is, a person must not only see the effects of God’s work, but also savor the beauty of God’s nature.

It is not in vain to do rational work, Edwards says, even though everything hangs on God’s free gift of spiritual life and sight. The reason is that “the more you have of a rational knowledge of divine things, the more opportunity will there be, when the Spirit shall be breathed into your heart,

to see the excellency of these things, and to taste the sweetness of them.²⁵

It is evident here that what Edwards means by “rational knowledge” is not to be confused with modern rationalism that philosophically excludes “divine things.” Even more relevant for the present issue of Christian scholarship is the fact that “rational knowledge” for Edwards would also exclude a Christian methodological imitation of rationalism in scholarly work. Edwards would, I think, find some contemporary Christian scholarship methodologically unintelligible because of the *de facto* exclusion of God and his word from the thought processes. The motive of such scholarship seems to be the obtaining of respect and acceptance in the relevant guild. But the price is high. And Edwards would, I think, question whether, in the long run, compromise will weaken God-exalting, Christian influence, because the concession to naturalism speaks more loudly than the goal of God’s supremacy in all things. Not only that, the very nature of reality will be distorted by a scholarship that adopts a methodology that does not put a premium on the ground, the staying power, and the goal of reality, namely, God. Where God is methodologically neglected, faithful renderings of reality will be impossible.

How then is this view of Christian scholarship an outworking of the truth that the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing? God exhibits his glory in the created reality being studied by the scholar (Ps. 19:1; 104:31; Col. 1:16–17). Yet God’s end in this exhibition is not realized if the scholar does not see it and savor it. Thus the savoring, relishing, and delighting of the scholar in the beauty of God’s glory is an occasion

when the exhibition of the glory is completed. In that moment, the two become one: the magnifying of God's glory is in and through the seeing and savoring of the scholar's mind and heart. When the echo of God's glory echoes in the affections of God's scholar and resounds through his speaking and writing, God's aim for Christian scholarship is achieved.

Implication #14.

The way to magnify God in death is by meeting death as gain. Paul said his passion was that "Christ be exalted in [his] body, whether by life or by death." And then he added the words that show how Christ would be exalted in his death: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20–21). Christ is shown as great, when death is seen as gain. The reason for this is plain: the glory of Christ is magnified when our hearts are more satisfied in him than in all that death takes from us. If we count death gain, because it brings us closer to Christ (which is what Phil. 1:23 says it does), then we show that Christ is more to be desired than all this world can offer.

Implication #15.

Finally, if the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then, as C.S. Lewis said, "*It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.*"²⁶ Jonathan Edwards expressed this duty with tremendous forcefulness in one of his seventy resolutions before he was twenty years old: "Resolved, To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as

I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.”²⁷ And, of course, the duty is established by explicit commands of Scripture: “Delight yourself in the LORD” (Ps. 37:4); “Serve the LORD with gladness” (Ps. 100:2); “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4); and many more.

Sometimes people ask: should we pursue obedience to God or joy in God? Edwards would answer: The question involves a category confusion. It’s like asking: should I pursue fruit or apples? Obedience is doing what we are told. And we are told to delight ourselves in the Lord. Therefore pursuing joy in God is obedience. In fact, when the psalm says, “Serve the LORD with gladness,” it implies that the pursuit of joy must be part of *all* our obedience, which is what Implication #4 above already said. It could not be otherwise if joy in God is essential to magnifying the surpassing worth of God.

I hope it is evident now that this duty to be satisfied in God is not just a piece of good advice for the sake of our mental health. It is rooted in the very nature of God as one who overflows with the glory of his fullness, which is magnified in being known and loved and enjoyed by his creatures. Which is why I say again that this discovery has made all the difference in my life. What I owe Jonathan Edwards for guiding me in these things is incalculable. I love his words, “The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted.”²⁸ But I also love to say it my way: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

A Final Plea and Prayer

Edwards's central insight—that God created the world to exhibit the fullness of his glory in the God-centered joy of his people—has made all the difference for me. Aside from all the other riches in Edwards's vision of God this alone would warrant Charles Colson's recommendation of Jonathan Edwards:

The western church—much of it drifting, enculturated, and infected with cheap grace—desperately needs to hear Edwards's challenge... . It is my belief that the prayers and work of those who love and obey Christ in our world may yet prevail as they keep the message of such a man as Jonathan Edwards.²⁹

O how I pray that these words, and all that I have written, will persuade many of you to read and embrace Edwards's great vision of God's passion for his glory.

NOTES

- 1 Sereno Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), clxiii.
- 2 I tell the story of the key encounters with C.S. Lewis in *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1996), 16–19. One of the most awakening sentences of my life has proved to be, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation” (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958], 95).
- 3 The importance of Fuller’s impact is narrated in the foreword which I wrote to his book *Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), x–xii. David Brand pays tribute to the same impact of Edwards through Daniel Fuller in his excellent book, *Profile of the Last Puritan*, x.
- 4 Miscellany #3 in: Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, ed. by Thomas Schafer, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 199. *The Miscellanies* are Edwards’s private notebooks where he did his thinking, which later made its way into his sermons and books. The date for Miscellany #3 is estimated to be from Edwards’s twentieth year. See Schafer’s dating efforts in *The Miscellanies*, 156–157.

- 5 Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World* in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 72 and footnote 40.
- 6 Ibid., 114.
- 7 Ibid., 277.
- 8 Ibid., 278.
- 9 God's righteousness is his unwavering commitment to uphold and display the infinite worth of his glory in all that he does, which would seem to require punishment for all who have "fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But since God's righteousness (his commitment to his glory) and his mercy (his commitment to our joy) are not ultimately at odds, he made a way to "be both just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). See footnote 21 in Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World* in Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 141.
- 10 See especially Romans 3:25–26, "God displayed [Christ] publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." See my exposition of this text in the wider Biblical context of this truth in *The Pleasures of God: Meditations*

on God's Delight in Being God (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1991), 160–184.

- 11 The traditional translation “follow” in Psalm 23:6 misses the uniform meaning of the Hebrew *radaph*, namely “pursue, chase or persecute.” The verse does not mean that God’s goodness and mercy follow us as though we were leaders and they were loyal subjects. It means they pursue us as though we were in constant need of omnipotent help—which we are. Daniel Fuller captures the force of this verse: “In that his goodness and mercy pursue after his people every day of their lives (see Ps. 23:6), God himself is modeling the benevolent love of 1 Corinthians 10:24: ‘Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.’ But this seeking the welfare of the creature does not contradict the oft-stated affirmation in Scripture that ‘to [God] be the glory forever! Amen’ (e.g., Rom. 11:36), for the blessing of knowing God, enjoyed by believing people as his mercy and goodness pursue them daily, causes their hearts to well up constantly in praise to him” (*Unity of the Bible*, 136).
- 12 See *The End for Which God Created the World*, Chapter Two, Section Five (226–240) for Edwards’s collection of Biblical texts that show God created the world with a view to pursuing the creature’s good.
- 13 Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, ed. by John Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 249–250.

- 14 Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, in *Ethical Writings*, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 8, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 602–603.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 559.
- 16 Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, 285.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 279.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 285. For the biblical evidence of hell's eternal conscious torment and the justice of it, see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1993), 115–128; and Jonathan Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 668–669; and Jonathan Edwards, “The Torments of Hell Are Exceeding Great,” *Sermons and Discourses*, 1723–1729, ed. by Kenneth Minkema, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 14 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 297–328.
- 19 Unpublished sermon on Exodus 9:12, quoted in John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1980), 3. This entire book illustrates Edwards's capacity to show that heaven is unspeakably wonderful and hell is unspeakably horrible.
- 20 I owe this way of saying it to David Wells in

personal conversation. Few people today are making wiser, more penetrating observations about this distinction than Wells in his three books, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

- 21 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 21, (I, 1).
- 22 Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival, The Great Awakening*, ed. by C. C. Goen, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 387.
- 23 *The Religious Affections*, 120.
- 24 Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, in: *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. by Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1971), 49.
- 25 “Christian Knowledge,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 162.
- 26 From a personal letter to Sheldon Vanauken in Vanauken’s book, *A Severe Mercy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 189.

- 27 Resolution #22 in Edwards's *Memoirs*, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh), xxi.
- 28 Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, 72 and footnote 40.
- 29 Charles Colson, "Introduction" to Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), xxiii, xxxiv.

SELF-LOVE, GOOD AND BAD: SHOULD WE BE WILLING TO BE DAMNED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD?

Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God (*Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012*), 387–401.

Good counsel tells me to alert the reader that what is coming may be heavy sledding. We are not used to reading material that is two centuries old, from a thought-world foreign to our day. Yet, as I said before: raking is easy, but you get only leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds. That is what I found in a great eighteenth-century pastor and theologian.

It is no secret, from what I have written elsewhere, that I am deeply indebted to Jonathan Edwards in the development of my understanding of God and life. J.I. Packer said of my book *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, “Jonathan Edwards, whose ghost walks through most of Piper’s pages, would be delighted with his disciple.” That was a very generous tribute. I write

with Edwards looking over my shoulder. So I would like to show that living by faith in future grace and Christian hedonism stand in faithful continuity with the thinking of Jonathan Edwards. I do not claim that Edwards would have chosen my way of bringing biblical truth to bear on the modern church. Nor do I assume it is the only or even the best way. But I do want to claim that it is biblical, and that it is in the Reformed tradition of Jonathan Edwards, and that, if properly understood and applied, it leads to a God-centered life of joyful and sacrificial love.

There are at least two features of Edwards's thought that appear at first glance to be at odds with Christian hedonism. One is his treatment of "self-love." He shows that its branches don't reach high enough and its roots don't go deep enough. How will this criticism of self-love fit with our stress on faith as being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus? Christian hedonism sounds like self-love. Is it? The other feature of Edwards's thought that seems contrary to Christian hedonism is his use of the term "disinterested." Genuine love to God must be disinterested, he would say, which of course does not sound like the language of hedonism. Or is it?

The Place of Self-Love in the Thought of Edwards

"Self-love" was a burning topic in Edwards's day. He had a love-hate relationship with the term, because it carried so much potential truth and so much potential error. He once wrote, "O, how is the world darkened, clouded, distracted, and torn to pieces by those dreadful enemies of mankind called words!"³⁰

His Pejorative Use of Self-Love

Edwards knew that some moralists in his day used the term self-love to refer simply to man's love for his own happiness, which was not a pejorative use.³¹

But his preference was to use the term in its more narrow and negative sense. He says in *The Nature of True Virtue*, "Self-love, as the phrase is used in common speech, most commonly signifies a man's regard to his confined private self, or love to himself with respect to his private interest."³² In other words, self-love was ordinarily used with the negative connotation of narrowness. It was virtually synonymous with selfishness. What makes a selfish person happy is not when others are benefited but when his own private happiness increases without consideration for others. That is the usual meaning of self-love as Edwards treats it.

In 1738, he preached a series of expositions on 1 Corinthians 13, later published under the title *Charity and its Fruits*. One of his sermons is based on the phrase in verse 5, "Charity... seeketh not her own" (KJV). The title of the sermon is "The Spirit of Charity, the Opposite of a Selfish Spirit." In it he describes the fall of man into sin like this:

The ruin that the fall brought upon the soul of man consists very much in his losing the nobler and more benevolent principles of his nature, and falling wholly under the power and government of self-love.... Sin like some powerful astringent, contracted his soul to the very small dimensions of selfishness; and God was forsaken, and fellow creatures forsaken, and man retired within

himself, and became totally governed by narrow and selfish principles and feelings. Self-love became absolute master of his soul, and the more noble and spiritual principles of his being took wings and flew away.³³

So self-love in this sense is the same as the vice of selfishness. People who are governed by self-love “place [their] happiness in good things that are confined or limited to themselves, to the exclusion of others. And this is selfishness. This is the thing most clearly and directly intended by that self-love which the Scripture condemns.”³⁴ So self-love is a trait that man has after the Fall, and its evil, as we will see, is not its desire for happiness, but its finding that happiness in narrow, merely private interests.

Edwards knew quite well that even benevolence for others could be rooted in a confined and narrow self-love. Much benevolence simply rises out of natural affinity groups that unite others to ourselves—groups like family and community and nationality. Edwards called this benevolence on the basis of self-love “compounded self-love” and did not recognize it as true virtue.

But Edwards did raise the question, When can the breadth of the benevolent effects of self-love be broad enough, so that it can be called true virtue? In 1755, seventeen years after he preached the sermons on 1 Corinthians 13, Edwards gave an extremely radical answer. He said, Only when it embraces the good of the whole universe of being. Or more simply, Only when it embraces God. For until then, self-love embraces “an infinitely small part of universal existence” because it does not embrace God.

If there could be a cause [like self-love] determining a person to benevolence towards the whole world of mankind, or even all created sensible natures throughout the universe, exclusive of union of heart to general existence and of love to God—not derived from that temper of mind which disposes to a supreme regard to him, nor subordinate to such divine love—it cannot be of the nature of true virtue.³⁵

Norman Fiering said of this statement, “We may admire the audacity of such a statement.... But it is also open to obvious criticism.”³⁶ Then he proceeds to critique Edwards in a way that seems to ignore the aim and achievement of Edwards in *The Nature of True Virtue*. What Edwards aims to do is show that God is central and indispensable in the definition of true virtue—to keep God at the center of all moral considerations, to stem the secularizing forces of ethical thinking in his day. Edwards could not conceive of calling any act truly virtuous that did not have in it a supreme regard to God. This is why Edwards seems to me so utterly relevant to our day, and why he is a model of God-centered thinking.

So what Edwards was trying to do by focusing on the negative, narrow, confined sense of self-love was to show in the end that all love is a narrow, merely natural kind of love unless it has a supreme regard to God. The inadequacy of self-love is that its branches do not reach up to God. They might embrace great causes and make great sacrifices, but if love does not embrace God, it is infinitely parochial. In other words, Edwards’s treatment of self-love,

like everything else he wrote, was aimed at defending the centrality and indispensability of God. And that is precisely the aim of “living by faith in future grace” as I have unfolded it in the book *Future Grace*, and the aim of Christian hedonism as I developed it in the books *Desiring God* and *The Pleasures of God*.

Edwards’s Positive Treatment of Self-Love

But we have not yet shown that Edwards’s view of self-love can encompass the mandate of Christian hedonism to pursue joy in God as an essential element of all true virtue, and satisfaction in God as an essential element of all true faith. So we turn now to another approach Edwards took to self-love, one that at first is remarkably positive, but then turns up its inadequacy because its roots don’t go deep enough. My contention is that what Edwards does here is strip away from hedonism everything that obscures its radical God-centeredness. What is left is what I (not Edwards) call Christian hedonism.

In *Charity and Its Fruits*, Edwards says,

It is not contrary to Christianity that a man should love himself, or, which is the same thing, should love his own happiness. If Christianity did indeed tend to destroy a man’s love to himself, and to his own happiness, it would therein tend to destroy the very spirit of humanity... That a man should love his own happiness, is as necessary to his nature as the faculty of the will is, and it is impossible that such a love should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being.³⁷

Edwards took all this for granted the way he took the very existence of human will for granted. But my experience is that it hits people today as though it were a new religion—which I think shows just how far we have come (fallen) from the biblical vision of Jonathan Edwards.

I suppose it may be a slight overstatement to say that Edwards took all this for granted, because he does undertake to argue for it somewhat. For example, he says,

That to love ourselves is not unlawful, is evident also from the fact, that the law of God makes self-love a rule and measure by which our love to others should be regulated. Thus Christ commands (Matthew 19:19), “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” which certainly supposes that we may, and must love ourselves.... And the same appears also from the fact, that the Scriptures, from one end of the Bible to the other, are full of motives that are set forth for the very purpose of working on the principle of self-love. Such are all the promises and threatenings of the word of God, its calls and invitations, its counsels to seek our own good, and its warnings to beware of misery.³⁸

But now how does all this relate to our supreme regard for God, which Edwards argues is so indispensable to true virtue? For many thoughtful Christians, the quest for happiness seems self-centered, not God-centered. But, in fact, Edwards can help us see that the attempt to abandon that quest produces a worse self-centeredness. He clears away a lot of fog when he poses the question, “Whether

or not a man ought to love God more than himself?" He answers like this:

Self-love, taken in the most extensive sense, and love to God are not things properly capable of being compared one with another; for they are not opposites or things entirely distinct, but one enters into the nature of the other.... Self-love is only a capacity of enjoying or taking delight in anything. Now surely 'tis improper to say that our love to God is superior to our general capacity of delighting in anything.³⁹

You can never play off self-love against love to God when self-love is treated as our love for happiness. Rather, love to God is the form that self-love takes when God is discovered as the all-satisfying fountain of joy. Norman Fiering catches the sense here perfectly when he sums up Edwards's position like this: "Disinterested love to God is impossible because the desire for happiness is intrinsic to all willing or loving whatsoever, and God is the necessary end of the search for happiness. Logically one cannot be disinterested about the source or basis of all interest."⁴⁰

Does "Disinterested" Really Mean Disinterested?

This is very important, because Edwards does in fact use the word "disinterested" when he talks about love to God.⁴¹ And this is one of the features of Edwards's thought that I said earlier looks contrary to Christian hedonism, but in fact isn't. Rather, the same ambiguity exists in the term "disinterested" as with the term "self-love." When

Edwards speaks of a disinterested love to God, he means a love that is grounded not in a desire for God's gifts, but in a desire for God himself. This is absolutely crucial for understanding Edwards's relation to Christian hedonism and living by faith in future grace.

"Disinterestedness" is not an anti-hedonistic word as Edwards uses it. It is simply his way (common in the eighteenth century) of stressing that we must seek our joy in God himself and not in the health, wealth, and prosperity he may give. It is a word designed to safeguard the God-centeredness of joy, not to oppose the pursuit of it.

You know immediately that you are in the realm of Christian hedonism when you read Edwards describing the seemingly paradoxical phrase, *disinterested delight!* This shows how careful we must be not to jump to conclusions when we see apparently non-hedonistic terms in Edwards (and other older writers). The following crucial insights come from Edwards's mature work on the *Religious Affections*:

As it is with the love of the saints, so it is with their joy, and *spiritual delight and pleasure*: the first foundation of it, is not any consideration or conception of their interest in [understand: material benefit from] divine things; but it primarily consists in the sweet entertainment their minds have in the view or contemplation of the divine and holy beauty of these things, as they are in themselves. And this is indeed the very main difference between the joy of the hypocrite, and the joy of the true saint. The former rejoices in himself; self is the first foundation of his joy: the

latter rejoices in God... True saints have their minds, in the first place, *inexpressibly pleased and delighted* with the sweet ideas of the glorious and amiable nature of the things of God. And this is the spring of all their delights, and the *cream of all their pleasures*... But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order: they first rejoice... that they are made so much of by God; and then on that ground, he seems in a sort, lovely to them.⁴²

A paragraph like this puts an end, once and for all, to the thought that the term “disinterested” in Edwards means that we should not pursue our deepest and highest pleasures in God. On the contrary! He is “the cream of all [our] pleasures,” and contemplating him is “sweet entertainment.” We should be driven on by longing for satisfaction in God himself, never content with the mere gifts of God, which are but tributaries flowing from the Fountain himself. It is a radically hedonistic paragraph, and a profound call to live by faith in future grace.

Should We Be Willing to Be Damned for the Glory of God?

Perhaps the best proof that supreme love for God can never be played off against the pursuit of satisfaction in God is Edwards’s answer to the question, whether we should be willing to be damned for the glory of God.

’Tis impossible for any person to be willing to be perfectly and finally miserable for God’s sake, for

this supposes love to God is superior to self-love in the most general and extensive sense of self-love, which enters into the nature of love to God... . If a man is willing to be perfectly miserable for God's sake... then he must be willing to be deprived [not only of his own natural benefits, but also] of that which is indirectly his own, viz., God's good, which supposition is inconsistent with itself; for to be willing to be deprived of this latter sort of good is opposite to that principle of love to God itself, from whence such a willingness is supposed to arise. Love to God, if it be superior to any other principle, will make a man forever unwilling, utterly and finally, to be deprived of that part of his happiness which he has in God's being blessed and glorified, and the more he loves Him, the more unwilling he will be. So that this supposition, that a man can be willing to be perfectly and utterly miserable out of love to God, is inconsistent with itself... . The more a man loves God, the more unwilling will he be to be deprived of this happiness [in God's glory].⁴³

Phrases like “happiness... in God's being... glorified” are complex. On the one hand, they speak of God's being blessed through being glorified. Our desire for this could almost sound altruistic toward God: he is blessed by what happens to us. But, on the other hand, the phrase speaks of our “*happiness* in God's being glorified.” Thus it becomes obvious that we are the beneficiaries here. In fact, as I have come to see and say, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. These two great goals are not at

odds: my joy and God's glory. The more I delight in God's being glorified, the more valuable that glory appears.⁴⁴ To try to abandon the pursuit of one will nullify the other.

So there is no such thing in the thought of Edwards as the ultimate abandonment of the quest for happiness. *Disinterestedness* is affirmed only to preserve the centrality of God himself as the object of our satisfaction. And *self-love* is rejected only when it is conceived as a narrow love for happiness that does not have God as its supreme focus. In the words of Norman Fiering, "The type of self-love that is overcome in finding union with God is specifically selfishness, not the self-love that seeks the consummation of happiness."⁴⁵

But Even Good Self-Love Is Merely Natural

Let us press deeper with Edwards. Is there then any reason to speak of the inadequacy of self-love when it is used in this broad sense of our love for happiness that reaches all the way up to embrace God? Yes, there is. And it appears when we ask, "Why do some people put their happiness in God and others don't?" Edwards's answer was the miracle of regeneration. And the reason he gave this answer was the reason he did everything he did: to put God not only at the top but also at the bottom of true virtue and true faith—to make him the ground as well as the goal.

His battle was against the secularizing tendencies that he saw in the ethical theories of his day—theories that reduced all virtue into powers that man has by nature. Edwards saw this as a naive estimation of man's corruption and as an assault on the centrality of God in the moral

life of the soul. How then do people come to have God as their true happiness? (Which is the same as asking, How is a Christian hedonist created? Or: How does one come to live by faith in future grace?) Edwards observed that a love to God that arises solely from self-love “cannot be a truly gracious and spiritual love... for self-love is a principle entirely natural, and as much in the hearts of devils as angels; and therefore surely nothing that is the mere result of it can be supernatural and divine.”⁴⁶

So he goes on to insist that those who say that all love to God arises solely from self-love

ought to consider a little further, and inquire how the man came to place his happiness in God’s being glorified, and in contemplating and enjoying God’s perfections... How came these things to be so agreeable to him, that he esteems it his highest happiness to glorify God? ... If after a man loves God, and has his heart so united to him, as to look upon God as his chief good... it will be a consequence and fruit of this, that even self-love, or love to his own happiness, will cause him to desire the glorifying and enjoying of God; it will not thence follow, that this very exercise of self-love, went before his love to God, and that his love to God was a consequence and fruit of that. Something else, entirely distinct from self-love might be the cause of this, viz. a change made in the views of his mind, and relish of his heart whereby he apprehends a beauty, glory, and supreme good, in God’s nature, as it is in itself.⁴⁷

So Edwards says that self-love alone can't account for the existence of spiritual love to God because, prior to the soul's pursuing happiness in God, the soul has to perceive the excellency of God and be given a relish for it. This is what happens in regeneration.

Divine love... may be thus described. 'Tis the soul's relish of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature, inclining the heart to God as the chief good. The first thing in Divine love, and that from which everything that appertains to it arises, is a relish of the excellency of the Divine nature; which the soul of man by nature has nothing of... . When once the soul is brought to relish the excellency of the Divine nature, then it will naturally, and of course, incline to God every way. It will incline to be with him and to enjoy him. It will have benevolence to God. It will be glad that he is happy. It will incline that he should be glorified, and that his will should be done in all things. So that the first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration, is to give the heart a Divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature; and indeed this is all the immediate effect of the Divine power that there is; this is all the Spirit of God needs to do, in order to a production of all good effects in the soul.⁴⁸

Very simply, what he is saying is this: a capacity to taste a thing must precede our desire for its sweetness. That is, regeneration must precede love's pursuit of happiness in

God. So Edwards speaks of the natural power of self-love being “regulated” by this supernatural taste for God:

The change that takes place in a man, when he is converted and sanctified, is not that his love for happiness is diminished, but only that it is regulated with respect to its exercises and influence, and the courses and objects it leads to... . When God brings a soul out of a miserable state and condition into a happy state, by conversion, he gives him happiness that before he had not [*namely, in God*], but he does not at the same time take away any of his love of happiness.⁴⁹

So the problem with our love for happiness is never that its intensity is too great. The main problem is that it flows in the wrong channels toward the wrong objects,⁵⁰ because our nature is corrupt and in desperate need of renovation by the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ And lest we think that, in speaking of love to God, we have moved afield from our concern with living by *faith* in future grace, recall that for Edwards, “love is the main thing in saving faith, the life and power of it, by which it produces great effects.”⁵²

How Then Shall We Live?

This leads us finally to the duties that flow from Edwards’s teaching and its relation to living by faith in future grace and Christian hedonism. Once the renovation of our hearts happens through the supernatural work of regeneration, the pursuit of the enjoyment of the glory of God becomes more and more clearly the

all-satisfying duty of the Christian. And indifference to this pursuit, as though it were a bad thing, appears as an increasingly great evil.

The heart is more and more gripped with the truth that God created the world for his own glory and that this glory echoes most clearly in the enjoyments of the saints. Listen as Edwards unfolds for us the deepest roots of Christian hedonism in the very nature of the Godhead. And notice how God's passion to be glorified and our passion to be satisfied unite into one experience.

God is glorified within himself these two ways: 1. By appearing... to himself in his own perfect idea [*of himself*], or in his Son, who is the brightness of his glory. 2. By enjoying and delighting in himself, by flowing forth in infinite love and delight towards himself, or in his Holy Spirit... So God glorifies himself toward the creatures also in two ways: 1. By appearing to... their understanding. 2. In communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which he makes of himself... *God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.* When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, his glory; and that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't]

glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it.⁵³

In other words, the chief end of man is to glorify God by *enjoying him forever*—which is the essence of Christian hedonism, and of living by faith in future grace. There is no final conflict between God’s passion to be glorified and man’s passion to be satisfied. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

As Edwards put it,

Because [God] infinitely values his own glory, consisting in the knowledge of himself, love to himself, and complacence and joy in himself; he therefore valued the image, communication or participation of these, in the creature. And it is because he values himself, that he delights in the knowledge, and love, and joy of the creature; as being himself the object of this knowledge, love and complacence.... [Thus] God’s respect to the creature’s good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at, is happiness in union with himself.⁵⁴

Maximize Spiritual Satisfaction; Manifest the Splendor of God

It follows from all this that it is impossible that anyone can pursue happiness with too much passion and zeal and intensity.⁵⁵ This pursuit is not sin. Sin is pursuing happiness where it cannot be lastingly found (Jer. 2:12–13), or

pursuing it in the right direction, but with lukewarm, halfhearted affections (Rev. 3:16). Virtue, on the other hand, is to do what we do with all our might⁵⁶ in pursuit of the enjoyment of all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore the cultivation of spiritual appetite is a great duty for all the saints. “Men... ought to indulge those appetites. To obtain as much of those spiritual satisfactions as lies in their power.”⁵⁷

The aim of my book *Future Grace* is to root ever more deeply in Scripture the vision of God and life called “living by faith in future grace.” I take subordinate pleasure in rooting it in the thought of one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church. I put little stock in whether anybody calls this vision of God and life “Christian hedonism.” That is a term that will pass away like vapor. But my prayer is that the truth in it will run and triumph. Another pastor will say it differently, and probably better, for another generation. I am called to serve mine. My passion is to assert the supremacy of God in every area of life. My discovery is that God is supreme not where he is simply served with duty but where he is savored with delight. “Delight yourself in the LORD” (Psalm 37:4) is not a secondary suggestion. It is a radical call to pursue your fullest satisfaction in all that God promises to be for you in Jesus. It is a call to live in the joyful freedom and sacrificial love that comes from faith in future grace. Then will come to pass the purpose of God who chose us in Christ to live “to the praise of his glory.”

NOTES

- 30 “Miscellanies,” no. 4, in *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from his Private Notebooks*, Harvey G. Townsend, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972, orig. 1955), 209. See also 139, 244 for other complaints about the inadequacy of language.
- 31 “[Self-love] may be taken for... [a person’s] loving whatsoever is pleasing to him. Which comes only to this, that self-love is a man’s liking, and being suited and pleased in that which he likes, and which pleases him; or, that it is a man’s loving what he loves. For whatever a man loves, that thing is... pleasing to him... And if this be all that they mean by self-love, no wonder they suppose that all love may be resolved into self-love.” *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 42–43. See also “The Mind,” in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, Wallace E. Anderson, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 337; *Charity and Its Fruits* (London: The Banner of Truth Press), 1969, 159–60.
- 32 *True Virtue*, 45.
- 33 *Charity and Its Fruits*, 157–58.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 164.
- 35 Edwards, *True Virtue*, 77.
- 36 Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral*

Thought and its British Context (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981), 196.

- 37 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 159.
- 38 Ibid., 60.
- 39 “Miscellanies,” no. 530, 202.
- 40 Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought*, 161.
- 41 Clyde A. Holbrook, ed., *Original Sin: The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 144; *Charity and Its Fruits*, 174
- 42 John E. Smith, ed., “Religious Affections,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 249–250. (emphasis added).
- 43 “Miscellanies,” no. 530, 204–205; see also Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought*, 160.
- 44 See Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, Paul Helm, ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971), 49–50.
- 45 Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought*, 162.
- 46 Smith, *Religious Affections*, 242.
- 47 Ibid., 241 (emphasis added). See also Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 44.
- 48 Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, 48–49.
- 49 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 161–162.
- 50 Ibid., 164.

- 51 “Miscellanies,” no. 397, 249.
- 52 Edwards, “Concerning Faith,” 586.
- 53 “Miscellanies,” no. 448, 133; see also no. 87, 128, and no. 332, 130 and no. 679, 138.
- 54 Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1974), 120.
- 55 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 161.
- 56 Edwards’s “Resolution no. 6,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust), xx. “Resolved: To live with all my might, while I do live.”
- 57 I owe this quote to Don Westblade, who transcribed the unpublished sermon of Edwards (from the Jonathan Edwards Project at Yale University) on Canticles 5:1, with the doctrine stated: “That persons need not and ought not to set any bounds to their spiritual and gracious appetites.”

GODLY SORROW AND THE FULLNESS OF JOY: BREAKING THE HEART AND MAKING IT GLAD

God Is the Gospel (*Wheaton: Crossway, 2005*), 106–112.

The greatest lesson I learned from Jonathan Edwards is that God is shown to be most beautiful and valuable when his people see him clearly in the gospel and delight in him above all else. In other words, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.⁵⁸ Which means that you never have to choose between your greatest joy and God's greatest glory.

The question here is: How does this relate to the necessary sorrows of the Christian life, especially the sorrow of gospel-awakened contrition? How does the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6) relate to the sorrow of contrition? Or to make the question even more pointed, how does the savoring of the glory of God in the gospel relate to the sorrow of gospel-awakened remorse for

sin? If the great good of the gospel is savoring the glory of God in the gospel, how can it also produce sorrow?

Sorrow Rises from the Sight of All-Satisfying Glory

In a sermon from 1723, titled “The Pleasantness of Religion,”⁵⁹ Edwards addressed the question: How does the centrality of savoring the glory of God in the gospel relate to the pain of gospel-awakened contrition? Here is the key insight:

There is repentance of sin: though it be a deep sorrow for sin that God requires as necessary to salvation, yet the very nature of it necessarily implies delight. *Repentance of sin is a sorrow arising from the sight of God’s excellency and mercy, but the apprehension of excellency or mercy must necessarily and unavoidably beget pleasure in the mind of the beholder.* ’Tis impossible that anyone should see anything that appears to him excellent and not behold it with pleasure, and it’s impossible to be affected with the mercy and love of God, and his willingness to be merciful to us and love us, and not be affected with pleasure at the thoughts of [it]; but this is the very affection that begets true repentance. How much so ever of a paradox it may seem, it is true that repentance is a sweet sorrow, so that the more of this sorrow, the more pleasure.⁶⁰

This is astonishing and true. What he is saying is that to bring people to the sorrow of repentance and contrition, you must bring them first to see the glory of God as their

treasure and their delight. This is what happens in the gospel. The gospel is the revelation of “the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). True sorrow over sin is shown by the gospel to be what it really is—the result of failing to savor “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The sorrow of true contrition is sorrow for not having God as our all-satisfying treasure. But to be sorrowful over not savoring God, we must see God as our treasure, our sweetness. To grieve over not delighting in God, he must have become a delight to us.

The Seeds of Delight Bear the Fruit of Sorrow

How did this happen? How did God become our all-satisfying treasure? It happened through the gospel. The gospel revealed the glory of God in Christ. We saw it. We were awakened to his beauty and worth. The seeds of delight were sown, and the fruit they produced was sorrow—sorrow that for so long we had never savored his glory. Paradoxically this means that true repentance and contrition based on the gospel is preceded by the awakening of a delight in God. To weep savingly over not possessing God as your treasure, he must have become precious to you. The gospel awakens sorrow for sin by awakening a savor for God.

How David Brainerd Broke the Hearts of Indians and Made Them Glad

Twenty-six years after he preached the sermon on “The Pleasantness of Religion,” Jonathan Edwards published the journals of David Brainerd, the young missionary to

the American Indians who died in 1747 at the age of twenty-nine. He took this opportunity to illustrate from real life what he had taught about the relationship between the glory of the gospel and the sorrow of contrition.

On August 9, 1745 Brainerd preached to the Indians of Crossweeksung, New Jersey and made this observation:

There were many tears among them while I was discoursing publicly... Some were much affected with a few words spoken to them in a powerful manner, which caused the persons to cry out in anguish of soul, although *I spoke not a word of terror, but on the contrary, set before them the fullness and all-sufficiency of Christ's merits*, and his willingness to save all that come to him; and thereupon pressed them to come without delay.⁶¹

Again on November 30 that same year he preached on Luke 16:19–26 concerning the rich man and Lazarus.

The Word made powerful impressions upon many in the assembly, especially while I discoursed of the blessedness of Lazarus “in Abraham’s bosom” [Luke 16:22]. This, I could perceive, affected them much more than what I spoke of the rich man’s misery and torments. And thus it has been usually with them... They have almost always appeared much more affected with the comfortable than the dreadful truths of God’s Word. And that which has distressed many of them under convictions, is that they found they wanted [=lacked], and could not obtain, the happiness of the godly.⁶²

This is exactly what Edwards had been preaching twenty-two years earlier. It seems very strange at first. One must taste the happiness of seeing and savoring God in the gospel before one can be truly sorrowful for not having more of that happiness. There is no contradiction between the necessity of sorrow for sin and the necessity of seeing and savoring the glory of God in the gospel. The sweetness of seeing God in the gospel is a prerequisite for godly sorrow for so long scorning that sweetness.

Only Joy-Based Sorrow Honors God

The implication of this truth for preaching the gospel is that God himself must be shown as the ultimate good news of the gospel. If people are not awakened to the preciousness of God and the beauty of his glory in the face of Christ, the sorrow of their contrition will not be owing to their failure to cherish God and prize his glory. It will be owing to the fear of hell, or the foolishness of their former behavior, or the waste of their lives. But none of these grounds for contrition, by themselves, is an honor to God.

What Is Disinterested Love? Pleasure in God Himself

Someone who knows a bit about Jonathan Edwards might raise an objection here. He might say, “Your way of talking about the gospel does not seem faithful to the way Edwards talked. You talk about cherishing and savoring and prizing God in the gospel. These words seem to suggest a strong desire to find pleasure or happiness in God. But Edwards spoke about a ‘disinterested’ love to God. Are you really being faithful to Edwards and to the apostle

Paul by the way you speak of responding to the gospel?”

In response to this good question I would say, it's true that Edwards used the term “disinterested love” in reference to God.

I must leave it to everyone to judge for himself... concerning mankind, how little there is of this disinterested love to God, this pure divine affection, in the world.⁶³

There is no other love so much above a selfish principle as Christian love is, there is no love that is so free and disinterested. God is loved for himself and for his own sake.⁶⁴

But the key to understanding his meaning is found in this last quote. Disinterested love to God is loving God “for himself and for his own sake.” In other words, Edwards used the term “disinterested love” to designate love that delights in God for his own greatness and beauty, and to distinguish it from love that delights only in God's gifts. Disinterested love is not love without pleasure. It is love whose pleasure is in God himself.

Disinterested Sweet Entertainment

In fact, Edwards would say that there is no love to God that does not include delight in God. And so if there is a disinterested love to God, there is disinterested delight in God. And that is exactly the way he thinks. For example, he says:

As it is with the love of the saints, so it is with their joy, and spiritual delight and pleasure: the

first foundation of it, is not any consideration or conception of their *interest* in divine things; but it primarily consists in the *sweet entertainment* their minds have in the view... of the divine and holy beauty of these things, as they are in themselves.⁶⁵

In other words, he says that their “spiritual delight” does not have its foundation in “their *interest* in divine things.” That means: their delight in God is not grounded in the gifts he gives them other than himself. That’s what “interest” means. Hence their delight in God is “disinterested.” Nevertheless, it consists in the “sweet entertainment” of their minds. Thus “disinterested” love for God is the “sweet entertainment” or the joy of knowing God himself.⁶⁶ That is what the gospel offers when it reveals “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). That is what must paradoxically precede and produce the sorrow of Christ-exalting contrition.

Anti-Triumphalism: Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing

One of the reasons for dealing in this chapter with the nature and foundation of Christian contrition is that it enables me to caution against triumphalism. I am aware that when I use the language of prizing and treasuring and delighting and cherishing and being satisfied by the glory of God in the face of Christ, it could sound to some as if all brokenness and suffering and pain and sorrow have been left behind. That is not true. The Christian never gets beyond the battle with indwelling sin.⁶⁷ Life is not all joy above sorrow; life is a battle for joy in the midst of sorrow.⁶⁸ The banner that flies over my life and over this book

is Paul's paradoxical maxim in 2 Corinthians 6:10, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Jonathan Edwards saw the glory of God in the gospel more clearly than most of us and experienced being enthralled with God's fellowship through the gospel.⁶⁹ But he also left us one of the most beautiful descriptions of what the glory of God in the gospel produces in the life of the believer. He showed that the God-enthralled vision of Christ in the gospel does not make a person presumptuous—it makes him meek. It produces broken-hearted joy.

All gracious affections that are a sweet odor to Christ, and that fill the soul of a Christian with a heavenly sweetness and fragrancy, are brokenhearted affections. A truly Christian love, either to God or men, is a humble brokenhearted love. The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires: their hope is a humble hope; and their joy, even when it is unspeakable, and full of glory, is a humble brokenhearted joy, and leaves the Christian more poor in spirit, and more like a little child, and more disposed to a universal lowliness of behavior.⁷⁰

NOTES

- 58 The section in Edwards's writings that made this most clear was:

God glorifies himself toward the creatures... in two ways: 1. By appearing to... their understanding. 2. In communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which he makes of himself... . *God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.* When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that he might communicate, and the creature receive, his glory; and that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it. Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies,"* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Schafer (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 495. Miscellany #448; see also #87 (pp. 251–252); #332 (410); #679 (not in the New Haven volume). Emphasis added.

See also the comments of Benjamin Warfield on the first question of the Westminster Catechism. The answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" is followed by this comment:

“Not to enjoy God, certainly, without glorifying him, for how can he to whom glory inherently belongs be enjoyed without being glorified? But just as certainly not to glorify God without enjoying him—for how can he whose glory is his perfections be glorified if he be not also enjoyed?” Benjamin Warfield, “The First Question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism,” in *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work, in The Works of Benjamin Warfield*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 400.

- 59 Jonathan Edwards, “The Pleasantness of Religion,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 15. His thesis in this sermon is: “It would be worth the while to be religious, if it were only for the pleasantness of it,” based on Proverbs 24:13–14.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 18–19. Emphasis added. Edward says similarly in another place, “The same taste which relishes the sweetness of true moral good, tastes the bitterness of moral evil.” *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 301.
- 61 Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 7, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 310. Emphasis added.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 342. Emphasis added.
- 63 Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, in *The Works of*

- Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 144.
- 64 Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, in *Ethical Writings*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 264.
- 65 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 249. Emphasis added.
- 66 Norman Fiering is right in the following quote if you take “disinterested” in the absolute sense of no benefit whatever, not even the “sweet entertainment” of beholding God. “Disinterested love to God is impossible because the desire for happiness is intrinsic to all willing or loving whatsoever, and God is the necessary end of the search for happiness. Logically one cannot be disinterested about the source or basis of all interest.” *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought in Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 161.
- 67 Especially helpful on this crucial point is John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, ed. William Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967). This volume contains three important works on the battle with remaining sin in believers: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*; *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It*; and *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*.
- 68 This is why I used the subtitle *How to Fight for Joy*

for my book *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004).

- 69 “Once as I rode out into the woods for my health in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love and meek, gentle condescension... which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud.” This is taken from Edwards’s “Personal Narrative,” in *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, ed. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1935), 69.
- 70 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 348–349.

THINKING AND FEELING—TOGETHER: CLEAR TRUTH FOR THE SAKE OF STRONG AFFECTIONS

Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God
(*Wheaton: Crossway, 2010*), 33–37.

Few people have helped me with the interconnection of thinking and feeling more than the eighteenth-century New England pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards. I told my story of his influence in my life in the book *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards*.⁷¹

Edwards Without a Successor

Edwards, as almost every historian says, was among the greatest thinkers that America has ever produced, if not the greatest.⁷² Historian Mark Noll argues that no one since Edwards has embodied the union of mind and heart the way Edwards did.

Edwards's piety continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-centered worldview or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards's perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy.⁷³

In other words, theology and piety found a union in Edwards that has disappeared or is very rare. I hope this book will encourage some to pursue that union.

Trinitarian Thinking and Feeling

One of the gifts Edwards gave to me, which I had not found anywhere else, was a foundation for human thinking and feeling in the Trinitarian nature of God. I don't mean that others haven't seen human nature rooted in God's nature. I simply mean that the way Edwards saw it was extraordinary. He showed me that human thinking and feeling do not exist arbitrarily; they exist because we are in the image of God, and God's "thinking" and "feeling" are more deeply part of his Trinitarian being than I had realized.

Prepare to be boggled. Here is Edwards's remarkable description of how the persons of the Trinity relate to each other. Notice that God the Son stands forth eternally as a work of God's thought. And God the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as the act of their joy.

This I suppose to be the blessed Trinity that we read of in the Holy Scriptures. The Father is the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and

most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of himself and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the deity subsisting in act, or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth in God's infinite love to and delight in himself. And I believe the whole Divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the Divine idea and Divine love, and that each of them are properly distinct persons.⁷⁴

In other words, God the Father has had an eternal image and idea of himself that is so full it is another Person standing forth—distinct as the Father's idea, yet one in divine essence. And God the Father and the Son have had an eternal joy in each other's excellence that carries so fully what they are that another Person stands forth, the Holy Spirit—distinct as the Father and Son's delight in each other, yet one in divine essence. There never was a time when God did not experience himself this way. The three Persons of the Trinity are coeternal. They are equally divine.

Glorified by Being Known and Enjoyed

But the amazing reality for our purposes here is that God's existence as a Trinity of Persons is the foundation of human nature as head and heart, thinking and feeling, knowing and loving. We can see this even more remarkably when we watch Edwards draw out the connection between God's nature and how he designed us to glorify him. Notice how he moves from God's intra-Trinitarian glory to the glory he aims to get in creation.

God is glorified within himself these two ways: (1) By appearing... to himself in his own perfect idea [of himself], or in his Son, who is the brightness of his glory. (2) By enjoying and delighting in himself, by flowing forth in infinite... delight towards himself, or in his Holy Spirit.

... So God glorifies himself toward the creatures also in two ways: (1) By appearing to... their understanding. (2) In communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which he makes of himself... . God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.

God made the world that he might communicate, and the creature receive, his glory; and that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it.⁷⁵

The implications of this truth are huge. It implies, for example, that if we are to live according to our nature as human beings in the image of God, and if we are to glorify God fully, we must engage our mind in knowing him truly and our hearts in loving him duly. The *both-and* plea of the mind and heart is not a mere personal preference of mine. It is

rooted in the nature of God's Trinitarian existence and in how he has created us to glorify him with mind and heart.

Clear Truth for the Sake of Strong Affections

Edwards set the pattern for us in seeking to awaken the affections, not with entertainment or hype but with clear views of truth. In other words, he made the work of thinking serve the experience of worship and love.

I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.⁷⁶

What an amazing example he was of the *both-and*—strong emotions for the glory of God based on *clear biblical views of the truth* of God. So you know it is not for any kind of academic gamesmanship when he said, “Get that knowledge of divine things that is within your power, even a doctrinal knowledge of the principles of the Christian religion.”⁷⁷ This was not for show. This was the work of the mind for the sake of marveling at God and ministering in love.

I hope it is clear now that the emphasis of this book on thinking is not at the expense of feeling or delighting or loving. Both are essential to being human, and both are essential to glorifying God. And, while it is true that mind and heart are mutually enlivening,⁷⁸ it is also clear that the mind is mainly the servant of the heart. That is, the mind serves to know the truth that fuels the fires of the heart.

The apex of glorifying God is enjoying him with the heart. But this is an empty emotionalism where that joy is not awakened and sustained by true views of God for who he really is. That is mainly what the mind is for.

NOTES

- 71 John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998).
- 72 Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 24. "... the greatest evangelical mind in American history and one of the truly seminal thinkers in Christian history."
- 73 Mark Noll, "Jonathan Edwards's Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought," *Reformed Journal* (February 1983), 26.
- 74 "An Essay on the Trinity," in *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. Paul Helm (Cambridge, UK: Clarke, 1971), 118.
- 75 "Miscellanies" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Schafer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 495 (Miscellany 448).
- 76 Jonathan Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 387.
- 77 Jonathan Edwards, "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Sermons and Discourse 1723–1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 92.

- 78 See Thomas Goodwin's explanation of this mutuality in chap. 6 of *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

REASONABLE, WELL-GROUNDED, SPIRITUAL FAITH: THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF CHRIST IS REALLY THERE

God Is the Gospel (*Wheaton: Crossway, 2005*), 82–85.

Jonathan Edwards shared John Calvin’s conviction about the ground of our faith in the gospel. It is the glory of God seen with the eyes of the heart as majestic and self-authenticating. But Edwards strikes a slightly different note. He stresses that the conviction of the truth of the gospel must be both *reasonable* and *spiritual*. The glory of God in the gospel is the key to both.

Edwards says that even if a person has strong religious affections that arise from a persuasion of the truth of the gospel, these affections are worthless “unless their persuasion be a *reasonable* persuasion or conviction.”⁷⁹ What does he mean by “reasonable”?

By a reasonable conviction, I mean, a conviction founded on real evidence, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction. Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true, when their persuasion is not at all built on evidence, but altogether on education, and the opinion of others; as many Mahometans are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Mahometan religion,⁸⁰ because their fathers, and neighbors, and nation believe it. That belief of the truth of the Christian religion, which is built on the very same grounds with a Mahometan's belief of the Mahometan religion, is the same sort of belief. And though the thing believed happens to be better, yet that does not make the belief itself to be of a better sort; for though the thing believed happens to be true, yet the belief of it is not owing to this truth, but to education. So that as the conviction is no better than the Mahometan's conviction; so the affections that flow from it, are no better in themselves, than the religious affections of Mahometans.⁸¹

One of my main concerns is that many people profess faith in Christ in this way. It is not a faith founded on the glory of Christ himself but on tradition or education or other people's opinion. If that is the case, the faith is not saving faith. Saving faith in Christ is built, as Edwards says, upon "real evidence, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction."

The Reasonable Ground of Faith Must Be Spiritual

But what is that “good reason” or “just ground” upon which faith must be based? The answer to this question also defines what he means by a true conviction being “spiritual.” For faith and its fruit to be truly “gracious,” that is, saving, Edwards says, “It is requisite, not only that the belief... should be a *reasonable*, but also a *spiritual* belief or conviction.”⁸² He says this because the “good reason” and “just ground” of conviction must arise from a spiritual—that is, Spirit-enabled—sight of the glory of God in the gospel.

*A spiritual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel, is such a conviction, as arises from having a spiritual view or apprehension of those things in the mind. And this is also evident from the Scripture, which often represents, that a saving belief of the reality and divinity of the things proposed and exhibited to us in the gospel, is from the Spirit of God’s enlightening the mind.*⁸³

Then, to support this, Edwards cites the text that we were concerned with in the previous chapter, 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, especially verse 6 (“[God] has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”). Then he comments on this verse: “Nothing can be more evident, than that a saving belief of the gospel is here spoken of, by the apostle, as arising from the mind’s being enlightened to behold the divine glory of the things it exhibits.”⁸⁴

God's Glory Is What the Gospel Events and Promises Are Meant to Show

Thus both John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards emphasize that saving faith in the gospel must be based on Spirit-enabled seeing of the glory of God in the face of Christ. I believe they are making clear what 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, and numerous other texts,⁸⁵ teach. Therefore, the glory of God in the face of Christ—that is, the glory of Christ who is the image of God—is essential to the gospel. It is not marginal or dispensable. Paul calls the gospel “the gospel of the glory of Christ.” This glory is what the events of the gospel are designed to reveal. If a person comes to the gospel and sees the events of Good Friday and Easter and believes that they happened and that they can bring some peace of mind, but does not see and savor any of this divine glory, that person does not have saving faith.

Seeing the glory of God in Christ in the gospel is essential to conversion. Edwards presses this with all his might as he struggles with the painful pastoral fact of false conversions. A professing Christian can have many right words but no spiritual fruit. What is wrong? The supernatural change from darkness to light has not happened. The blinding effects of sin and Satan have not been lifted. The eyes of the heart are still unable to see and savor the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

When men are converted, they are, as it were, called out of one region into the other, out of a region of darkness into the land of light... . In conversion they are brought to see spiritual objects. Those things which before they only heard of by

the hearing of the ear, they now are brought to a sight of: a sight of God, and a sight of Christ, and a sight of sin and holiness, a sight of the way of salvation, a sight of the spiritual and invisible world, a sight of the happiness of the enjoyment of God and his favor, and a sight of the dreadfulness of his anger... They are now convinced of the being of God, after another manner than ever they were before... 'Tis not merely by ratiocination⁸⁶ that those things are confirmed to them; but they are convinced that they are, because that they see them to be.⁸⁷

Now let us emphasize that these essential, divine things are seen in the gospel. It is true that all the Scripture has the mark of God's glory on it, since he is its theme and author. But in the gospel events of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection—the terrible and wonderful events of Good Friday and Easter—the glory of God shines most brightly. Thus it is especially important that we think of the gospel in terms of the revelation of God's glory. God designed it to be the main place where his glory would be revealed from age to age. Thus Jonathan Edwards says, "Now this distinguishing glory of the divine Being has its brightest appearance and manifestation, in the things proposed and exhibited to us in *the gospel*, the doctrines there taught, the word there spoken, and the divine counsels, acts and works there revealed."⁸⁸

NOTES

- 79 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith, vol. 2 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), 295.
- 80 “Mahometan” is an archaic term for a Muslim.
- 81 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 295.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid., 296
- 84 Ibid., 298.
- 85 For example, Edwards cites Luke 10:21–22; John 6:40; 17:6–8; Matthew 16:16–17; Galatians 1:14–16. Ibid., 297.
- 86 “... not that [a person] judges the doctrines of the gospel to be from God, without any argument or deduction at all; but it is without any long chain of arguments; the argument is but one, and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory.” Ibid., 298.
- 87 Jonathan Edwards, “Christians a Chosen Generation,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 322.
- 88 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 300. Emphasis added.

THE EXCELLENCIES OF CHRIST: THE HIGHEST, BEST, SWEETEST, FINAL GOOD OF THE GOOD NEWS

God Is the Gospel (*Wheaton: Crossway, 2005*), 47–53, 63–72.

The ultimate good made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ, and offered in the gospel, is: “Behold your God!” Moses had pleaded for this gift as he wrestled for God’s presence for the journey to the Promised Land: “Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory’” (Ex. 33:18). King David expressed the uniqueness of this blessing in Psalm 27: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, *to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD* and to inquire in his temple... . You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘*Your face, LORD, do I seek*’” (vv. 4, 8). The memory of these encounters with God sustains David in his afflictions: “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory” (Ps. 63:1–2).

We know that seeing God is in two senses impossible: morally we are not good enough in our fallen condition and would be consumed in the fire of his holiness if we saw him fully for who he is. This is why God showed Moses his “back” and not his face: “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Ex. 33:20). So God put Moses in a rock, passed by, and said, “You shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (v. 23).

But the impossibility of seeing God is not just because of our moral condition. It is also because he is God and we are not. This seems to be the meaning of 1 Timothy 6:16: “[He] alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” Created beings simply cannot look on the Creator and see him for who he is.⁸⁹

Therefore the gazing on God in the Old Testament was mediated. There was something in between. God revealed himself in deeds (Ps. 77:11–13) and visionary forms (e.g., Ezek. 1:28) and nature (Ps. 19:1) and angels (Judg. 13:21–22) and especially by his word: “The LORD *appeared* again at Shiloh, for the LORD *revealed himself* to Samuel at Shiloh *by the word of the LORD*” (1 Sam. 3:21).

The Glory of the Lord Shall Be Revealed—in Jesus Christ

But the day would come when the glory of the Lord would be revealed and seen in a new way. This was the

greatest hope and expectation in the Old Testament. “A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And *the glory of the LORD* shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isa. 40:3–5). “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and *the glory of the LORD* has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and *his glory will be seen upon you*. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isa. 60:1–3). “The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall *see my glory*” (Isa. 66:18).

This day dawned with the coming of Jesus. He was the Word of God and was truly God and was the incarnate manifestation of the glory of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and *we have seen his glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). When he worked his wonders, the glory that people saw, if they believed, was the glory of God. Jesus said to Martha, just before he raised her brother Lazarus from the dead, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would *see the glory of God?*” (John 11:40).

More of God Appeared Than the Prophets Dreamed

The glory of the Lord has risen upon the world more fully and wonderfully than the prophets imagined. They knew that the Messiah would come and that he would manifest the righteousness and faithfulness of God as never before. But they could not see plainly,⁹⁰ as we can see, that in Jesus “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9), that he is in the Father and the Father is in him, and the two are one (John 10:30, 38). They would have been stunned speechless to hear Jesus say to Philip, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9). Or to hear Jesus say the simple and breathtaking words, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

This is why the apostle Paul called Jesus “the Christ who is *God over all*, blessed forever” (Rom. 9:5), and why he described Christ in his incarnation as being “*in the form of God*” (Phil. 2:6).⁹¹ But Jesus did not “*count equality with God* a thing to be grasped.” That is, he did not demand that he hold on to all its manifestations and avoid the humiliation of the incarnation. Rather he was willing to lay down the outward manifestations of deity and take the form of a servant and be born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:6–7). This is why Paul described Jesus’ second coming as “the appearing of the glory of *our great* God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

This is why we find in the book of Hebrews these stunning words about Jesus, “But of the Son [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.’ ... And, ‘You, Lord,

laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (1:8, 10). We may conclude from these and other words about Jesus that the time finally arrived for the revelation of God in a way no one had fully dreamed: God himself, the divine Son, would become man. And human beings would see the glory of God in a way they had never seen it before. Formerly, the Bible says, God spoke by prophets, but in these last days—the days since Jesus came—God “has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature*, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:2–3). When we see Jesus, we see the glory of God as in no other manifestation.⁹²

The Excellency of Christ That Not Everyone Saw

Of course, there were many who saw Jesus and did not see the glory of God. They saw a glutton and a drunkard (Matt. 11:19). They saw Beelzebul, the prince of demons (Matt. 10:25; 12:24). They saw an impostor (Matt. 27:63). “Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear” (Matt. 13:13). The glory of God in the life and ministry of Jesus was not the blinding glory that we will see when he comes the second time with “his face... like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev. 1:16; cf. Luke 9:29). His glory, in his first coming, was the incomparably exquisite array of spiritual, moral, intellectual, verbal, and practical perfections that manifest themselves in a kind of meek miracle-working and unanswerable teaching and humble action that set Jesus apart from all men.⁹³

What I am trying to express here is that the glory of Christ, as he appeared among us, consisted not in one attribute or another, and not in one act or another, but in what Jonathan Edwards called “an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies.”⁹⁴ In a sermon titled “The Excellency of Christ” Edwards took as his text Revelation 5:5–6 where Christ is compared both to a lion and a lamb. His point was that the unique glory of Christ was that such diverse excellencies (lion and lamb) unite in him. These excellencies are so diverse that they “would have seemed to us utterly incompatible in the same subject.”⁹⁵ In other words,

- › we admire him for his glory, but even more because his glory is mingled with humility;
- › we admire him for his transcendence, but even more because his transcendence is accompanied by condescension;
- › we admire him for his uncompromising justice, but even more because it is tempered with mercy;
- › we admire him for his majesty, but even more because it is a majesty in meekness;
- › we admire him because of his equality with God, but even more because as God’s equal he nevertheless has a deep reverence for God;
- › we admire him because of how worthy he was of all good, but even more because this was accompanied by an amazing patience to suffer evil;
- › we admire him because of his sovereign dominion over

the world, but even more because this dominion was clothed with a spirit of obedience and submission;

- › we love the way he stumped the proud scribes with his wisdom, and we love it even more because he could be simple enough to like children and spend time with them;
- › and we admire him because he could still the storm, but even more because he refused to use that power to strike the Samaritans with lightning (Luke 9:54-55) and he refused to use it to get himself down from the cross.

The list could go on and on. But this is enough to illustrate that beauty and excellency in Christ is not a simple thing. It is complex. It is a coming together in one person of the perfect balance and proportion of extremely diverse qualities. And that's what makes Jesus Christ uniquely glorious, excellent, and admirable. The human heart was made to stand in awe of such ultimate excellence. We were made to admire Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Importance of Spiritual Seeing

Seeing the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” is not neutral. One cannot see it and hate it. One cannot see it and reject it. If one claims to see it, only to reject it, one is “seeing” it only the way Satan sees it and wants us to see it. In that case we are still in the grip of his blinding power. No, the kind of seeing that Satan prevents is not the neutral seeing that sets you before a meal with no taste or distaste for what you see. The kind of seeing that Satan cancels (v. 4) and God creates (v. 6) is more like spiritual tasting than rational testing.

This kind of seeing is not the circumstantial inference that the brown fluid in the bottle with the wax comb must be honey. Rather this seeing is the immediate knowledge that it is honey because of putting some on the tongue. There is no series of arguments that awakens the certainty of sweetness. This is what seeing light means. If you are blind, someone may persuade you that the sun is bright. But that persuasion is not what Paul is talking about. When your eyes are opened—that is, when God says, “Let there be light”—the persuasion is of a different kind. That’s what happens in the preaching of the gospel. It’s what happens when God moves with Creator power over the darkness of human hearts.

Jonathan Edwards again helps us see these things more clearly:

There is a twofold understanding or knowledge of good, that God has made the mind of man capable of. The first, that which is merely speculative or notional... . The other is that which consists in the sense of the heart: as when there is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing... . Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness... . When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension... . which is a

far different thing from having a rational opinion that it is excellent.⁹⁶

Beware of thinking that Edwards is making too much of this spiritual seeing. All these thoughts are not dreamed up. They come from long and earnest meditation on the meaning of the word “light” in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 6. It is the “light of the gospel” and the “light of... knowledge.” What must be seen is not mere news and not mere knowledge. What must be seen is *light*. And the light gets its unique quality from the fact that the light of the “gospel of... glory” and the light of “the knowledge of... glory” are one. The light of the glory of Christ, and the light of the glory of God are one light. They will, in the end, prove to be one glory. But the point here is this: the glory of God in Christ, revealed through the gospel, is a real, objective *light* that must be spiritually seen in order for there to be salvation. If it is not seen—spiritually tasted as glorious and precious—Satan still has his way, and there is no salvation.⁹⁷

The Gospel Reveals a Glorious Person

Consider further that Paul speaks here of Christ revealing his glory through the gospel. First there is Christ; then there is the revelation of his glory; then there is the revelation of this glory through the gospel. Let’s ponder these three steps in turn.

First there is Christ. The glory spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:4 is not a vague, impersonal glory, like the glory of sunshine. It is the glory of a *person*. Paul speaks of “the light of the gospel of the glory of *Christ*.” The treasure in this text is not glory *per se*. It is Christ in his glory. It is

the glorious *Christ*. He is the ultimate gift and treasure of the gospel. All other words and deeds are means to this: seeing Jesus Christ—the kind of seeing that is seeing and savoring simultaneously.

Second, there is the revelation of glory—Christ revealing his *glory* through the gospel. Christ's glory, in his first coming, was the incomparably exquisite array of spiritual, moral, intellectual, verbal, and practical perfections that manifest themselves in a kind of meek miracle-working and unanswerable teaching and humble action that set Jesus apart from all men. Each of Jesus' deeds and words and attitudes was glorious, but it is the way they come together in beautiful summation—I called it an exquisite array—that constitutes his glory.

But the climax of the glory of his life on earth was the way it ended. It was as if all the darker colors in the spectrum of glory came together in the most beautiful sunset on Good Friday, with the crucified Christ as the blood-red sun in the crimson sky. And it was as if all the brighter colors in the spectrum of glory came together in the most beautiful sunrise on Easter morning, with the risen Christ as the golden sun shining in full strength. Both the glory of the sunset and the glory of the sunrise shone on the horizon of a lifetime of incomparably beautiful love. This is what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 4:4 when he spoke of "the glory of Christ." It is the glory of a person. But the person displays his glory in words and actions and feelings. The glory is not the glory of a painting or even a sunset. Those are only analogies. They are too static and lifeless.

The spiritual beauty of Christ is Christ-in-action—

Christ loving, and Christ touching lepers, and Christ blessing children, and healing the crippled, and raising the dead, and commanding demons, and teaching with unrivaled authority, and silencing the skeptics, and rebuking his disciples, and predicting the details of his death, and setting his face like flint toward Jerusalem, and weeping over the city, and silent before his accusers, and meekly sovereign over Pilate (“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above,” John 19:11), and crucified, and praying for his enemies, and forgiving a thief, and caring for his mother while in agony, and giving up his spirit in death, and rising from the dead—“No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18). Such is the glory of Christ.

This Is the Gospel: The Revelation of the Glory of God in Christ

Third, there is the gospel—Christ revealing his glory *through the gospel*. The gospel is good news. It is the proclamation of what happened. The first generation of disciples saw these happenings with their own eyes. But for all of us since then, the glory of Christ is mediated through their proclamation. This is the way they said it would be: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you” (1 John 1:1–3).

The glorious person who once walked the earth is now unseen. All his decisive acts are in the invisible past. We do not have any videos or recordings of Jesus Christ on earth. What we have linking us with Christ and with his cross and resurrection is the word of God, and its center, the gospel. “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Gal. 3:1). God has ordained that the true, flesh-and-blood reality of Christ carry across the centuries by means of the Scriptures—and their blazing center, the gospel of Christ crucified and risen.

This is how Paul defined the center of the gospel: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures... he was buried... he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). These are the indispensable deeds of the gospel. Other things are implied, even essential, but these are explicit and essential.

His death and resurrection are where the glory of Christ shines most brightly. There is a divine glory in the way Jesus embraced his death and what he accomplished by it. So Paul says, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Cor. 1:23–24). “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). For those who have eyes to see, there is divine glory in the death of Jesus.

So it is with his resurrection. Paul said that when the human body dies it “is sown in dishonor” and when it is raised “it is raised in glory” (1 Cor. 15:43). It was the glory of God that raised Jesus, and it was the glory of God

into which he was raised: He was “raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4), and then the Father “gave him glory” (1 Pet. 1:21). Jesus himself said after he was raised, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26).

Therefore, when the gospel is preached in its fullness, and by God’s mighty grace Satan’s blinding power is overcome, and God says to the human soul, “Let there be light!” what the soul sees and savors in the gospel is “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” That is the aim of gospel preaching.

The Glory of Christ Is the Glory of God

The glory of Christ, which we see in the gospel, is God’s glory for at least three reasons. The first is that God speaks the light of the glory into being in our hearts. Second Corinthians 4:6 makes this clear: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Two times the verse says that God created the light: the first one referring to the creation of this world (“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’”), and the second one referring to the creation of light in our hearts (“has shone in our hearts to give the light”). Therefore this is God’s light. He creates it. He gives it.

But we must not make the mistake of thinking that because God creates the light in our hearts, it is not the objective light of the glory of the events of Good Friday and Easter. Paul is not saying that God creates light in the heart apart from the gospel events. No, the light God

creates is “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” It is not an independent or different light from what Christ revealed in history. When this light shines in the soul by God’s sovereign creation, what the soul sees is the glory of Christ acting in the gospel.

So we must hold fast to two truths, not just one, even if they seem to be in tension. First, we must hold fast to the truth that the spiritual light Paul speaks about in verse 4 actually streams from the events of the gospel of Christ. The other truth is that God creates this light in the heart. It is not caused by human preaching. It is caused immediately by God. Here is the way Jonathan Edwards describes these two truths:

This light is immediately given by God, and not obtained by natural means... ’Tis not in this affair, as it is in inspiration [of the Scriptures], where new truths are suggested; for there is by this light only given a due apprehension of the same truths that are revealed in the word of God; and therefore it is not given without the word... The word of God... conveys to our minds these and those doctrines; it is the cause of the notion of them in our heads, but not the sense of the divine excellency of them in our hearts. Indeed a person can’t have spiritual light without the word... As for instance, that notion that there is a Christ, and that Christ is holy and gracious, is conveyed to the mind by the word of God: but the sense of the excellency of Christ by reason of that holiness and grace, is nevertheless immediately the work of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸

So the light of the glory of Christ that shines through the gospel is the light of God's glory. And the first reason is that God himself speaks the light of that glory into being in our hearts.

The Glory of Christ Is the Glory of God in the Face of Christ

The second reason that the glory of Christ is the glory of God is that Christ is the image of God. Paul says this explicitly in verse 4 and then differently in verse 6. In verse 4 he refers to “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, *who is the image of God.*” And in verse 6 he refers to “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ.*” Thus he shows that the glory is one glory by saying it in two ways. First, it is the glory of Christ, but Christ is “the image of God,” and so it is also the glory of God. Or again, it is the glory of God, but it is “in the face of Jesus Christ,” so it is also the glory of Christ.

The reference to “the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6) is remarkable. God “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ.*” Combined with the word “image” in verse 4, the emphasis seems to be on visibility, openness, knowability.⁹⁹ God must have an image to be seen. Or another way to say it is that God must have a human face. That image is Christ, and that face is the face of Christ. But the seeing is not the seeing of photography or video. It is the seeing that can happen through the Word and by the Spirit. Jesus did have a literal, physical, human face. That is implied and important. The glory of God shone in the historical, bodily face of Jesus.

His face was the brightness of his person. If you want to know a person, you don't look mainly at his neck or shoulder or knee. You look at his face. The face is the window on the soul. The face is the revelation of the heart. The face carries the emotions of joy or sadness or anger or grief. We have words like smile and frown to express how the heart is manifest in the face. We do not smile or frown with the wrist or the knee. The face represents the person in direct communication. If someone hides his face from us, he does not want to be known. The real, bodily face of Jesus matters. It signifies that he was a real human being and that he was a person revealed in real, historical, physical life.

The Future Face of Christ

This is also important because Jesus was raised from the dead with that same bodily face. Our hope for future fellowship with him is not hope for a ghost-like floating in the same vicinity. It is the hope to see him *face to face*. Paul said this in words that would anticipate this passage: "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). If we see dimly now and later hope to see face to face, then what we are seeing dimly now is "the face of Jesus Christ." That is, we are seeing the glory of the real historical person manifest in words and deeds and feelings as he really was in the body on this earth.

This is what we hope to see when he returns, and it is what Paul says those who do not believe will lose: "They

will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, *away from* the presence [literally: face] of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess. 1:9). But those who believe will “marvel” and “glory” at the face of Christ when he returns (2 Thess. 1:10). We will not be satisfied until the day when we look on Jesus face to face. A real face. A human face. But oh, so much more! A face infinitely radiant with the glory of his might.

The Deepest Reason Why Christ's Glory Is God's Glory

Implicit in what we have said so far about the glory of Christ being the glory of God is that Christ and God are one in essence. They are both God. But we should make this explicit now because its relevance for the meaning of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 4:4–6 is huge. The third reason that the glory of Christ is the glory of God is that Christ is God.¹⁰⁰

Jesus Christ “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). This was not the glory of a creature. This is the glory of a begotten Son—begotten from all eternity, as implied in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” His glory is the glory of God because Jesus Christ is God. The glory of the only Son—not the creature-sons, like us, but the divine Son—is the glory of the Father because they are of the same essence, the same divine Being.¹⁰¹ “In him the whole

fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9; see 1:19). This is the fullest reason why he is called “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). It is also the fullest reason why Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), and, “The Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38), and, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13).¹⁰²

The glory of Christ is the one glory that all his people are waiting for—“our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). Jesus is “our great God.” There is a glory of the Father and a glory of the Son, but they are so united that if you see the one, you see the other. They do not have the same roles in the work of redemption, but the glory manifest in each of their roles shines from them both. No one knows the glory of the Son and is a stranger to the glory of the Father. And no one knows the glory of the Father and is a stranger to the glory of the Son.

NOTES

- 89 I take the passages of Scripture that seem like exceptions to this (like Genesis 32:30, “Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, ‘For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered’”) as statements along the lines of Psalm 27:4, 8 where seeing God’s face means seeing reflections and evidences of his brightness and favor. Some of these reflections of God are so remarkable that witnesses speak of seeing God himself—but we need not think they mean with no mediator at all. John Sailhamer comments on Genesis 32:30, “Jacob’s remark did not necessarily mean that the ‘man’ with whom Jacob wrestled was in fact God. Rather, as with other similar statements (e.g., Jud. 13:22), when one saw the ‘angel of the Lord,’ it was appropriate to say that he had seen the face of God.” Genesis, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 1:210.
- 90 First Peter 1:10–11 says, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.”
- 91 Being in the “form of God” does not mean that he is only in the “form” of God and therefore not really

God. “Form gets its meaning from the following phrase, “equality with God” and from the human counterpart language in Philippians 2:7, “taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” The parallel language is to show that Christ was really man and was really God. See one of the most exhaustive studies of this crucial text, Ralph P. Martin, *CARMEN CHRISTI: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

- 92 When the Bible says that “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1), it means something fundamentally different from when it says that Christ is the radiance of God’s glory. Nowhere does the Bible say or hint that nature is God. But frequently the Bible says and shows that Jesus is God.
- 93 Commenting on Peter’s assurance of faith after seeing the outward glory of Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–9), where, Peter said, “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16), Jonathan Edwards explains the difference between this “outward glory” and the “spiritual glory” that one sees with the eyes of the heart: “If a sight of Christ’s outward glory might give a rational assurance of his divinity, why may not an apprehension of his spiritual glory do so too? Doubtless Christ’s spiritual glory is in itself as distinguishing, and as plainly showing his divinity, as his outward glory; and a great deal more: for his spiritual glory is that

wherein his divinity consists; and the outward glory of his transfiguration showed him to be divine, only as it was a remarkable image or representation of that spiritual glory. Doubtless therefore he that has had a clear sight of the spiritual glory of Christ, may say, ‘I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but have been an eyewitness of his majesty,’ upon as good grounds as the Apostle, when he had respect to the outward glory of Christ, that he had seen.” “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 419.

- 94 Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in *Sermons And Discourses 1734–1738*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 19, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 565.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), 413.
- 97 In the New Testament one of the ways that those who are perishing are distinguished from the saved is by the fact that they have not “seen” God. For example, 1 John 3:6b, “No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.” And 3 John 11, “Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.”

- 98 Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” 416–417.
- 99 Several verses before 2 Corinthians 4:4–6 Paul had spoken of another face, namely, Moses’. Paul pointed out that what Moses had seen on Mount Sinai made his face radiant with glory. But this was a fading glory, and Moses would cover his face so that the fading glory would not be seen. “The Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end... [So Moses] put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end” (2 Cor. 3:7, 13). But Paul said that the glory of Christ in the new covenant would not be a fading glory. “For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory” (2 Cor. 3:11). So it makes sense that Paul would refer to the “face of Jesus Christ” since he is contrasting the ministry of Christ with the ministry of Moses whose face had to be veiled.
- 100 For an excellent and readable introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity (the deity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit as one God yet three Persons) see Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005). For a historical overview of the doctrine see Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2004). For a banquet of biblical reflection see Jonathan Edwards, *Writings on the*

Trinity, Grace, and Faith, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. Sang Hyun Lee, vol. 21 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003).

- 101 For some of my reflections on the oneness of the Father and the Son see “The Pleasure of God in His Son,” in John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2000), 25–45.
- 102 “The attributes expressed in these words are attributed to God himself in [Revelation]1:8 and 21:6. Christ can be the judge of men because he transcends all human experience, sharing the eternal nature of God himself.” George Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 293.

GOD'S GOVERNANCE OF ALL THINGS, GOOD AND EVIL: RECOVERING A GOD-ENTRANCED WORLDVIEW

Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist
(*Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2003*), 37–39; 335–352.

Many of us have gone through a period of deep struggle with the doctrine of God's sovereignty. If we take our doctrines into our hearts where they belong, they can cause upheavals of emotion and sleepless nights. This is far better than toying with academic ideas that never touch real life. The possibility at least exists that out of the upheavals will come a new era of calm and confidence.

It has happened for many of us the way it did for Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was a pastor and a profound theologian in New England in the early 1700s. He was a leader in the First Great Awakening. His major works still challenge great minds of our day. His extraordinary combination of logic and love make him a deeply moving writer.

Again and again when I am dry and weak, I pull down my collection of Edwards's works and stir myself up with one of his sermons.¹⁰³

He recounts the struggle he had with the doctrine of God's sovereignty:

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty... It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God...

But never could I give an account, how, or by what means, I was thus convinced, not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it; but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections.

And there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against it, in the most absolute sense... I have often since had not only a conviction but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so.¹⁰⁴

It is not surprising, then, that Jonathan Edwards struggled earnestly and deeply with the problem that stands before us now. How can we affirm the happiness of God on the basis of his sovereignty when much of what God permits in the world is contrary to his own commands in Scripture? How can we say God is happy when there is so much sin and misery in the world?

Edwards did not claim to exhaust the mystery here. But he does help us find a possible way of avoiding outright contradiction while being faithful to the Scriptures. To put it in my own words, he said that the infinite complexity of the divine mind is such that God has the capacity to look at the world through two lenses. He can look through a narrow lens or through a wide-angle lens.

When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy of the sin for what it is in itself, and he is angered and grieved: “I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 18:32).

But when God looks at a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy of the sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it. He sees it in relation to all the connections and effects that form a pattern, or mosaic, stretching into eternity. This mosaic in all its parts—good and evil—brings him delight.¹⁰⁵

Edwards on the Divine Decrees

Fourteen years ago, Charles Colson wrote, “The western church—much of it drifting, enculturated, and infected

with cheap grace—desperately needs to hear Edwards’s challenge... It is my belief that the prayers and work of those who love and obey Christ in our world may yet prevail as they keep the message of such a man as Jonathan Edwards.”¹⁰⁶ That conviction lies behind my life and my ministry. And I certainly believe it.

Most of us, having only been exposed to one of Edwards’s sermons, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” do not know the real Jonathan Edwards. We don’t know that he knew his heaven even better than his hell and that his vision of the glory of God was just as ravishing as his vision of hell was repulsive—as it should be.

Most of us don’t know

- › that he is considered now, by secular and evangelical historians alike, the greatest religious thinker America has ever produced
- › that he was not only God’s kindling for the Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s, but also its most penetrating analyst and critic
- › that he was driven by a great longing to see the missionary task of the church completed and that his influence on the modern missionary movement is immense because of his *Life of David Brainerd*
- › that he was a rural pastor for twenty-three years in a church of six hundred people
- › that he was a missionary to native Americans for seven years after being asked to leave his church
- › that together with Sarah he reared eleven faithful children

- › that he lived only to fifty-four
- › and died with a library of only three hundred books
- › that his own books are still ministering mightily after 250 years—but not as mightily as they should.

Mark Noll, who teaches history at Notre Dame and has thought much about the work of Edwards, has written:

Since Edwards, American evangelicals have not thought about life from the ground up as Christians because their entire culture has ceased to do so. Edwards’s *piety* continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to *his God-entranced worldview* or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards’s perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy.¹⁰⁷

One of the burdens of my life is the recovery of a “God-entranced worldview.” But what I have seen in more than thirty years of pastoral ministry and six years of teaching experience before that is that people who waver with uncertainty over the problem of God’s sovereignty in the matter of evil usually do not have a God-entranced worldview. For them, now God is sovereign, and now he is not. Now he is in control, and now he is not. Now, when things are going well, he is good and reliable, and when they go bad, well, maybe he’s not. Now he’s the supreme authority of the universe, and now he is in the dock with human prosecutors peppering him with demands that he give an account of himself.

But when a person settles it biblically, intellectually, and emotionally—that God has ultimate control of all things, including evil, and that this is gracious and precious beyond words—then a marvelous stability and depth come into that person’s life, and he develops a “God-entranced worldview.” When a person believes, with the Heidelberg Catechism (Question 27), that “the almighty and everywhere present power of God... upholds heaven and earth, with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand”—when a person believes and cherishes that truth, he has the key to a God-entranced worldview.

So my aim in this section is to commend to you this absolute sovereign control of God over all things, including evil, because it is biblical and because it will help you become stable and deep and God-entranced and God-glorifying in all you think and feel and do.

And when we set our face in this direction, Jonathan Edwards becomes a great help to us because he wrestled with the problems of God’s sovereignty as deeply as anyone. And I want you to know how he resolved some of the difficulties.

So my plan is to lay out for you some of the evidence for God’s control of all things, including evil. Then I will deal with two problems:

1. Is God then the author of sin?
2. And why does he will that there be evil in the world?

I will close with an exhortation that you not waver before the truth of God's sovereignty, but embrace it for the day of your own calamity.

1. Evidence of God's Control

First, then, consider the evidence that God controls all things, including evil. When I speak of evil, I have two kinds in mind, natural and moral. Natural evil we usually refer to as calamities: hurricanes, floods, disease—all the natural ways that death and misery strike. Moral evil we usually refer to as sin: murder, lying, adultery, stealing—all the ways that people rebel against God and fail to love each other. So what we are considering here is that God rules the world in such a way that all calamities and all sin remain in his ultimate control and therefore within his ultimate design and purpose.

An increasingly popular movement afoot today is called “open theism,” which denies that God has exhaustive, definite foreknowledge of the entire future.¹⁰⁸ The denial of God's foreknowledge of human and demonic choices is a buttress to the view that God is not in control of evils in the world and therefore has no purpose in them. God's uncertainty about what humans and demons are going to choose strengthens the case that he does not plan those choices and therefore does not control them or have particular purposes in them.

For example, Gregory Boyd, in his book *God at War*, says, “Divine goodness does not completely control or in any sense will evil.”¹⁰⁹

He argues:

Neither Jesus nor his disciples seemed to understand God's absolute power as absolute control. They prayed for God's will to be done on earth, but this assumes that they understand that God's will was not yet being done on earth (Mt. 6:10). Hence neither Jesus nor his disciples assumed that there had to be a divine purpose behind all events in history. Rather, they understood the cosmos to be populated by a myriad of free agents, some human, some angelic, and many of them evil. The manner in which events unfold in history was understood to be as much a factor of what these agents individually and collectively will as it was a matter of what God himself willed.¹¹⁰

In other words: "The Bible does not assume that every particular evil has a particular godly purpose behind it."¹¹¹ Or as John Sanders puts it:

God does not have a specific divine purpose for each and every occurrence of evil. ... When a two-month-old child contracts a painful, incurable bone cancer that means suffering and death, it is pointless evil. The Holocaust is pointless evil. The rape and dismemberment of a young girl is pointless evil. The accident that caused the death of my brother was a tragedy. God does not have a specific purpose in mind for these occurrences.¹¹²

This is diametrically opposed to what I believe the Bible teaches and what this chapter is meant to commend to you for your earnest consideration.

1.1 Evidence That God Controls Calamity

Consider the evidence that God controls physical evil—that is, calamity. But keep in mind that physical evil and moral evil almost always intersect. Many of our pains happen because human or demonic agents make choices that hurt us. So some of this evidence can serve under both headings: God’s control of calamities and God’s control of sins.

Life and Death

The Bible treats human life as something God has absolute rights over. He gives it and takes it according to his will. We do not own it or have any absolute rights to it. It is a trust for as long as the owner wills for us to have it. To have life is a gift and to lose it is never an injustice from God, whether he takes it at age five or at age ninety-five.

When Job lost his ten children at the instigation of Satan, he would not give Satan the ultimate causality. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). And, lest we think Job was mistaken, the author adds, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (v. 22). “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10).¹¹³

In Deuteronomy 32:39, God says, “There is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” When David made Bathsheba pregnant, the Lord rebuked him by taking the child: Second Samuel 12:15, 18 says, “The LORD afflicted the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David,

and he became sick... . On the seventh day the child died.” Life belongs to God. He owes it to no one. He may give it and take it according to his infinite wisdom. James says, “You do not know what tomorrow will bring. ... For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ... You ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:14–15; see 1 Samuel 2:6–7).

Disease

One of the calamities that threatens life is disease. When Moses was fearful about speaking, God said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11). In other words, behind all disease and disability is the ultimate will of God. Not that Satan is not involved—he is probably always involved in one way or another with destructive purposes (Acts 10:38). But his power is not decisive. He cannot act without God’s permission.

That is one of the points of Job’s sickness. The text makes it plain that when disease came upon Job, “*Satan*... struck Job with loathsome sores” (Job 2:7). His wife urged him to curse God. But Job said, “Shall we receive good *from God*, and shall we not receive evil?” (v. 10). And again the author of the book commends Job by saying, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” In other words: This is a right view of God’s sovereignty over Satan. Satan is real and may have a hand in our calamities, but not the final hand, and not the decisive hand. James makes clear that God had a good purpose in all Job’s afflictions: “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the

purpose (*telos*) of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). So Satan may have been involved, but the ultimate purpose was God’s, and it was “compassionate and merciful.”

This is the same lesson we learn from 2 Corinthians 12:7, where Paul says that his thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan and yet was given for the purpose of his own holiness: “To keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!” (NASB). Now, humility is *not* Satan’s purpose in this affliction. Therefore, the purpose is God’s. Which means that here Satan is being used by God to accomplish his good purposes in Paul’s life.

There is no reason to believe that Satan is ever out of God’s ultimate control. Mark 1:27 says of Jesus, “He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And Luke 4:36 says, “With authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!” In other words, no matter how real and terrible Satan and his demons are in this world, they remain subordinate to the ultimate will of God.

Natural Disasters

Another kind of calamity that threatens life and health is violent weather and conditions of the earth, like earthquakes and floods and monsoons and hurricanes and tornadoes and droughts. These calamities kill hundreds of thousands of people. The testimony of the Scriptures is that God controls the winds and the weather. “He

summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread” (Psalm 105:16). We see this same authority in Jesus. He rebukes the threatening wind and the sea, and the disciples say, “Even wind and the sea obey him” (Mark 4:41).

Repeatedly in the Psalms, God is praised as the One who rules the wind and the lightening. “He makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire” (Psalm 104:4). He “makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses” (Psalm 135:7). “He makes his wind blow and the waters flow... Fire and hail, snow and mist; stormy wind fulfilling his word!” (Psalms 147:18; 148:8; cf. 78:26). Isaac Watts was right: “There’s not a plant or flower below but makes your glories known; and clouds arise and tempests blow by order from your throne.”¹⁴ Which means that all the calamities of wind and rain and flood and storm are owing to God’s ultimate decree. One word from him and the wind and the seas obey.

Destructive Animals

Another kind of calamity that threatens life is the action of destructive animals. When the Assyrians populated Samaria with foreigners, 2 Kings 17:25 says, “Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them.” And in Daniel 6:22, Daniel says to the king, “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths.” Other Scriptures speak of God commanding birds and bears and donkeys and large fish to do his bidding. Which means that all calamities owing to animal life are ultimately in the control of God. He can see a pit bull break loose from his chain and attack a child; and he could, with one word,

command that its mouth be shut. Similarly, he controls the invisible animal and plant life that wreaks havoc in the world: bacteria and viruses and parasites and thousands of microscopic beings that destroy health and life. If God can shut the mouth of a ravenous lion, then he can shut the mouth of a malaria-carrying mosquito and nullify the harmful effects of every other animal that kills.

All Other Kinds of Calamities

Other kinds of calamities could be mentioned, but perhaps we should simply hear the texts that speak in sweeping inclusiveness about God's control covering them all. In Isaiah 45:7 God says, "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these." Amos 3:6 says, "Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?" In Job 42:2, Job confesses, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Nebuchadnezzar says (in Daniel 4:35), "[God] does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" And Paul says, in Ephesians 1:11, that God is the One "who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

And if someone should raise the question of sheer chance and the kinds of things that just seem to happen with no more meaning than the role of the dice, Proverbs 16:33 answers: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." In other words, from God's perspective, there is no such thing as "chance."¹¹⁵ He has

his purposes for every roll of the dice in Las Vegas and every seemingly absurd turn of events in the universe.¹¹⁶

This is why Charles Spurgeon, the London pastor from one hundred years ago, said:

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes—that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens—that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence—the fall of... leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.¹¹⁷

When Spurgeon was challenged that this is nothing but fatalism and stoicism, he replied:

What is fate? Fate is this—*Whatever is, must be*. But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, *Whatever God ordains, must be*; but the wisdom of God never ordains anything without a purpose. Everything in this world is working for some great end. Fate does not say that... There is all the difference between fate and Providence that there is between a man with good eyes and a blind man.¹¹⁸

1.2 God's Control Over Moral Evil

Now consider the evidence for God's control over moral evil—the evil choices that are made in the world. Again,

there are specific instances and texts that make sweeping statements of God's control.

For example, all the choices of Joseph's brothers in getting rid of him and selling him into slavery are seen as sin and yet also as the outworking of God's good purpose. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph says to his brothers when they fear his vengeance, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Gregory Boyd and others, who do not believe that God always has a specific purpose in the evil choices of people (especially since he does not know what those choices are going to be before they make them),¹¹⁹ try to say that God can use the choices people make for his own purposes after they make them and he then knows what they are.¹²⁰

But this will not fit what the text says or what Psalm 105:17 says. Genesis 50:20 says, "You meant evil against me." Evil is a feminine singular noun. Then it says, "God meant it for good." The word *it* is a feminine singular suffix that can only agree with the antecedent feminine singular noun *evil*. And the verb *meant* is the same past tense in both cases. You meant evil against me in the past, as you were doing it. And God meant that very evil, not as evil, but as good in the past as you were doing it. And to make this perfectly clear, Psalm 105:17 says about Joseph's coming to Egypt, "[God] had *sent* a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave." God sent him. God did not find him there owing to evil choices, and then try to make something good come of it. Therefore, this text stands as a kind of paradigm for how to understand the evil will of man within the sovereign will of God.

The death of Jesus offers another example of how God's sovereign will ordains that a sinful act come to pass. Edwards says, "The crucifying of Christ was a great sin; and as man committed it, it was exceedingly hateful and highly provoking to God. Yet upon many great considerations it was the will of God that it should be done."¹²¹ Then he refers to Acts 4:27–28: "Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (see also Isaiah 53:10). In other words, all the sinful acts of Herod, of Pilate, of Gentiles and Jews, were predestined to occur.

Edwards ponders that someone might say that only the sufferings of Christ were planned by God, not the sins against him, to which he responds, "I answer, [the sufferings] could not come to pass but by sin. For contempt and disgrace was one thing he was to suffer. [Therefore] even the free actions of men are subject to God's disposal."¹²²

These specific examples (which could be multiplied by many more instances¹²³) where God purposefully governs the sinful choices of people are generalized in several passages. For example, Romans 9:16: "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (NASB). Man's will is not the ultimately decisive agent in the world; God's is. Proverbs 20:24: "Man's steps are ordained by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?" (NASB). Proverbs 19:21: "Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand" (NASB). Proverbs 21:1: "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns

it wherever he will.” Jeremiah 10:23: “I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps” (RSV).

Therefore, I conclude with Jonathan Edwards: “God decrees all things, even all sins.”¹²⁴ Or, as Paul says in Ephesians 1:11, “[He] works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

2. Two Questions

And I pose two questions as an evangelical who is seeking the glory of God and who longs for a biblical, God-entranced worldview: (1) Is God the author of sin? (2) Why does God ordain that evil exist? What answers did Jonathan Edwards give to each of these questions?

2.1 Is God the Author of Sin?

Edwards answers, “If by ‘the author of sin,’ be meant the sinner, the agent, or the actor of sin, or the doer of a wicked thing... it would be a reproach and blasphemy, to suppose God to be the author of sin. In this sense, I utterly deny God to be the author of sin.”¹²⁵ But, he argues, willing that sin exist in the world is not the same as sinning. God does not commit sin in willing that there be sin. God has established a world in which sin will indeed necessarily come to pass by God’s permission, but not by his “positive agency.”

God is, Edwards says, “the permitter... of sin; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted... will most certainly and infallibly follow.”¹²⁶

He uses the analogy of the way the sun brings about light and warmth by its essential nature, but brings about dark and cold by dropping below the horizon. “If the sun were the proper cause of cold and darkness,” he says, “it would be the fountain of these things, as it is the fountain of light and heat: and then something might be argued from the nature of cold and darkness, to a likeness of nature in the sun.”¹²⁷ In other words, “sin is not the fruit of any positive agency or influence of the most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of his action and energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the want of his influence.”¹²⁸

Thus, in one sense, God wills that what he hates comes to pass as well as what he loves. Edwards says:

God may hate a thing as it is in itself, and considered simply as evil, and yet... it may be his will it should come to pass, considering all consequences... God doesn't will sin as sin or for the sake of anything evil; though it be his pleasure so to order things, that he permitting, sin will come to pass; for the sake of the great good that by his disposal shall be the consequence. His willing to order things so that evil should come to pass, for the sake of the contrary good, is no argument that he doesn't hate evil, as evil: and if so, then it is no reason why he may not reasonably forbid evil as evil, and punish it as such.¹²⁹

This is a fundamental truth that helps explain some perplexing things in the Bible; namely, that God often expresses his will to be one way and then acts to bring

about another state of affairs. God opposes hatred toward his people, yet ordained that his people be hated in Egypt (Gen. 12:3; Psa. 105:25—“He turned their hearts to hate his people.”). He hardens Pharaoh’s heart, but commands him to let his people go (Ex. 4:21; 5:1; 8:1). He makes plain that it is sin for David to take a military census of his people, but ordains that he do it (2 Sam. 24:1, 10). He opposes adultery, but ordains that Absalom should lie with his father’s wives (Ex. 20:14; 2 Sam. 12:11). He forbids rebellion and insubordination against the king, but ordains that Jeroboam and the ten tribes rebel against Rehoboam (Rom. 13:1; 1 Sam. 15:23; 1 Ki. 12:15–16). He opposes murder, but ordains the murder of his Son (Ex. 20:13; Acts 4:28). He desires all men to be saved, but effectually calls only some (1 Tim. 2:4; 1 Cor. 1:26–30; 2 Tim. 2:26).

What this means is that we must learn that God wills things in two different senses. The Bible demands this by the way it speaks of God’s will in different ways. Edwards uses the terms “will of decree” and “will of command.” Edwards explains:

[God’s] will of decree [or sovereign will] is not his will in the same sense as his will of command [or moral will] is. Therefore it is not difficult at all to suppose that the one may be otherwise than the other: his will in both senses is his inclination. But when we say he wills virtue, or loves virtue or the happiness of his creature; thereby is intended that virtue or the creature’s happiness, absolutely and simply considered, is agreeable to the inclination of his nature. His will of decree is his inclination to

a thing not as to that thing absolutely and simply, but with reference to the universality of things. So God, though he hates a thing as it is simply, may incline to it with reference to the universality of things.¹³⁰

This brings us to the final question and already points to the answer.

2.2 Why Does God Ordain That There Be Evil?

It is evident from what has been said that it is not because he delights in evil as evil. Rather, he “wills that evil come to pass... that good may come of it.”¹³¹ What good? And how does the existence of evil serve this good end? Here is Edwards’s stunning answer:

It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God’s glory should be complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionably effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested, and another not at all...

Thus it is necessary, that God’s awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God’s glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of divine

glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they could scarcely shine forth at all.

If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God's holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in his providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God's grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness so ever he bestowed, his goodness would not be so much prized and admired... .

So evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which he made the world; because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and the sense of his love. And if the knowledge of him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect.¹³²

So the answer to the question "Is God less glorious because He ordained that evil be?" is *no*, just the opposite. God is more glorious for having conceived and created and governed a world like this with all its evil. The effort to absolve him by denying his foreknowledge of sin or by denying his control of sin is a fatal error and a great dishonor to his word and his wisdom. Evangelicals who

are seeking the glory of God, look well to the teaching of your churches and your schools. But most of all, look well to your souls.

If you would see God's glory and savor his glory and magnify his glory in this world, do not remain wavering before the sovereignty of God in the face of great evil. Take his Book in your hand, plead for his Spirit of illumination and humility and trust, and settle this matter so that you might be unshakable in the day of your own calamity. My prayer is that what I have written will sharpen and deepen your God-entranced worldview and that in the day of your loss you will be like Job, who, when he lost all his children, fell down and worshiped and said, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD."

NOTES

- 103 For the complete list of Edwards's works from Yale University Press, see Appendix 2: Edwards's Influence on Piper: A Bibliography, by Justin Taylor.
- 104 Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, ed. C. H. Faust and T. H. Johnson (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962), 58–59.
- 105 Edwards treats this problem by distinguishing two kinds of willing in God (which is implied in what I have said). God's "will of command" (or revealed will) is what he commands in Scripture (Thou shalt not kill, etc.). His "will of decree" (or secret will, or sovereign will) is what he infallibly brings to pass in the world. Edwards's words are complex, but they are worth the effort if you love the deep things of God:

When a distinction is made between God's revealed will and his secret will, or his will of command and decree, "will" is certainly in that distinction taken in two senses. His will of decree, is not his will in the same sense as his will of command is. Therefore, it is no difficulty at all to suppose, that the one may be otherwise than the other: his will in both senses is his inclination. But when we say he wills virtue, or loves virtue, or the happiness of his creature; thereby is intended, that virtue, or the creature's happiness, absolutely and

simply considered, is agreeable to the inclination of his nature.

His will of decree is his inclination to a thing, not as to that thing absolutely and simply, but with respect to the universality of things, that have been, are, or shall be. So God, though he hates a thing as it is simply, may incline to it with reference to the universality of things. Though he hates sin in itself, yet he may will to permit it, for the greater promotion of holiness in this universality, including all things, and at all times. So, though he has no inclination to a creature's misery, considered absolutely, yet he may will it, for the greater promotion of happiness in this universality.

Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Divine Decrees," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 527–528.

- 106 Charles Colson, "Introduction," in Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1984), xxiii, xxxiv.
- 107 Mark Noll, "Jonathan Edwards' Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought," *Reformed Journal* (February 1983): 26, emphasis added. Noll summarized Edwards's unusual juxtapositions in another place:

Although his biography presents many dramatic contrasts, these were in reality only different facets of a common allegiance to a sovereign God. Thus,

Edwards both preached ferocious hell-fire sermons and expressed lyrical appreciations of nature because the God who created the world in all its beauty was also perfect in holiness. Edwards combined herculean intellectual labors with child-like piety because he perceived God as both infinitely complex and blissfully simple. In his Northampton church his consistent exaltation of divine majesty led to very different results—he was first lionized as a great leader and then dismissed from his pulpit. Edwards held that the omnipotent deity required repentance and faith from his human creatures so he proclaimed both the absolute sovereignty of God and the urgent responsibilities of men.

(Caption under Edwards's portrait in *Christian History* 4, no. 4, p. 3.)

- 108 For responses to this dangerous theology, see Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000); John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001); and *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003).
- 109 Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1997), 20, emphasis added.
- 110 *Ibid.*, 53.

- 111 Ibid., 166.
- 112 John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 262.
- 113 Amazingly, Boyd thinks that Job's theology is incorrect here, though his heart was in the right place. He writes, "Yahweh commends Job for speaking truth from his heart... But this is not the same as endorsing Job's theology." Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 404, emphasis added. But surely when God says that "in all this Job did not sin with his lips," the point is not merely that his heart was in the right place, but rather that his words—from his lips—were pleasing to God.
- 114 Isaac Watts, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God," verse 3.
- 115 See R. C. Sproul, *Not a Chance: The Myth of Chance in Modern Science and Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994). As he says, "If chance is, God is not. If God is, chance is not. The two cannot coexist by reason of the impossibility of the contrary" (3).
- 116 Commenting on Proverbs 16:33, Charles Bridges writes:

The instructive lesson to learn is that there is no blank in the most minute circumstances. Things, not only apparently contingent, but depending

upon a whole train of contingencies, are exactly fulfilled. The name of a King (1 Kings 13:2), or of a deliverer (Isaiah 44:28), is declared many hundred years before their existence—before therefore it could be known to any—save the Omniscient Governor of the universe—whether such persons would exist. The falling of a hair or a sparrow is directed, no less than the birth and death of princes, or the revolutions of empires (Matthew 10:29–30). Everything is a wheel of Providence. Who directed the Ishmaelites on their journey to Egypt at the very moment that Joseph was cast into the pit (Genesis 37:25)? Who guided Pharaoh’s daughter to the stream, just when the ark, with its precious deposit, was committed to the water (Exodus 2:3–5)? What gave Ahasuerus a sleepless night, that he might be amused with the records of his Kingdom (Esther 6:1)? Who prepared the whale at the very time and place that Jonah’s lot was cast (Jonah 1:17)? Who can fail to see the hand of God, most wonderful in the most apparently casual contingencies, overruling all second causes to fulfill his will, while they work their own? “When kingdoms are tossed up and down like a tennis-ball (Isaiah 22:18); not one event can fly out of the bounds of his Providence. The smallest are not below it. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without it. Nor a hair, but it is numbered by it.

Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974, orig. 1846), 253.

- 117 Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Banner of Truth), 493.
- 118 *Ibid.*, 201–202.
- 119 “God can’t foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people he creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions.” Gregory Boyd, *Letters from A Skeptic* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Victor, 1994), 30. In *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), Boyd writes that “future free decisions do not exist (except as possibilities) for God to know until free agents make them” (120).
- 120 “As the Lord did with Joseph’s evil brothers, and as Christ did with Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ that originated from Satan, God can sometimes use the evil wills of personal beings, human or divine, to his own ends (Genesis 50:20; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10). This by no means entails that there is a divine will behind every activity of an evil spirit—for usually we find that God and evil spirits (whether called angels, gods or demons) are in real conflict with each other.” Gregory Boyd, *God at War*, 154. I would observe that “real conflict” does not rule out the ultimate control of God or God having good purposes in all events. Satan’s purposes in Paul’s “thorn” and in the betrayal and death of Jesus were diametrically opposed to God’s purposes.
- 121 Jonathan Edwards, “Concerning the Divine Decrees,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 529.

- 122 Ibid., 534
- 123 For example, Exodus 4:21; 7:3; Deuteronomy 2:30; Judges 9:22–24; 14:4; 1 Samuel 18:10–11; 2 Samuel 12:11; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Kings 19:7, 37; Psalm 105:25; Jeremiah 52:1–3; John 15:24–26; Romans 9:18; 2 Corinthians 1:8–9; Hebrews 12:4–11; 1 Peter 3:17; 4:19; Revelation 17:17. Commenting on Deuteronomy 2:30 and the hardening of Sihon, Old Testament scholar R. K. Harrison said, “Because the Ancient Hebrews ascribed all causality to God as the author of all created things, it was both natural and proper for them to see the response of Sihon in the light of the larger activity of God.” R. K. Harrison, “Deuteronomy,” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970) 209–10. See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 399–403, where Edwards discusses texts showing God as the disposer and orderer of sin.
- 124 Edwards, “Concerning the Divine Decrees,” 534.
- 125 Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 399.
- 126 Ibid.
- 127 Ibid., 404.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 Ibid., 407–409.

130 Edwards, “Concerning the Divine Decrees,” 528.

131 Ibid., 542.

132 Ibid., 528.

THE JUSTICE OF HELL: HOW IS ETERNAL SUFFERING PROPORTIONABLE TO A LIFE OF SINNING?

Future Grace (*Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012*),
262–264; Desiring God, (*Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah,*
2003), 58–59.

There will come a time when the patience of God is over. When God has seen his people suffer for the allotted time and the appointed number of martyrs is complete (Rev. 6:11), then vengeance will come from heaven. Paul describes it like this: “It [is] just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:6–8). Notice that God’s vengeance on our offenders is experienced by us as “relief.” In other words, the judgment on “those who afflict” us is a form of *grace* toward us.

Jesus taught a similar truth in the parable of the unjust judge. He told the story of a widow who “kept coming to [the judge] and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary’” (Luke 18:3). Finally the judge relented and gave her what she needed. Jesus interprets the story: “Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily” (Luke 18:7–8). So again God’s future justice for the opponents of his people is pictured as relief—like the relief of a widow in distress. Future justice for God’s enemies is pictured as *future grace* for God’s people.

Perhaps the most remarkable picture of judgment as grace is the picture of Babylon’s destruction in Revelation 18. At her destruction, a great voice from heaven cries, “*Rejoice over her*, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!” (Rev. 18:20). Then a great multitude is heard saying, “*Hallelujah!* Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants” (Rev. 19:1–2).

Heaven Will Not Be Blackmailed

When God’s patience has run its long-suffering course, and this age is over, and judgment comes on the enemies of God’s people, the saints will not disapprove of God’s justice. They will not cry out against him. On the contrary, the apostle John calls on them to “rejoice” and to

shout “hallelujah!” This means that the final destruction of the unrepentant will not be experienced as a misery for God’s people. The unwillingness of others to repent will not hold the affections of the saints hostage. Hell will not be able to blackmail heaven into misery. God’s judgment will be approved, and the saints will experience the vindication of truth as a great grace.

Over two hundred fifty years ago, Jonathan Edwards commented on Revelation 18:20 with these words: “Indeed [the saints] are not called upon to rejoice in having their revenge glutted, but in seeing justice executed, and in seeing the love and tenderness of God towards them, manifested in his severity towards their enemies.”¹³³ This is what is stressed in Revelation 19:2, “His judgments are true and just.” Thus Edwards’s answer is that God’s final judgment is a *future grace* to the people of God. He says, “It is often mentioned in Scripture, as an instance of the great love of God to his people, that his wrath is so awakened, when they are wronged and injured. Thus Christ hath promised... ‘if any man offend one of his little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea’ (Matthew 18:6).”¹³⁴

Edwards explains further “why the sufferings of the wicked will not cause grief to the righteous, but the contrary.” He says,

Negatively; it will not be because the saints in heaven are the subjects of any ill disposition; but on the contrary, this rejoicing of theirs will be the fruit of an amiable and excellent disposition: it will

be the fruit of a perfect holiness and conformity to Christ, the holy Lamb of God. The devil delights in the misery of men from cruelty, and from envy and revenge, and because he delights in misery, for its own sake, from a malicious disposition.

But it will be from exceedingly different principles, and for quite other reasons, that the just damnation of the wicked will be an occasion of rejoicing to the saints in glory. It will not be because they delight in seeing the misery of others absolutely considered. The damned, suffering divine vengeance, will be no occasion of joy to the saints merely as it is the misery of others, or because it is pleasant to them to behold the misery of others merely for its own sake... It is not to be understood, that they are to rejoice in having their revenge glutted, but to rejoice in seeing the justice of God executed, and in seeing his love to them in executing it on his enemies.

Positively; the sufferings of the damned will be no occasion of grief to the heavenly inhabitants, as they will have no love nor pity to the damned as such. It will be no argument of want of a spirit of love in them, that they do not love the damned; for the heavenly inhabitants will know that it is not fit that they should love them, because they will know then, that God has no love to them, nor pity for them.¹³⁵

Edwards raises the objection that, since it is right and good

that we grieve over the faithlessness and lostness of men now in this age (Rom. 9:1–3; Luke 19:41), surely it would be right to feel the same in the age to come. He answers,

It is now our duty to love all men, though they are wicked; but it will not be a duty to love wicked men hereafter. Christ, by many precepts in his word has made it our duty to love all men. We are commanded to love wicked men, and our enemies and persecutors, but this command doth not extend to the saints in glory, with respect to the damned in hell. Nor is there the same reason that it should. We ought now to love all and even wicked men; we know not but that God loves them. However wicked any man is, yet we know not but that he is one whom God loved from eternity; we know not but that Christ loved him with a dying love, had his name upon his heart before the world was, and had respect to him when he endured those bitter agonies on the cross. We know not but that he is to be our companion in glory to all eternity... .

We ought now to seek and be concerned for the salvation of wicked men, because now they are capable subjects of it... . It is yet a day of grace with them and they have the offers of salvation. Christ is as yet seeking their salvation; he is calling upon them inviting and wooing them; he stands at the door and knocks. He is using many means with them, is calling them, saying *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?* ... But it will not be so in another world: there wicked men will be no longer capable subjects

of mercy. The saints will know, that it is the will of God the wicked should be miserable to all eternity. It will therefore cease to be their duty any more to seek their salvation, or to be concerned about their misery. On the other hand it will be their duty to rejoice in the will and glory of God. It is not our duty to be sorry that God hath executed just vengeance on the devils, concerning whom the will of God in their eternal state is already known to us.¹³⁶

The Eternal Misery of Hell

Hell is a place of torment. It is not merely the absence of pleasure. It is not annihilation.¹³⁷ Jesus repeatedly describes it as an experience of fire. “Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:22). “It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire” (Matt. 18:9). “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47–48). He warned often that there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

Not only is it a place of torment; it is also everlasting. Hell is not remedial, contrary to what many popular writers are saying these days.¹³⁸ Jesus closes the Parable of the Last Judgment with these words: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’... These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:41, 46). The “punishment” is eternal the same way the “life” is eternal.

Another evidence that hell is everlasting is the teaching of Jesus that there is sin that will not be forgiven in the age to come: “Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matt. 12:32). If hell is remedial and will someday be emptied of all sinners, then they would have to be forgiven. But Jesus says there is sin that will never be forgiven.

John sums up the terrible realities of torment and endlessness in Revelation 14:11: “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.”

Therefore, hell is just. Some have objected that an everlasting punishment is out of proportion to the seriousness of the sin committed. But this is not true, because the seriousness of our sin is infinite. Consider the explanation of Jonathan Edwards:

The crime of one being despising and casting contempt on another, is proportionably more or less heinous, as he was under greater or less obligations to obey him. And therefore if there be any being that we are under infinite obligations to love, and honor, and obey, the contrary towards him must be infinitely faulty.

Our obligation to love, honor, and obey any being is in proportion to his loveliness, honorableness, and authority... But God is a being infinitely lovely, because he hath infinite excellency and beauty...

So sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and

so deserving infinite punishment... The eternity of the punishment of ungodly men renders it infinite... and therefore renders no more than proportionable to the heinousness of what they are guilty of.¹³⁹

When every human being stands before God on the Day of judgment, God would not have to use one sentence of Scripture to show us our guilt and the appropriateness of our condemnation. He would need only to ask three questions:

1. Was it not plain in nature that everything you had was a gift and that you were dependent on your Maker for life and breath and everything?
2. Did not the judicial sentiment¹⁴⁰ in your own heart always hold other people guilty when they lacked the gratitude they should have had in response to a kindness you performed?
3. Has your life been filled with gratitude and trust toward me in proportion to my generosity and authority?

Case closed.

NOTES

- 133 Jonathan Edwards, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 207–208.
- 134 *Ibid.*, 210.
- 135 *Ibid.*, 208–210.
- 136 *Ibid.*
- 137 For the biblical support against annihilationism and in support of hell as eternal conscious torment, see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, second edition, revised and expanded (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), chapter 4, and the bibliography cited therein.
- 138 Among evangelicals, the reputation of George MacDonald’s works has promoted this notion of hell as remedial and not eternal. For example, MacDonald’s sermon “Justice,” in *Creation in Christ*, ed. Rolland Hein (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 1976), 63–81, argues vehemently against the orthodox view of hell:

Mind I am not saying it is not right to punish [wicked people]; I am saying that justice is not, never can be, satisfied by suffering—nay, cannot have any satisfaction in or from suffering... Such justice as Dante’s keeps wickedness alive in its most terrible

forms. The life of God goes forth to inform, or at least give a home to, victorious evil. Is he not defeated every time that one of these lost souls defies him? God is triumphantly defeated, I say, throughout the hell of his vengeance. Although against evil, it is but the vain and wasted cruelty of a tyrant.... Punishment is for the sake of amendment and atonement. God is bound by his love to punish sin in order to deliver his creature: He is bound by his justice to destroy sin in his creation. (71–72)

J.I. Packer discusses the contemporary forms of this view in “Good Pagans and God’s Kingdom,” *Christianity Today* 17 (17 January 1986), 22–25 and in “The Problem of Eternal Punishment,” in *The J.I. Packer Collection*, selected and introduced by Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 210–226.

- 139 Jonathan Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 669.
- 140 I want to express gratitude and deep admiration for Edward John Carnell’s penetrating analysis of “the judicial sentiment” and its relation to the existence of God. The judicial sentiment is the moral faculty that is duly offended when we are mistreated. Here is a taste of his words from the profound and beautiful book *Christian Commitment* (New York: Macmillan, 1957):

Whereas conscience accuses the self the judicial sentiment accuses others. The direction of accusation is the important thing. Conscience monitors one's own moral conduct, while the judicial sentiment monitors the moral conduct of others.

Furthermore, conscience is subject to social and cultural conditioning, whereas the judicial sentiment is not. All normal men, past, present, and future, experience an aroused judicial sentiment whenever they are personally mistreated. (110)

An aroused judicial sentiment is merely heaven's warning that the image of God is being outraged. Cultural conditioning may alter the direction of the judicial sentiment, but it does not alter the faculty itself. (112)

The voice of the judicial sentiment is the voice of God. (136)

HERALDING A GLORIOUS GOD: TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF EDWARDS'S PREACHING

The Supremacy of God in Preaching, *revised edition*
(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, a division of Baker
Publishing Group, 2004), 83–105.

What sort of preaching results from Edwards's vision of God? What sort of preaching did God use to ignite the Great Awakening in New England during Edwards's ministry at Northampton? Spiritual awakening is the sovereign work of God, to be sure. But he uses means, especially preaching. "Of his own will he brought us forth *by the word of truth*" (James 1:18). "It pleased God *through the folly of what we preach* to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

I have tried to capture the essence of Edwards's preaching in ten characteristics. But I am so convinced of the value of these characteristics for our own day that I am going to call them ten characteristics of good preaching and present them as challenges to you, not just as facts about

Edwards. I have gleaned these characteristics both from the way he preached and from his occasional comments about preaching.

1. Stir Up Holy Affections

Good preaching aims to stir up “holy affections”—things like hate for sin, delight in God, hope in his promises, gratitude for his mercy, desire for holiness, tender compassion. The reason for this is that the absence of holy affections in Christians is odious.

The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.¹⁴¹

Elsewhere Edwards remarked, “If true religion lies much in the *affections*, we may infer, that *such a way of preaching the word...* as has a tendency deeply to affect the hearts of those who attend... is much to be desired.”¹⁴²

Of course, the dignified clergy in Boston saw great danger in targeting the emotions like this. For example, Charles Chauncy charged that it was “a plain stubborn Fact, that the Passions have, generally, in these Times, been apply’d to, as though the main Thing in Religion was to throw them into Disturbance.”¹⁴³ Edwards’s answer was crafted and balanced.

I don’t think ministers are to be blamed for raising the affections of their hearers too high, if that

which they are affected with be only that which is worthy of affection, and their affections are not raised beyond a proportion to their importance... . I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with. I know it has long been fashionable to despise a very earnest and pathetic way of preaching; and they, and they only, have been valued as preachers, that have shown the greatest extent of learning, and strength of reason, and correctness of method and language: but I humbly conceive it has been for want of understanding, or duly considering human nature, that such preaching has been thought to have the greatest tendency to answer the ends of preaching; and the experience of the present and past ages abundantly confirms the same.¹⁴⁴

Probably in our day someone would ask Edwards why he does not make external deeds of love and justice his goal rather than just the affections of the heart. The answer is that he does make behavior his aim, namely, by aiming to transform the spring of behavior—the affections. He chooses this strategy for two reasons. One is that a good tree can't bear bad fruit. The longest section of his great book *Religious Affections* is devoted to proving this thesis: "Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice."¹⁴⁵ Edwards aimed at the affections because they are the springs of all godly action. Make the tree good and its fruit will be good.

The other reason Edwards aimed to stir up holy affections is that “no external fruit is good, which does not proceed from such exercises.”¹⁴⁶ Outward acts of benevolence and piety that do not flow from the new and God-given affections of the heart, which delight to depend on God and seek his glory, are only legalism and have no value in honoring God. If you give your body to be burned and have not love, it profits nothing (1 Cor. 13:3).

Therefore, good preaching aims to stir up holy affections in those who hear. It targets the heart.

2. Enlighten the Mind

Yes, Edwards said, “Our people don’t so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching that has the greatest tendency to do this.”¹⁴⁷ But there is a world of difference between the way Edwards aims to move the hearts of his people and the way relational, psychologically oriented preachers today might try to move their hearers.

Edwards preached an ordination sermon in 1744 on the text about John the Baptist, “He was a burning and a shining light” (John 5:35 KJV). His main point was that a preacher must burn and shine. There must be heat in the heart and light in the mind—and no more heat than justified by the light.

If a minister has light without heat, and entertains his auditory [hearers] with learned discourses, without a savour of the power of godliness, or any appearance of fervency of spirit, and zeal for God and the good of souls, he may gratify itching ears,

and fill the heads of his people with empty notions; but it will not be very likely to reach their hearts, or save their souls. And if, on the other hand, he be driven on with a fierce and intemperate zeal, and vehement heat, without light, he will be likely to kindle the like unhallowed flame in his people, and to fire their corrupt passions and affections; but will make them never the better, nor lead them a step towards heaven, but drive them apace the other way.¹⁴⁸

Heat *and* light. Burning and shining! It is crucial to bring light to the mind, because affections that do not rise from the mind's apprehension of truth are not holy affections. For example, he says:

That faith, which is without spiritual light, is not the faith of the children of the light and of the day, but the presumption of the children of darkness. And therefore to press and urge them to believe, without any spiritual light or sight, tends greatly to help forward the delusions of the prince of darkness.¹⁴⁹

He speaks even more strongly when he says:

Suppose the religious affections of persons indeed arise from a strong persuasion of the truth of the Christian religion; their affections are not the better, unless it be a *reasonable* persuasion or conviction. By a reasonable conviction, I mean a conviction founded on *real evidence*, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction.¹⁵⁰

So the good preacher will make it his aim to give his hearers “good reason” and “just ground” for the affections he is trying to stir up. Edwards can never be brought forward as an example of one who manipulated emotions. He treated his hearers as creatures of reason and sought to move their hearts only by giving the light of truth to the mind.

Therefore, he taught that it is

very profitable for ministers in their preaching, to endeavor clearly and distinctly to explain the doctrines of religion, and unravel the difficulties that attend them, and to confirm them with strength of reason and argumentation, and also to observe some easy and clear method and order in their discourses, for the help of the understanding and memory.¹⁵¹

The reason for this is that good preaching aims to enlighten the mind of the hearers with divine truth. It was a wonderful combination that God used to awaken New England over 250 years ago: heat and light, burning and shining, head and heart, deep doctrine and deep delight. May not God use this means again today as we seek to enlighten the mind and inflame the heart?

3. Saturate with Scripture

I say that good preaching is “saturated with Scripture” and not “based on Scripture” because Scripture is more (not less) than the basis for good preaching. Good preaching does not sit on Scripture like a basis and say other things. It oozes Scripture.

Again and again my advice to beginning preachers is, “Quote the text! Quote the text! Say the actual words of the text again and again. Show the people where your ideas are coming from.” Most people do not easily see the connections a preacher sees between his words and the words of the text he is preaching from. They must be shown again and again by saturating the sermon with actual quotes from Scripture. Edwards expended great energy to write out whole passages in his sermon manuscripts that gave support for what he was saying. He quoted verse after verse that cast light on his theme. The reason Bible passages should saturate our sermons, according to Edwards, is that “they are as it were the beams of the light of the Sun of righteousness; they are the light by which ministers must be enlightened, and the light they are to hold forth to their hearers; and they are the fire whence their hearts and the hearts of their hearers must be enkindled.”¹⁵²

He looked back once on his early pastoral experience and said:

I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it, every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet and powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading; often dwelling long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it; yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders.¹⁵³

One has to stand in awe of how thorough Edwards's knowledge of the whole Bible was, especially in view of the fact that he was also conversant with the best theological, moral, and philosophical learning of his day. As a student he made this life resolution: "Resolved, To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same."¹⁵⁴ "Steadily," "constantly," "frequently"—this was the source of the wealth of Scripture in Edwards's sermons.

His practice in study was to take hundreds of notes on the Scriptures and pursue any thread of insight as far as he could.

My method of study, from my first beginning the work of the ministry, has been very much by writing; applying myself, in this way, to improve every important hint; pursuing the clue to my utmost, when anything in reading, meditation, or conversation, has been suggested to my mind, that seemed to promise light in any weighty point; thus penning what appeared to me my best thoughts, on innumerable subjects, for my own benefit.¹⁵⁵

His pen was his exegetical eye. Like Calvin (who said this in the introduction to the *Institutes*) he learned as he wrote and he wrote as he learned. In what he saw by this method he makes most of our hurried meditations on Scripture look very superficial.

The reason I love to read Edwards is the same reason I love to read the Puritans: It's like reading the Bible through the eyes of one who understands it deeply and

feels it with all his heart. Good preaching (whatever name you put on it) is saturated with Scripture. And therefore, as Edwards says, the minister “must be well studied in divinity, well acquainted with the written word of God [and] mighty in the Scriptures.”¹⁵⁶

4. Employ Analogies and Images

Experience and Scripture teach that the heart is most powerfully touched not when the mind is entertaining abstract ideas, but when it is filled with vivid images of amazing reality. Edwards was, to be sure, a metaphysician and a philosopher of the highest order. He believed in the importance of theory. But he knew that abstractions kindled few affections. And new affections are the goal of preaching. So Edwards strained to make the glories of heaven look irresistibly beautiful and the torments of hell look intolerably horrible. And he sought to compare abstract theological truth to common events and experiences.

Sereno Dwight says that “those who are conversant with the writings of Edwards, need not be informed that all his works, even the most metaphysical, are rich in illustration, or that his sermons abound with imagery of every kind, adapted to make a powerful and lasting impression.”¹⁵⁷

In his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards referred to Revelation 19:15, which contains the phrase, “the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (KJV). He says:

The words are exceedingly terrible. If it had only been said, “the wrath of God,” the words would

have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is “the fierceness and wrath of God.” The fury of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! O how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?¹⁵⁸

There is Edwards’s challenge to every preacher of the Word of God. Who can find images and analogies that come anywhere near creating the profound feelings we ought to have when we consider realities like hell and heaven? We dare not fault Edwards’s images of hell unless we are prepared to fault the Bible. For in his own view (and I surely think he was right) he was only groping for language that might come close to what awesome realities are contained in biblical phrases like “the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

Today we do just the opposite. We grope for circumlocutions of hell and create images as far from the horror of the biblical phrases as we can. Partly as a result, our attempts to make heaven look attractive and make grace look amazing often appear extremely pitiful. We would do well to labor with Edwards to find images and analogies that produce impressions in our people comparable to reality.

But it was not only heaven and hell that pushed Edwards to find analogies and images. He used the analogy of a surgeon with a scalpel to explain some kinds of preaching. He used the similarity of a human embryo to an animal embryo to show that at conversion a new life with all its new affections may be there but not yet show itself as fully distinct from the unregenerate. He pictured the pure heart with remaining impurities as a vat

of fermenting liquor trying to get clean of all sediment. And he saw holiness in the soul as a garden of God with all manner of pleasant flowers. His sermons abound with images and analogies to give light to the understanding and heat to the affections.

5. Use Threat and Warning

Edwards did know his hell, but he knew his heaven even better. I can vividly recall the winter evenings in 1971–72 when my wife Noël and I sat on our couch in Munich, Germany, reading together Jonathan Edwards’s sermon “Heaven Is a World of Love.” What a magnificent vision! Surely if our people saw us preachers painting such pictures of glory and panting after God the way Edwards did, there would be a new awakening in the churches.

But those who have the largest hearts for heaven shudder most deeply at the horrors of hell. Edwards was fully persuaded that hell was real. “This doctrine is indeed awful and dreadful, yet ’tis of God.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, he esteemed the threats of Jesus as the strident tones of love. “Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:22). “It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matt. 5:30). “Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). Edwards could not remain silent where Jesus was so vocal. Hell awaits every unconverted person. Love must warn them with the threats of the Lord.

The use of threat or warning in preaching to the saints is rare today for at least two reasons: First, it produces guilt and fear, which are considered to be unproductive.

Second, it seems theologically inappropriate because the saints are secure and don't need to be warned or threatened. Edwards rejected both reasons. When fear and guilt correspond with the true state of things, it is reasonable and loving to stir them up. And, while the saints are secure in the omnipotent keeping power of God, their security proves itself in their willingness to give heed to biblical warnings and persevere in godliness. "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Edwards said that God set things up for the church in such a way "that when their *love* decays... *fear* should arise. They need *fear* then to restrain them from sin, [and] to excite them to care for the good of their souls. But hath so ordered that when *love* rises... then fear should vanish, and be driven away."¹⁶⁰

So on the one hand, Edwards says, "God's wrath and future punishment are proposed to all sorts of men, as motives to... obedience, not only to the wicked, but also to the godly."¹⁶¹ And on the other hand, he says, "Holy love and hope are principles vastly more efficacious upon the heart, to make it tender, and to fill it with a dread of sin... than [is] a slavish fear of hell."¹⁶² Preaching about hell is never an end in itself. You can't frighten anyone into heaven. Heaven is for people who love purity, not for people who simply loathe pain. Nevertheless, Edwards said, "Some talk of it as an unreasonable thing to think to fright persons to heaven; but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell—tis a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house on fire."¹⁶³

Therefore, good preaching will deliver the biblical

messages of warning to congregations of saints just like Paul did when he said to the Galatians, “I warn you... that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21). Or when he said, “Do not be arrogant, but fear” (Rom. 11:20, author’s translation). Or when Peter said, “If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile”(1 Pet. 1:17). Such warnings are the somber tones that help good preaching to display with lavish colors the magnificent promises and pictures of heaven like Paul did when he said to the Ephesians that in the coming ages God will “show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

6. Plead for a Response

Can a Calvinist like Edwards really plead with people to flee hell and cherish heaven? Do not total depravity and unconditional election and irresistible grace make such pleading inconsistent?

Edwards learned his Calvinism from the Bible and therefore was spared many errors in his preaching. He did not infer that unconditional election or irresistible grace or supernatural regeneration or the inability of the natural man led to the conclusion that the use of pleading was inappropriate. He said, “Sinners... should be earnestly invited to come and accept of a Savior, and yield their hearts unto him, with all the winning, encouraging arguments for them... that the Gospel affords.”⁷⁶⁴

I recall hearing a preacher in the Reformed tradition

several years ago preach from 1 Corinthians 16, which ends with the fearful threat, “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed” (v. 22). He alluded to it in passing, but there was no yearning or pleading with the people to love Christ and to escape the terrible curse. I marveled that this could be. There is a tradition of hyper-Calvinism that says that God’s purpose to save the elect gives preachers warrant to invite to Christ only those who give evidence that they are already quickened and drawn by the Spirit. It breeds a kind of preaching that only informs but does not plead with sinners to repent. Edwards, like Spurgeon after him, knew that this was not authentic Calvinism; it was contrary to Scripture and unworthy of the Reformed tradition.

In fact, Edwards wrote a whole book, *The Freedom of the Will*, to show that

God’s moral government over mankind, His treating them as moral agents, making them the objects of His commands, counsels, calls, warnings, exhortations, promises, threatenings, rewards and punishments, is not inconsistent with a determining disposal of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe.¹⁶⁵

In other words, pleading with our listeners to make a response to our preaching is not at odds with a high doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

When we preach, to be sure, it is God who effects the results for which we long. But that does not rule out earnest appeals for our people to respond. For as Edwards explains:

We are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some, and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what he produces, viz. our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active.

In the Scriptures the same things are represented as from God and from us. God is said to convert [2 Tim. 2:25], and men are said to convert and turn [Acts 2:38]. God makes a new heart [Ezek. 36:26], and we are commanded to make us a new heart [Ezek. 18:31]. God circumcises the heart [Deut. 30:6], and we are commanded to circumcise our own hearts [Deut. 10:16] ... These things are agreeable to that text, “God worketh in you both to will and to do.”⁶⁶

Therefore, Edwards pled with his people to respond to the Word of God and be saved. “Now, if you have any sort of prudence for your own salvation, and have not a mind to go to hell, improve this season! Now is the accepted time! Now is the day of salvation... Do not harden your hearts at such a day as this!” Almost every sermon has a long section called “Application” where Edwards screws in the implications of his doctrine and presses for a response. He did not give what is known today as an “altar call,” but he did “call” and expostulate and plead for his people to respond to God.

So it seems that God has been pleased to give awakening power to preaching that does not shrink back from

the loving threatenings of the Lord, and that lavishes the saints with incomparable promises of grace, and that pleads passionately and lovingly that no one hear the Word of God in vain. It is a tragedy to see pastors state the facts and sit down. Good preaching pleads with people to respond to the Word of God.

7. Probe the Workings of the Heart

Powerful preaching is like surgery. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, it locates, lances, and removes the infection of sin. Sereno Dwight, one of Edwards's early biographers, said of him, "His knowledge of the human heart, and its operations, has scarcely been equaled by that of any uninspired preacher."¹⁶⁷ My own experience as a patient on Edwards's operating table confirms this judgment.

How did Edwards get such a profound knowledge of the human soul? It was not from hobnobbing with the Northampton parishioners. Dwight said that he had never known of a man more constantly retired from the world to give himself to reading and contemplations. It may have begun with a typical Puritan bent toward introspection. On July 30, 1723, when he was nineteen years old, Edwards wrote in his diary, "Have concluded to endeavor to work myself into duties by searching and tracing back all the real reasons why I do them not, and narrowly searching out all the subtle subterfuges of my thoughts."¹⁶⁸ A week later he wrote, "Very much convinced of the extraordinary deceitfulness of the heart, and how exceedingly... appetite blinds the mind, and brings it into entire subjection."¹⁶⁹ So Dwight is certainly right when he says that much of

Edwards's insight into the human heart came "from his thorough acquaintance with his own heart."¹⁷⁰

A second thing that gave Edwards such a profound insight into the workings of the heart was the necessity of sorting out the wheat and the chaff in the intense religious experiences of his people during the Great Awakening. His book on the *Religious Affections*, which he had originally preached as sermons in 1742–1743, is a devastating exposure of self-deception in religion. It probes relentlessly to the root of our depravity. This kind of sustained and careful examination of the religious experiences of his people gave Edwards a remarkable grasp of the works of their hearts.

A third cause of Edwards's knowledge of the human heart was his extraordinary insight into God's testimony about it in Scripture. For example, he notices in Galatians 4:15 that the religious experience of the Galatians had been so intense that they would have plucked out their eyes for Paul. But then Edwards notices also in verse 11 of that chapter that Paul says he might have "labored over you in vain." From this Edwards infers shrewdly that the height or intensity of religious affections (readiness to pluck out the eye) is no sure sign that they are genuine (since his labor might have been in vain).¹⁷¹ Years and years of this kind of study make for a profound surgeon of souls. It produces a preaching that uncovers the secret things of the heart. And more than once it has led to great awakening in the church.

Edwards said that every minister of the word "must be acquainted with experimental religion, and not ignorant of the inward operations of the Spirit of God, nor of

Satan's devices."¹⁷² Again and again when I read Edwards's sermons I have the profound experience of having myself laid bare. The secrets of my heart are plowed up. The deceitful workings of my heart are exposed. The potential beauty of new affections appears attractive. I find that they are even taking root as I read.

Edwards compared the preacher to a surgeon:

To blame a minister for declaring the truth to those who are under awakenings, and not immediately administering comfort to them, is like blaming a surgeon because when he has begun to thrust in his lance, whereby he has already put his patient to great pain... he won't stay his hand, but goes on to thrust it in further, till he comes to the core of the wound. Such a compassionate physician, who as soon as his patient began to flinch, should withdraw his hand... would be one that would heal the hurt slightly, crying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."¹⁷³

This analogy of the surgeon and the scalpel is indeed apt for his own preaching. We don't want to lie naked on the table, and we don't want to be cut, but oh, the joy of having the cancer out! Therefore, good preaching, like good surgery, probes the workings of the human heart.

8. Yield to the Holy Spirit in Prayer

In 1735 Edwards preached a sermon entitled "The Most High, a Prayer-Hearing God." In it he said, "God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be antecedent to the

bestowment of mercy; and he is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayer, as though he were prevailed on by prayer.¹⁷⁴ The goal of preaching is utterly dependent on the mercy of God for its fulfillment. Therefore, the preacher must labor to put his preaching under divine influence by prayer.

By this means the Holy Spirit assists the preacher. But Edwards didn't believe the assistance came in the form of words being immediately suggested to the mind. If that's all the Spirit did, a preacher could be a devil and do his work. No, the Holy Spirit fills the heart with holy affections and the heart fills the mouth. "When a person is in an holy and lively frame in secret prayer, it will wonderfully supply him with matter and with expressions... [in] preaching."¹⁷⁵

So Edwards counsels the young men of his day:

Ministers, in order to be burning and shining lights, should walk closely with God, and keep near to Christ; that they may ever be enlightened and enkindled by him. And they should be much in seeking God, and conversing with him by prayer, who is the fountain of light and love.¹⁷⁶

He tells us about his own experience with prayer early in his ministry, and I suspect that it became more precious rather than less. He said:

I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and

it was always my manner, at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.¹⁷⁷

Besides private prayer Edwards threw himself into the wider prayer movement of his day that was spreading from Scotland. He wrote an entire book “to promote explicit agreement and visible union of God’s people in extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion and advancement of Christ’s kingdom.”¹⁷⁸ The secret prayer of the preacher and the concerts of prayer among the people conspire in the mercy of God to bring down the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Good preaching is born of good praying. And it will come forth with the power that caused the Great Awakening when it is delivered under the mighty prayer-wrought influence of the Holy Spirit.

9. Be Broken and Tenderhearted

Good preaching comes from a spirit of brokenness and tenderness. For all his authority and power Jesus was attractive because he was “gentle and lowly in heart,” which made him a place of rest (Matt. 11:29). “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). There is in the Spirit-filled preacher a tender affection that sweetens every promise and softens with tears every warning and rebuke. “We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own

children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:7–8).

One of the secrets of Edwards’s power in the pulpit was the “brokenhearted” tenderness with which he could address the weightiest matters. In his own words we catch the scent of this demeanor:

All gracious affections... are brokenhearted affections. A truly Christian love... is a humble brokenhearted love. The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires: their hope is an humble hope; and their joy, even when it is unspeakable, and full of glory, is a humble, brokenhearted joy, and leaves the Christian more poor in spirit, and more like a little child and more disposed to an universal lowliness of behavior.¹⁷⁹

Genuine spiritual power in the pulpit is not synonymous with loudness. Hard hearts are not likely to be broken by shrill voices. Edwards was persuaded from Scripture that “gracious affections do not tend to make men bold, forward, noisy, and boisterous; but rather to speak trembling.”¹⁸⁰ The eye of divine blessing is upon the meek and trembling: “This is the one to whom I will look [says the Lord]: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa. 66:2).

Therefore, Edwards says:

Ministers should be persons of the same quiet, lamb-like spirit that Christ was of... the same

spirit of forgiveness of injuries; the same spirit of charity, of fervent love and extensive benevolence; the same disposition to pity the miserable, to weep with those that weep, to help men under their calamities of both soul and body, to hear and grant the requests of the needy, and relieve the afflicted; the same spirit of condescension to the poor and mean, tenderness and gentleness towards the weak, and great and effectual love to enemies.¹⁸¹

The spirit we long to see in our people must be in ourselves first. But that will never happen until, as Edwards says, we know our own emptiness and helplessness and terrible sinfulness. Edwards lived in a kind of spiraling oscillation between humiliation for his sin and exultation in his Savior. He describes his experience like this:

Often since I lived in this town, I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together; so that I have often been forced to shut myself up.¹⁸²

It is not hard to imagine the depth of earnestness that this kind of experience brought to the preaching of God's Word.

But of course one is on the precipice of despair when one focuses only on sin. This was not Edwards's aim nor his experience. For him there was a response to guilt that made it an intensely evangelical and liberating experience:

I love to think of coming to Christ, to receive

salvation of him, poor in spirit, and quite empty of self, humbly exalting him alone; cut off entirely from my own root, in order to grow into, and out of Christ; to have God in Christ be my all in all.¹⁸³

This is the supremacy of God in the life of the preacher that leads straight to God's supremacy in preaching.

When we speak of Edwards's intensity, it is plain that it was not a harsh and loud and belligerent thing. Edwards's power was not in rhetorical flourish or ear-splitting thunders. It was born in brokenhearted affections.

Edwards was described by Thomas Prince as "a preacher of a low and moderate voice, a natural way of delivery; and without any agitation of body, or anything else in the manner to excite attention; except his habitual and great solemnity, looking and speaking as in the presence of God."¹⁸⁴ Edwards stands as a rare testimony to the truth that good preaching—preaching that makes God supreme—comes from a spirit of brokenness and tenderness.

10. Be Intense

Good preaching gives the impression that something very great is at stake. With Edwards's view of the reality of heaven and hell and the necessity of persevering in a life of holy affections and godliness, eternity was at stake every Sunday. This sets him off from the average preacher today. Our emotional rejection of hell and our facile view of conversion and the abundant false security we purvey have created an atmosphere in which the great biblical intensity of preaching is almost impossible.

Edwards so believed in the realities of which he spoke, and so longed for their reality to stagger his people, that when George Whitefield preached these realities with power in Edwards's pulpit, Edwards wept during the whole service. Edwards could no more imagine speaking in a cold or casual or indifferent or flippant manner about the great things of God than he could imagine a father discussing coolly the collapse of a flaming house upon his children.

Lack of intensity in preaching can only communicate that the preacher does not believe or has never been seriously gripped by the reality of which he speaks—or that the subject matter is insignificant. This was never the case with Edwards. He stood in continual awe at the weight of the truth he was charged to proclaim.

One contemporary said that Edwards's eloquence was the power of presenting an important truth before an audience, with overwhelming weight of argument, and with such intensesness of feeling, that the whole soul of the speaker is thrown into every part of the conception and delivery; so that the solemn attention of the whole audience is riveted, from the beginning to the close, and impressions are left that cannot be effaced.¹⁸⁵

In his introduction to John Gillies's *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival*, Horatius Bonar in 1845 described the kind of preachers God had been pleased to use to awaken his church through the centuries:

They felt their infinite responsibility as stewards of the mysteries of God and shepherds appointed

by the Chief Shepherd to gather in and watch over souls. They lived and labored and preached like men on whose lips the immortality of thousands hung. Everything they did and spoke bore the stamp of earnestness, and proclaimed to all with whom they came into contact that the matters about which they had been sent to treat were of infinite moment... Their preaching seems to have been of the most masculine and fearless kind, falling on the audience with tremendous power. It was not vehement, it was not fierce, it was not noisy; it was far too solemn to be such; it was massive, weighty, cutting, piercing, sharper than a two-edged sword.¹⁸⁶

So it was with Jonathan Edwards just over 250 years ago. By precept and example Edwards calls us to “an exceeding affectionate way of preaching about the great things of religion” and to flee from a “moderate, dull indifferent way of speaking.”¹⁸⁷ We simply must signify, without melodrama or affectation, that the reality behind our message is breathtaking.

Of course, that assumes that we have seen the God of Jonathan Edwards. If we don't share the greatness of his vision of God, we will not approach the greatness of his preaching. On the other hand, if God in his grace should see fit to open our eyes to the vision of Edwards, if we were granted to taste the sweet sovereignty of the Almighty the way Edwards tasted it, then a renewal of the pulpit in our day would be possible—indeed inevitable.

NOTES

- 141 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 238.
- 142 Ibid., 244. Emphasis added.
- 143 Edwards, *Selections*, xx.
- 144 Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, in *The Great Awakening, in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 387; see also 399.
- 145 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 314.
- 146 Ibid., 243.
- 147 Edwards, *Concerning the Revival*, 388.
- 148 Edwards, “True Excellency,” 958.
- 149 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 258.
- 150 Ibid., 289.
- 151 Edwards, *Concerning the Revival*, 386.
- 152 Edwards, “True Excellency,” 959.
- 153 Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” *Selections*, 65.
- 154 Dwight, *Memoirs*, xxi.
- 155 Ibid., clxxiv.
- 156 Edwards, “True Excellency,” 957.

- 157 Dwight, *Memoirs*, 957.
- 158 Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 10.
- 159 Quoted in John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 44. This volume gives an excellent introduction to Edwards's balanced insights on the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell.
- 160 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 259.
- 161 Edwards, *Perseverance*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 596.
- 162 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 308.
- 163 Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, 248.
- 164 Edwards, *Concerning the Revival*, 391.
- 165 Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 87.
- 166 Edwards, *Efficacious Grace*, 557.
- 167 Jonathan Edwards, *Pressing into the Kingdom*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, 659.
- 168 Dwight, *Memoirs*, clxxxix.
- 169 *Ibid.*, xxx.
- 170 *Ibid.*, clxxxix.

- 171 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 246.
- 172 Edwards, "True Excellency," 957.
- 173 Edwards, *Concerning the Revival*, 390–391.
- 174 Edwards, "The Most High, A Prayer-Hearing God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 116.
- 175 Edwards, *Concerning the Revival*, 438.
- 176 Edwards, "True Excellency," 960.
- 177 Edwards, "Personal Narrative," *Selections*, 61.
- 178 Edwards, *A Humble Attempt*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 278–312.
- 179 Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 302.
- 180 *Ibid.*, 308.
- 181 Edwards, "Christ the Example of Ministers," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 961.
- 182 Edwards, "Personal Narrative," *Selections*, 69.
- 183 *Ibid.*, 67.
- 184 Quoted in *The Great Awakening*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, 72.
- 185 Dwight, *Memoirs*, cxc.
- 186 Horatius Bonar, "Preface," in John Gillies, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), vi. 49.
- 187 Edwards, *Concerning the Revival*, 386

MOTIVATING MISSIONS: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN COMPASSION FOR PEOPLE AND PASSION FOR GOD

Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions, 3rd edition (*Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003*), 227–238.

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

With those words I began *Let the Nations Be Glad* — a book on the supremacy of God in missions. There are deep roots to those sentences, and I owe more debts than I can

ever pay. The person most responsible for my views and for my articulation of those views (under God and after the Bible) is Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century pastor and theologian whose God-entranced worldview sheds its light across all the pages of this book. The impact that Edwards has had on my thinking as it relates to worship and missions (and almost everything else) is incalculable.

The Pervasive Influence of Jonathan Edwards

You can hear his influence in the questions behind the first sentence: *What is the ultimate goal of the church? What is the ultimate goal of redemption and of history and of creation?* Edwards was always asking about the ultimate end of things, because once we know and embrace the final and highest reason that we and the church and the nations exist, then all our thinking and all our feeling and all our acting will be governed by that aim. It continually amazes me how few people ask and answer with conviction and passion the most important questions—the ultimate questions.

But that is what Edwards cared about most. Edwards was absolutely clear on the ultimate question of why all things exist, including you and me and the church universal and the nations and history. He was absolutely clear on it because God was absolutely clear on it. Edwards wrote a book called *The End for Which God Created the World*.¹⁸⁸ In my own thinking, it is the most important thing he ever wrote. Once we understand what he wrote there, everything—absolutely everything—changes. His answer to the question, *What is the ultimate goal of creation*

and history and redemption and your life and everything else? is this: “All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works, is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.”¹⁸⁹

Edwards’s Biblically Saturated Argumentation

Edwards is sure of this because the Bible is clear about this. Edwards piles text upon text from the Scriptures to show the radical God-centeredness of God. He puts it like this:

God had respect to *himself*, as his highest end [or goal], in this work [of creation]; because he is *worthy* in himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison [to] him.¹⁹⁰

He cites Romans 11:36: “For from him and through him and *to him* are all things. To him be glory forever.” And Colossians 1:16: “All things were created through him and *for him*.” And Hebrews 2:10: “For it was fitting that he, *for whom* and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.” And Proverbs 16:4: “The LORD hath made all things *for himself*” (KJV).¹⁹¹

The point of these texts—and dozens more—is not that God has deficiencies he is trying to remedy but that he has perfections he wants to display. God’s aim in creation is to put himself on display. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” Psalm 19:1 says. Who set it up that way? God did. This is *his* aim in creation. To make himself known

as glorious. And the same thing is true of the history of redemption. Isaiah 48:9–11 is like a banner not just over God’s rescue of Israel from exile but over all his acts of rescue, especially the cross:

For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you... I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

All of creation, all of redemption, all of history is designed by God to display God. That is the ultimate goal of the church.

Why Did I Put “Worship” Where the Glory of God Belongs?

But that is not what I said in the first sentence of this book on missions. I said, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is.” Why the substitution of “worship” for “the glory of God”? Why not say, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. The *glory of God* is”? The reason is that missions is demanded not by God’s failure to show glory but by man’s failure to savor the glory. Creation is telling the glory of God, but the peoples are not treasuring it.

His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. (Rom. 1:20–21)

Natural revelation is not getting through. Honor and thanks to God are not welling up in the hearts of the peoples when they see his glory manifest in nature. They are not worshiping the true God. That's why missions is necessary.

Missions exists because *worship* doesn't. The ultimate issue addressed by missions is that God's glory is dishonored among the peoples of the world. When Paul brought his indictment of his own people to a climax in Romans 2:24, he said, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." That is the ultimate problem in the world. That is the ultimate outrage.

The glory of God is not honored.

The holiness of God is not revered.

The greatness of God is not admired.

The power of God is not praised.

The truth of God is not sought.

The wisdom of God is not esteemed.

The beauty of God is not treasured.

The goodness of God is not savored.

The faithfulness of God is not trusted.

The commandments of God are not obeyed.

The justice of God is not respected.

The wrath of God is not feared.

The grace of God is not cherished.

The presence of God is not prized.

The person of God is not loved.

The infinite, all-glorious Creator of the universe, by whom and for whom all things exist—who holds every person's life in being at every moment (Acts 17:25)—is

disregarded, disbelieved, disobeyed, and dishonored among the peoples of the world. That is the ultimate reason for missions.

The opposite of this disrespect is worship. Worship is not a gathering. It is not essentially a song service or sitting under preaching. Worship is not essentially any form of outward act. Worship is essentially an inner stirring of the heart to treasure God above all the treasures of the world—

a valuing of God above all else that is valuable

a loving of God above all else that is lovely

a savoring of God above all else that is sweet

an admiring of God above all else that is admirable

a fearing of God above all else that is fearful

a respecting of God above all else that is

respectable

a prizing of God above all else that is precious

Worship from the Inside Out

In other words, worship is right affections in the heart toward God, rooted in right thoughts in the head about God, becoming visible in right actions of the body reflecting God. These three stages of worship from inner essence to outward display can be seen in three texts.

- › First, Matthew 15:8–9: “This people honors me with their lips, but *their heart* is far from me; in vain do they worship me.” So if worship is not from the heart, it is vain and empty, meaning it is *not* worship. That means the essence can’t be outward. The essence of worship is affection, not action.

- › Second, John 4:23: “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit *and truth*, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” Notice, the Father seeks worship in spirit *and truth*—right affections rising for God, rooted in right thinking about God.
- › Third, Matthew 5:16: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your *good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” God intends for his glory to be public. He did not create the world so that his glory would remain incognito. And he does not redeem people so that they will have merely private experiences of his preciousness. His aim is that his glory be openly reflected in the deeds of his people, whose thoughts reflect his truth and whose affections reflect his worth. Worship is seeing, savoring, and showing the glory of all that God is for us in Jesus Christ.

The first and ultimate goal of missions is that this worship happens among all the nations of the world—that God’s glory and greatness find a fitting reflection among the peoples.

Not Just More People but People from All Peoples

Note that I said “peoples,” not people. The aim of missions (as distinct from local evangelism where the church already exists) is that there be a church who worships God through Jesus Christ in all the peoples and tribes and languages and ethnic groups of the world. We have seen this goal of missions most clearly in the result of missions

in Revelation 5:9. The song to Christ in heaven will be, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died to redeem a worshiping people for his Father from all the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations. Missions exists to plant Christ-purchased, God-exalting worshiping communities of the redeemed in all the peoples of the world.

The passion of a missionary—as distinct from that of an evangelist—is to plant a worshiping community of Christians in a people group who has no access to the gospel because of language or cultural barriers. Paul was one of these “frontier” missionaries: “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named... But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions... I go to Spain” (Rom. 15:20, 23–24).

The first great passion of missions, therefore, is to honor the glory of God by restoring the rightful place of God in the hearts of people who presently think, feel, and act in ways that dishonor God every day, and in particular, to do this by bringing forth a worshiping people from among all the unreached peoples of the world. If you love the glory of God, you cannot be indifferent to missions. This is the ultimate reason Jesus Christ came into the world. Romans 15:8–9 says, “Christ became a servant to the circumcised... *in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*” Christ came to get glory for his Father among the nations. If you love what Jesus Christ came to accomplish, you love missions.

Compassion for People, Not Just Passion for God

But now comes the question this chapter is mainly designed to answer: How does the motive of compassion for people relate to this primary motive of a passion for the glory of God? Most of us would agree that Jesus came not only to vindicate God's righteousness and uphold God's glory but also to rescue sinners from everlasting misery.

Alongside the truth that we are all guilty of treason and have dishonored our King, we must now put forward the truth that we are therefore worthy of execution and everlasting punishment. With mutiny comes misery. Unbelief not only dishonors God but also destroys the soul. Everything that discredits God damages man. Every assault on God's holiness is an assault on human happiness. Every thought or feeling or action that makes God look wrong or irrelevant increases humanity's ruin. Everything that decreases God's reputation increases our suffering.

And so missions is driven by a passion not only to restore the glory of God to its rightful place in the worshiping soul but also to rescue sinners from everlasting pain. If there is one thing that almost everyone knows about Jonathan Edwards, it is that he believed in the reality and eternity of hell.

Edwards Wanted to Honor God and Rescue People from Hell

In his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Edwards was not a cool, detached observer of perishing people. He was a passionate evangelist pleading for people to receive mercy while there was still time.

After referring to Revelation 14:20, which speaks of “the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God,” he says:

The words are exceeding terrible... . “The fierceness and wrath of God.” The fury of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! O how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them? ... Consider this, you who are here present, that yet remain in an unregenerate state... . Now God stands ready to pity you; this is a day of mercy.¹⁹²

And Edwards believed not only that hell would be horrible and conscious but also that it would be never ending. He would have been appalled at the number of so-called evangelicals today who have abandoned the biblical teaching on hell as eternal, conscious torment in favor of a view of annihilation (Matt. 25:41, 46; Mark 9:42–48; 2 Thess. 1:5–10; Rev. 14:9–11; 20:10, 14–15). In response to the annihilationists of his own day, Edwards preached a message on April 2, 1739, with the stated doctrine, “The misery of the wicked in hell will be absolutely eternal.” In another sermon, he makes the point that annihilation is not the form of punishment that unbelievers receive but the relief from punishment that they desire and don’t receive. “Wicked men will hereafter earnestly wish to be turned to nothing and forever cease to be that they may escape the wrath of God.”¹⁹³ I believe Edwards is right, and we should tremble and fly to Christ, our only hope.

So I say again, missions is driven not only by a passion for the supremacy of God in all things but also by a

compassion for perishing people, whom we all once were.

Edwards preached a series of fifteen sermons on the “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13 (“Charity and Its Fruits”) and said in sermon four, on verse 4 (“Love suffers long and is kind”), “A Christian spirit disposes persons meekly to bear ill that is received from others, and cheerfully and freely to do good to others.”¹⁹⁴ One of his applications was:

Men may do good to the souls of vicious persons by being the instruments of reclaiming them from their vicious courses. They may do good to the souls of secure and senseless sinners by putting them in mind of their misery and danger and so being the instruments of awakening them. And persons may be the instruments of others’ conversion, of bringing them home to Christ. We read in Daniel 12:3 of those that turn many to righteousness.¹⁹⁵

The motive of love toward sinners and the desire to do good to them are essential to the Christian spirit. It is the spirit of Christ himself. Mark 6:34 says, “When [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had *compassion* on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.” In Luke 15:20, in the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus portrays the heart of his Father in the same way: “[His son] arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt *compassion*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The love of God for perishing sinners moved him to

provide at great cost a way to rescue them from everlasting destruction, and missions is the extension of that love to the unreached peoples of the world.

How Does Compassion for People Relate to Passion for God?

Here is the main question I am pursuing: What is the relationship between our passion for the supremacy of God—the glory of God, the honor of God and of his Son among the nations—and our compassion for perishing sinners whose end is everlasting misery if they do not hear the gospel and believe? I wonder if you've ever experienced a tension in your own soul between these two motives. I have. That's why this question matters so much to me. I want to be utterly devoted to the cause of world evangelization, and I want it to be from God-exalting, person-loving motives. And these two do not always feel emotionally compatible. Are they? How are they? Does Jonathan Edwards provide a key? I will try to unfold the answer in five steps:

1. *Compassion pursues the rescue of perishing sinners.* Compassion moves us to work for the rescue of unbelievers from the coming wrath of God in hell (1 Thess. 1:10). The biggest problem in the world for every human being—from the poorest to the richest, from the sickest to the healthiest—is the same: how to escape the wrath of God that hangs over all humans because of our sin. Love demands that we work to rescue people from the wrath of God.

2. *Fear of hell by itself saves nobody.* Edwards never tired of warning people to flee from the wrath to come.¹⁹⁶ But he knew that mere fear of the consequences of sin is not a saving fear. People who love sin fear and sometimes weep over the consequences of sin.¹⁹⁷ It is natural to hate pain. It is supernatural to hate sin. It is natural to love sin and supernatural to love Christ.

What this implies is that you can scare people toward heaven, but you can't scare anybody into heaven. Saving faith means receiving Christ as your treasure, not just as a deliverer from pain. It is possible to claim faith in Christ as merely a rescuer from hell. Such faith saves no one. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Saving faith is a coming to Jesus for the satisfaction of your soul thirst.

Until your soul has a thirst for Christ as the bread of life and the living water, you will use Christ for what your soul thirsts after. Many people who claim to have saving faith simply use Christ to get what they really want, which is not Christ but his gifts (escape from hell, peace of mind, health of body, a better marriage, a social network, etc.). We are saved by coming to Christ not only as our deliverer but also as our treasure—coming for all that God is for us in Jesus. Test yourself: Would you want to go to heaven if Christ were not there? Is he or his gifts your treasure?

3. *Therefore, compassion must not merely warn people about the pains of going to hell but must also lure people*

to the pleasures of knowing Christ. The only way to get to heaven is by wanting to be with Christ and by trusting his work to get you there. Wanting to avoid hell is not the same as wanting to be with Christ. And so it would not be compassionate merely to warn people about hell. We must display to them the beauties of Christ. Compassion does not merely warn people; it woos people. Compassion aims to awaken in people a delight in Christ, not just a dread of hell. No one goes to heaven who does not love Christ. Paul said, “If any one does not love the Lord, let him be accursed” (1 Cor. 16:22 NASB). Compassion seeks, with prayer and preaching and serving in the power of the Holy Spirit, to create joy in who Christ is. Compassion stirs up satisfaction in Christ. At its heart, that is what saving faith is: being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus.

4. *The key from Jonathan Edwards: It is precisely this satisfaction in Christ himself that magnifies Christ and glorifies God.* The key to the coherence between passion for God’s glory and compassion for perishing humans is that rejoicing in God himself, through Christ, glorifies God. The pleasure you take in God is the measure of the treasure you find in him. You make much of him and show him to be great when you find your joy in him, especially when the taste and lure of this joy enables you to leave comforts and risk your life in the cause of missions. Here is the key quotation from Edwards:

So God glorifies Himself toward the creatures also in two ways: 1. By appearing to... their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself... . *God is glorified not only by his glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.* When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory; and that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it.¹⁹⁸

My way of saying this is, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."¹⁹⁹

With this profound insight from Jonathan Edwards into God's purpose in creation and redemption, we see the unity of our two motives in missions:

5. *The aim of compassion to rescue sinners from everlasting pain and the aim of passion to see God honored are not in conflict.* Sinners escape hell and honor God with the same act: treasuring all that God is for them in Christ, being satisfied with all that God is for them in Christ. God does not get the honor he should, and man does not escape the pain he would, if Christ himself is not our treasure. But if, by the mercy of God, Christ

becomes the treasure of the nations and God becomes their delight, then he is honored and we are saved.

And that's the goal of missions. Therefore, the two-fold motive of missions, mercy for man and glory for God, is one coherent goal. So let us take up our cross and, for the joy set before us, be willing to lay down our lives to make the nations glad in God.

*Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.
(Psalm 67:3-4)*

NOTES

- 188 Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World* is published in its entirety in John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998).
- 189 Ibid., 242.
- 190 Ibid., 140 (italics in original).
- 191 Emphasis added. Most modern versions translate this verse so that “for himself” is rendered “for its own purpose”: “The LORD has made everything *for its own purpose*, even the wicked for the day of evil” (NASB). But this is a contextual judgment call, not a necessary grammatical feature of the text. The Hebrew *lamma’anehu* can be properly translated “for himself.”
- 192 Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 10.
- 193 Quoted in John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 75.
- 194 Jonathan Edwards, “Charity and Its Fruits,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 185.
- 195 Ibid., 207–8. Daniel 12:3 says, “And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above;

and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

- 196 Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*. See page 51 for a 1747 sermon in which he comments on how frequently he warned his people about the dangers of hell.
- 197 Note the contrast in 2 Corinthians 7:10 between “godly grief” and “worldly grief”: “For *godly grief* produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas *worldly grief* produces death.”
- 198 Jonathan Edwards, The “Miscellanies,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Schafer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 495, emphasis added. Miscellany #448; see also #87, 251–252; #332, 410; #679 (not in the New Haven volume).
- 199 For an exposition of this statement, see John Piper, *Desiring God: Mediations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1996); and idem, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2001).

Appendix 1

PIPER ENCOUNTERS EDWARDS: A CHRONOLOGY

Justin Taylor

For our purposes, the personal history of John Piper can be divided in accordance with the institutions where he studied and then served: first, Wade Hampton High School in Greenville, South Carolina (1961–1964), Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois (bachelor of arts degree with a literature major and a philosophy minor, 1964–1968), Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (bachelor of divinity degree, 1968–1971), the University of Munich in Germany (doctor of theology degree in New Testament, 1971–1974). This was then followed by his two primary places of employment over the next four decades: Bethel College in Saint Paul, Minnesota (where he taught biblical studies, 1974–1980), and Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota (where, as noted above, he served as senior pastor, 1980–2013).

When Piper entered Fuller Seminary in 1968, all he knew of Edwards was that he had preached “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741). Piper likely encountered an excerpt of this sermon in his high school literature anthology, undoubtedly highlighting Edwards’s famous (or infamous) language, such as:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.²⁰⁰

Piper later would write, “Identifying Jonathan Edwards with ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ is like identifying Jesus with the woes against Chorazin and Bethsaida [Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13]. This is a fraction of the whole, and it is not the main achievement.”²⁰¹

1968–69: *Essay on the Trinity*

In Piper’s first quarter at Fuller, in the fall of 1968, he took his first class with Dr. Daniel P. Fuller (b. 1928), the only child of Charles Fuller (1887–1968) and Grace Fuller (1886–1966), co-founders of the seminary in 1947 with Harold John Ockenga (1905–1985). Fuller would soon become a mentor to Piper and a major influence on his life and theology, perhaps his most significant “living teacher.”

Little did Piper realize as he entered Fuller's "Hermeneutics" class one fall day that he would soon be introduced to what would become his most important "dead teacher," Jonathan Edwards.²⁰²

Fuller's large class that year (with approximately 80 students) combined the theology students with the new psychology students.²⁰³ Dr. Fuller, a committed evidentialist who insisted on arguments over presuppositions and biblicism over systems, was challenged by one of the psychology students for being too rational. The objection was along the lines that rational engagement was inimical to faith and piety. Upset at the suggestion and throwing his hands in the air, Fuller retorted that he saw no reason for logic and piety to be pitted against each other. (Piper later recorded that his heart "was beating fast with pleasure and expectation" as Fuller continued.²⁰⁴) He rhetorically asked the class, "Why can't we be like Jonathan Edwards who in one moment could be writing a devotion that would warm your grandmother's heart and in the next give a philosophical argument that would stump the chief thinkers of his day?"²⁰⁵ That was all Piper needed—after class he went straight to the library, almost completely ignorant of this man Edwards, and checked out his posthumously published *Essay on the Trinity*.²⁰⁶ In the third quarter (spring of 1969) Piper took church history with Geoffrey Bromiley (1915–2009) and decided to write his paper on Edwards's Trinitarian essay. "It was," Piper writes, "one of those defining moments when my view of God's being was forever stamped."²⁰⁷

Edwards's efforts at analyzing the Trinity produced at least three lasting effects for Piper. First, it helped him

“conceptualize (at least in part) the affirmation that God is three in one.”²⁰⁸ Piper summarizes this Edwardsian (and before him, Augustinian) conceptual framework as follows:

The Son of God is the eternal idea or image that God has of himself. And the image that he has of himself is so perfect and so complete and so full as to *be* the living, personal reproduction (or begetting) of God the Father. And this living, personal image or radiance or form of God *is* God, namely, God the Son. And therefore God the Son is coeternal with God the Father and equal in essence and glory. And between the Son and the Father there arises eternally an infinitely holy personal communion of love.²⁰⁹

Secondly, Edwards’s labors taught Piper a more foundational and methodological lesson about mystery and Scripture. When accused of reducing God to manageable proportions through definitions and analysis, Edwards responded:

I am far from asserting this as any explication of this mystery that unfolds and removes the mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of it: for I am sensible that however, by what has been said, some difficulties are lessened, others that are new appear; and the number of those things that appear mysterious, wonderful and incomprehensible are increased by it. I offer it only as a further manifestation of what of divine truth the Word of God exhibits to the view of our

minds concerning this great mystery. I think the Word of God teaches us more things concerning it to be believed by us than have been generally taken [notice of], and that it exhibits many things concerning it exceeding glorious and wonderful than have been taken notice [of]... .²¹⁰

It was that last line in particular that struck Piper, for in it he saw a truth that would affect his entire approach to scholarship and piety: “It is the *knowledge*, not the ignorance, of God that inspires awe and true worship.”²¹¹ Edwards had shown Piper great heights of Trinitarian reality, and yet here he was confessing how much more there was to see. Piper comments: “Those who have climbed highest see more clearly than those in the cloudy regions below how much higher the reaches of the mountains of God really are. Below we talk about mystery because we cannot see above the clouds. Above the clouds Edwards talks of mystery because the peaks of divinity stretch out into space.”

Finally, this encounter taught Piper a third lesson: “the Edwards I had met in high school was a caricature.”²¹²

Fall 1970: *Freedom of the Will*

In the first quarter of his senior year (September of 1970), Piper did an independent study with Dr. Fuller on Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will*.²¹³ The resulting paper evidences no interaction with secondary literature, or even other writings from Edwards on this theme, but seems mainly to have consisted in a detailed reading of this one classic, with questions for further exploration and discussion.²¹⁴

Reflecting on this encounter eight years later, Piper would summarize his experience in working through this material: “I found it totally compelling philosophically, and in perfect harmony with my emerging Biblical theology. St. Paul and Jonathan Edwards conspired to demolish my previous notions about freedom.”²¹⁵ But Piper’s memory simplifies his actual conclusions at the time. In reality, he found some parts compelling and other parts inconclusive. In the closing of his review essay, Piper wrote that “Edwards’ argument for moral determinism is to me inescapably compelling.” In particular, he pointed to Edwards’s arguments from divine foreknowledge to determinism, and his argument that every event necessarily has a cause. But Piper was less convinced of Edwards’s defense of compatibilism and of God himself: “His argument, however, for the compatibility of moral determinism with moral agency, and his defense of God’s righteousness, are somewhat less than adequate solutions in my own thinking. There are too many questions left unanswered at this time.”

In an appendix to the paper, Piper lists four of these unanswered questions: (1) He asks, “What criteria do we use for determining what is a *sine qua non* of responsibility?” (2) He offers a thought experiment whereby a surgeon implants a remote-controlled electrode in the brain that can cause strong sexual desires, and yet the man is unaware of the electrode or the source of the desire. Piper asks, “Is this man responsible, i.e., morally reprehensible, for committing sexual offenses under the influence of such a motive? If not, wherein lies the difference between the motive sent by God and the one sent by electricity?” (3)

Piper wonders if Edwards begs the question regarding the way God orders evil for good ends. “Is not the real question ‘Why is there evil?’ instead of, ‘What does God do with it now that it is here?’ But can we pass judgment on the existence of evil? If we say that it is evil that evil exists, then even our judgment depends for its validity on the existence of evil.” (4) Finally, Piper asks, “Can I any longer pray ‘Thy will be done’ if I believe it is not possible that it should be otherwise?”²¹⁶

These questions apparently receded as Piper became fully convinced that Edwards had rightly identified the Achilles’ heel of Arminianism and the compatibilistic presuppositions of the biblical text. He now counsels those who want to understand the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, “if you want to read one of the world’s greatest books on one of life’s most fundamental and difficult problems, read Jonathan Edwards’ *On the Freedom of the Will*.”²¹⁷

Summer 1971: *The Nature of True Virtue*

In the spring of 1971, Piper’s last semester at Fuller Seminary, he took an ethics class from Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002). Smedes advised the students that in addition to the Bible, they should “choose one great theologian,” applying themselves “throughout life to understanding and mastering his thought.” In this way they would “sink at least one shaft deep into reality, rather than always dabbling on the surface of things.” In time, they might “become this man’s peer and know at least one system with which to bring other ideas into fruitful dialogue.”²¹⁸ Having already

written papers on Edwards's views on the Trinity and the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, Piper decided to make Edwards his life-long theological mentor and companion. Years later Piper would commend the wisdom of Smedes's advice and the decision in particular to study Edwards:

To make it your aim to understand Jonathan Edwards is to set one of the highest and most fruitful theological goals possible. I have plodded along in pursuit of this goal for years and the effort has been rewarded one hundred-fold in profundity of theological, ethical, psychological insight. But more than that, Edwards has ushered me closer into the presence of God than any other writer has. He has done this by depicting God in a way so authentic and so powerful that to read and understand is to experience the Reality beyond the description. Edwards has been there where few of us ever get to go in this life and he has sought and found words that, for me at least, not only inform but transport. Penetrating logic and spiritual responses of the affections mingle in Edwards like branch and fruit, fire and heat, pain and weeping. They are inextricably wed. It is impossible to have understood Edwards and ever to be satisfied again with "rationalism" or with "enthusiasm." Logic and affection are happily married in the healthy heart of Jonathan Edwards.²¹⁹

Before beginning doctoral work that fall at the University of Munich, Piper and his wife visited her family on their

small farm in Barnesville, Georgia. With pen in hand, Piper spent several of those warm summer days sitting on an old-fashioned two-seater swing tied to a large hickory tree in the backyard, absorbing Edwards's essay on *The Nature of True Virtue*.²²⁰

The book had two effects on Piper: first, he says, it "aroused in me a deeply pleasurable aesthetic experience," an "aesthetic sense of awe at beholding a pure idea given lucid expression." Second, and more importantly, it gave him "a brand-new awareness that the categories of morality ultimately resolve into categories of spiritual aesthetics, and one of the last things you can say about virtue is that it is 'a kind of beautiful nature, form or quality.'" ²²¹ Along these lines, Piper quotes Perry Miller's observation that *The Nature of True Virtue* "is not a reasoning about virtue, but a beholding of it." Edwards gazes upon the conception of virtue "until it yields up meaning beyond meaning, and the simulacra fall away. The book approaches, as nearly as any creation in our literature, a naked idea." ²²² When Piper finished reading the work, he not only had "a deep longing to be a good man" but was reawakened both poetically and rationally, the former reawakening expressed through a poem he wrote entitled "Georgia Woods" ("because nothing looked the same when I put the book down") and the latter expressed in part by a long personal journal entry using Edwards's argument to work out "why a Christian is obligated to forgive wrongs when there seems to be a moral law in our hearts that cries out against evil in the world." ²²³

Piper also found Edwards's radical exercise in God-centeredness to be extremely instructive. In this essay Edwards makes the stunning argument that "if there

could be an instinct or other cause determining a person to benevolence towards the whole world of mankind... exclusive of... love to God... [and] supreme regard to him... it cannot be of the nature of true virtue.”²²⁴ To embrace the whole world minus God, Edwards says, would be to embrace “an infinitely small part of universal existence.”²²⁵ Piper paraphrases: “to delight in the good of all the universe, but not to delight in God, is like being glad that a candle is lit, but being indifferent to the rising sun. Apart from embracing God as our chief delight, we are (quite literally) infinitely parochial.”²²⁶ Piper then contrasts this perspective with that of modern evangelicalism:

What Edwards is doing here—and this is the great achievement of his life, and the great message to modern evangelicals—is to make God absolutely indispensable in the definition of true virtue. He is refusing to define virtue—no matter how public, no matter how broad—without reference to God. He means to keep God at the center of all moral considerations, to stem the secularizing forces of his own day. And the need for such vigilance over God-centeredness is even more necessary today. Edwards could not conceive of calling any act truly virtuous that did not have in it a supreme regard to God. One of the great follies of modern evangelical public life is how much we are willing to say about public virtue without reference to God.²²⁷

Piper reinforces the point:

His main message is that, if we would not be

infinitely parochial, and thus fail in true virtue, then our private life, our public life, and our global life must be driven not by a narrow, constricted, merely natural self-love, but by passion for the supremacy of God in all things—a passion created through supernatural new birth by the Holy Spirit, giving us a new spiritual taste for the glory of God—a passion sustained by the ongoing, sanctifying influences of the Word of God—and a passion bent on spreading itself through all of culture and all the nations until Christ comes.²²⁸

1971–72: *Charity and Its Fruits*

While in Munich, Piper read two biographies, one by Samuel Hopkins²²⁹ and the other by Henry Bamford Parkes.²³⁰ He also read three more of Edwards’s works, beginning with *Charity and Its Fruits*, an exposition of 1 Corinthians 13.²³¹

Piper and his wife read a 360-page edition of *Charity and Its Fruits* aloud to each other during their family time in the evenings. They both agreed that the work was “terribly verbose and repetitive,” but for Piper it put flesh onto the “naked idea” of *The Nature of True Virtue*. It raised a set of questions for Piper about Edwards’s own approach to the relationship between personal piety and public witness: “What did it mean to this intensely religious Puritan to be a good man? Did it only mean not telling jokes on Sunday and warning people to flee the flames of hell? Did goodness relate only [to] the personal habits or did it reach out to embrace larger social dimensions?”²³² What Piper saw is that Edwards’s intense piety was anything but privatized.

For example, Edwards wrote:

We ought to seek others' spiritual good. A Christian spirit will dispose us to seek others' spiritual happiness; it will dispose us to seek their salvation from hell, and that they may obtain eternal glory... . A Christian spirit will dispose persons to seek others' wealth and outward estate. 1 Corinthians 10:24, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." ... A Christian spirit is contrary to a selfish spirit as it *disposes persons to be public spirited*. A man of a right spirit is not of a narrow, private spirit; but he is greatly concerned for the good of the public community to which he belongs, and particularly of the town where he dwells.²³³

Perhaps most importantly, *Charity and Its Fruits* caused Piper to wrestle with a possible internal tension with respect to the so-called "Christian hedonism" that Piper had learned in part from the writings of Edwards. In order to see this tension, we must first allow Piper to unpack his understanding of Christian hedonism:

Christian Hedonism teaches that all true virtue must have in it a certain gladness of heart. Therefore the pursuit of virtue must be, in some measure, a pursuit of happiness. It's not enough to say that happiness will be the eventual *result* of virtuous choices. Rather, since a certain gladness of heart belongs to the nature of true virtue, that gladness must be pursued, if virtue is going to be pursued.²³⁴

It follows from this, Piper says, that “if we try to deny or mortify or abandon that pursuit of happiness, we set ourselves against virtue. And that would mean we set ourselves against the good of man and the glory of God.”²³⁵

For Piper, then, what sort of happiness is essential in all virtuous acts? He answers: “the happiness of experiencing the glory of God. In all virtuous acts we pursue the enjoyment of the glory of God, and more specifically, the enjoyment of the *presence* and the *promotion* of God’s glory.”²³⁶ It is clear that Edwards was a strong influence on this emerging matrix of glory and joy in Piper’s theology. Edwards wrote:

God is glorified within Himself these two ways: 1. By appearing... to Himself in His own perfect idea [of Himself], or in His Son who is the brightness of His glory. 2. By enjoying and delighting in Himself, by flowing forth in infinite love and delight towards Himself, or in his Holy Spirit.²³⁷

Edwards then applies this glorification within the immanent Trinity (*ad intra*) to the economic Trinity (*ad extra*) as well:

So God glorifies Himself toward the creatures also in two ways: 1. By appearing to... their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself... . God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is

more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory; and that it might [be] received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory [doesn't] glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it.²³⁸

But if we are always to glorify God by pursuing our holy joy, how does that fit with 1 Corinthians 13:5, which teaches that “Love seeks not its own”? Edwards’s seventh sermon in the book, “Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit,” proved to be enormously helpful to Piper in sorting this out. Edwards argued that “seek not its own” did not preclude seeking joy but rather precluded seeking *confined* joy. Edwards explains:

Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own *confined* good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the *common* good, in that which is the good of others as well as their own, in good to be enjoyed *in* others and to be enjoyed *by* others. And man’s love of his own happiness which runs in this channel is not what is called selfishness, but is quite opposite to it... . This is the thing most directly intended by that self-love which the Scripture condemns. When it is said that charity seeketh not her own, we are to understand it of her own private good, good limited to herself.²³⁹

In other words, Piper restates, “if what makes a person happy is the extension of his joy in God into the lives of others, then it is not wrong to seek that happiness, because it magnifies God and blesses people. Love is the labor of Christian hedonism, not its opposite.”²⁴⁰ Reflecting later on these days of discovery and clarification, Piper writes, “This kind of thinking was simply mind-boggling to me in those days.”²⁴¹

Related to this is the question of what Edwards means by “self-love.”²⁴² Piper writes that Edwards “had a love-hate relationship with the term, because it carried so much potential truth and so much potential error.”²⁴³ On the one hand, Edwards could write regarding the fall of Adam: “Self-love became absolute master of his soul, and the more noble and spiritual principles of his being took wings and flew away.”²⁴⁴ “Self-love, as the phrase is used in common speech, most commonly signifies a man’s regard to his confined *private self*, or love to himself with respect to his *private interest*.”²⁴⁵ This narrow, negative sense of the term is the most common use for Edwards. On the other hand, however, he could at times use the same term as a neutral, and potentially positive, feature of our humanity:

It is not a thing contrary to Christianity that a man should love himself; or, which is the same thing, that he should love his own happiness. Christianity does not tend to destroy a man’s love to his own happiness; it would therein tend to destroy the humanity. Christianity is not destructive of humanity. That a man should love his own happiness is necessary to his nature, as a

faculty of will is; and it is impossible that it should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being. The saints love their own happiness; yea, those that are perfect in holiness. The saints and angels in heaven love their own happiness. Otherwise their happiness, which God has given them, would be no happiness to them; for that which anyone does not love he can enjoy no happiness in.²⁴⁶

Another quote reinforces the point:

That to love ourselves is not unlawful is evident from that, that the law of God makes it [i.e., self-love] a rule and measure by which our love to others should be regulated. Thus Christ commands, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” [Matt. 19:19]; which certainly supposes that we may and must love ourselves... . And it also appears from this, that the Scripture from one end of the Bible to the other is full of things which are there held forth to work upon a principle of self-love. Such are all the promises and threatenings of the Word of God, and all its calls and invitations; its counsels to seek our own good, and its warnings to beware of misery.²⁴⁷

What Piper came to see is that Edwards was using “self-love” in two very different ways. On the one hand, he could use it neutrally in such a way that sin was not necessarily involved. Piper explains that the neutral sense of self-love “is simply our built-in capacity to like and dislike,

or approve and disapprove, or be pleased or displeased. It is neither good nor bad until some object is fastened upon as liked and approved and pleasing. If the thing fastened upon is evil, or the fastening upon it is disproportionate to its true worth, then our being pleased by it is shown to be corrupt. But the sheer faculty of desiring and liking and approving and being pleased is neither virtuous nor evil.²⁴⁸ In this sense, “self-love” is virtually synonymous with the faculty of the will. “Self-love is to the soul what hunger is to the stomach. It is simply there with our creaturehood; it’s the inescapable desire to be happy.”²⁴⁹ As Edwards put it, “self-love is only a capacity of enjoying or taking delight in anything.”²⁵⁰

So whereas the neutral sense is akin to “will,” the negative sense is synonymous with “selfishness”: those who are governed by it “place their happiness in good things which are confined or limited to themselves exclusive of others. And this is selfishness. This is the thing most directly intended by that self-love which the Scripture condemns.”²⁵¹ It is this meaning, Edwards says, that Paul is thinking of when he explains in 1 Corinthians 13:5 that “love seeks not its own.” Piper summarizes: “true, spiritual love is not governed by a narrow, limited, confined pursuit of one’s own pleasure.”²⁵² So from the perspective of Christian hedonism, “What is evil about self-love is not its desire to be happy—that is essential to our nature as creatures, whether fallen or not. What is evil about self-love is its finding happiness in such small, narrow, limited, confined reality, namely, the self and all that makes much of the self. Our depravity is our being exactly the opposite of public-spirited.”²⁵³

1971–72: *The End for which God Created the World*

The second Edwards book that Piper read in Munich was *Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World*,²⁵⁴ which Edwards intended to be read in conjunction with *The Nature of True Virtue*. In their little apartment, Piper transformed his 8 by 5 foot pantry into a makeshift study, and it was there that he read this book, which would mark his ministry for life. Decades later he would write, “In that book, a vision of God is displayed that took me captive thirty years ago and has put its stamp on every part of my life and ministry.”²⁵⁵

Piper paraphrases Edwards’s answer to the question of why God created the world: “to emanate the fullness of his glory for his people to know, praise, and enjoy.” Here is Edwards in his own words, expressing what Piper calls “the heart” of Edwards’s theology:

For it appears that all that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works is included in that one phrase, “the glory of God”; ... In the creature’s knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God; and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.²⁵⁶

“From my perspective now,” Piper writes, “I would say that if there were one book which captures the essence or well-spring of Edwards’ theology it is this.”²⁵⁷ “That is the heart and center of Jonathan Edwards and, I believe, of the Bible too. That kind of reading can turn a pantry into a vestibule of Heaven.”²⁵⁸

1973: *Religious Affections*

There were no Sunday evening services for the German Baptist Church the Pipers attended during his doctoral studies at the University of Munich, so Piper would often spend that time reading. In late 1973 he received by mail a “crackly old” edition of *Religion Affections*, printed in 1796 in London, and spent several weeks reading it while sitting on a black rocking chair in their flat.²⁵⁹ He would slowly read two to three pages at a time, stopping to close the book—to think, to savor, and to be changed by these words of wisdom. “They taught me and they moved me. I came to feel ever more deeply that no possessions could compare to sitting at the feet of people who have the ‘lips of knowledge’ [Prov. 20:15].”²⁶⁰ “For several months,” Piper writes, “it was the meat of my Sunday evening meditation. I can remember writing letters week after week to former teachers, to friends and to my parents about the effect this book was having on me. Far more than *The Nature of True Virtue*, this book convicted me of sinful lukewarmness in my affections toward God and inspired in me a passion to know and love God as I ought.”²⁶¹

Edwards argues that “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections,” and that “the affections are no

other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.²⁶² His approach—on the one hand, defending the genuineness and necessity of religious affections in religious experience; on the other hand, refusing to endorse the enthusiastic excesses of the Great Awakening—resonated with Piper in part because of his own experience: “Perhaps the reason the book moved me so is because it was Edwards’ effort to save the best of two worlds—the very worlds in which I grew up and now live...”.²⁶³ He explains that Edwards “struggled to bring together” two worlds: “revival fervor and the reasonable apprehension of truth.”

My father is an evangelist. He conducted evangelistic crusades for over fifty years, and I respect him very highly. I wish I had some of his gifts. I will probably never attain the fruitfulness of his soul-winning life. Rather, I am a theologically oriented pastor. I love my people and cherish our life together in worship and ministry. But I am fairly analytic and given to study. The ministry of the Word is my (protecting and guiding and encouraging) shepherd’s staff. It is not surprising, then, that the *Religious Affections* should seem to me a very contemporary and helpful message. It brought together more of my personal history and personal makeup than any other of Edwards’s books.²⁶⁴

Piper’s prediction was right: he would never be the same again having read it.

1974–80: Bethel Years

After returning to the United States and during his six-year tenure of teaching biblical studies at Bethel College, Piper read three more biographies of Jonathan Edwards (by Ola Elizabeth Winslow,²⁶⁵ Sereno Edwards Dwight,²⁶⁶ and Perry Miller²⁶⁷).

During one of his years at Bethel, Piper resolved to read Edwards for fifteen minutes a day for the entire year.²⁶⁸ It was in this way that he read *An Humble Inquiry* (1749)²⁶⁹ and *The Great Doctrine of Original Sin* (1758).²⁷⁰ During his Bethel years, Piper also read Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative* (1737),²⁷¹ his posthumously published *Treatise on Grace* (1740),²⁷² the posthumously published *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1739),²⁷³ and his bestselling work, *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749).²⁷⁴

In addition to his reading, Piper also began some writing on Edwards. In 1976 he wrote an unpublished response to a chapter by “James Strauss’ Critique of Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*.”²⁷⁵ Strauss had written an essay in a collection of papers defending Arminianism and criticizing Calvinism, and he suggested (1) “a central fallacy, if not a lethal fallacy,” in Edwards’s argument is the ambiguity in which he defines the determination of the will; (2) Edwards’s claim that moral agency and radical determination are compatible actually generates a *reductio ad absurdum*; and (3) Edwards’s argument from foreknowledge to necessity is logically invalid. Piper examined each of these points and concluded that “Strauss succeeds in none of the three criticisms it levels against Jonathan Edwards’ view of determinism, volition, and moral agency.”

Piper's only published academic article on Edwards was "Jonathan Edwards on the Problem of Faith and History."²⁷⁶ Using *Religious Affections*, Piper explores how Edwards grounds faith in relation to historical knowledge, a subject which had not (at least at that time) been addressed in the growing body of Edwardsian secondary literature. Piper argues that Edwards's arguments warrant our serious consideration because he is "able to hold together things that in our own day are often isolated into various theological camps."

First, he respects the validity of and encourages the pursuit of historical arguments for the truth of the gospel. Second, he recognizes that these arguments have a limited function not because they are inimical to the nature of faith (as modern existentialist theologians say), but because the great mass of ordinary people cannot carry through a detailed historical argument. Third, faith must nevertheless be reasonable if it is to be saving faith; that is, it must have a just ground for certainty. This ground, Edwards argues, is really there in the gospel record for all who have eyes to see.²⁷⁷

That same year he also published "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards," offering a narrative of his own discovery of Edwards along with a narrative of Edwards's life.²⁷⁸

Piper's Encounters with Edwards: A Ranking

Writing in 1993, Piper sought to rank the works of Edwards in terms of which has been most influential in

his life and theology.²⁷⁹ Piper placed them in this order: (1) *Freedom of the Will*, (2) *The End for which God Created the World*, (3) *Religious Affections*, (4) *The Nature of True Virtue*, (5) *Essay on the Trinity*, (6) *Original Sin*, (7) *Charity and Its Fruits*, and (8) other sermons.

When asked to revisit the ranking 20 years later, Piper would now (tentatively) reverse his choices for 1 and 2, as well as 6 and 7.²⁸⁰ The different order may be represented as follows:

	1993	2013
1	<i>Freedom of the Will</i>	<i>The End for which God Created the World</i>
2	<i>The End for which God Created the World</i>	<i>Freedom of the Will</i>
3	<i>Religious Affections</i>	<i>Religious Affections</i>
4	<i>The Nature of the True Virtue</i>	<i>The Nature of the True Virtue</i>
5	<i>Essay on the Trinity</i>	<i>Essay on the Trinity</i>
6	<i>Original Sin</i>	<i>Charity and Its Fruits</i>
7	<i>Charity and Its Fruits</i>	<i>Original Sin</i>
8	Other sermons	Other sermons

In analyzing this ranking, Piper rightly asks, “Who can really know how deep and pervasive an impact is?”²⁸¹

Piper explains several things that *Freedom of the Will* did for his theology. “The impact of this issue,” he writes, “is pervasive in its main point.” First, it solidified for him the thesis of the book:

God’s moral government over mankind, his treating them as moral agents, making them the objects of his commands, counsels, calls, warnings, expostulations, promises, threatenings, rewards and punishments, is not inconsistent with a determining disposal of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe, in his providence; either by positive efficiency, or permission.²⁸²

Piper describes the impact of this as “vast in every direction.”²⁸³

Second, Piper believes that Edwards is right that “the settling of this issue undoes the Arminian scheme at every turn”:

’Tis easy to see how the decision of most of the points in controversy, between Calvinists and Arminians, depends on the determination of this grand article concerning *the freedom of the will requisite to moral agency*; and that by clearing and establishing the Calvinistic doctrine in this point, the chief arguments are obviated, by which Arminian doctrines in general are supported, and the contrary doctrines demonstratively confirmed.²⁸⁴

In particular, *Freedom of the Will* introduced Piper to the distinction between moral ability and natural ability. “This has been huge,” Piper writes, “in enabling me to help

people grasp what we mean when we say those who are in the flesh ‘can’t’ please God (Rom. 8:7) and yet are accountable because the inability is moral not natural.” Finally, Piper notes that in his copy of the book, Part 1, Section 11, is heavily underlined. This is undoubtedly owing to the open theism controversy that Piper was involved with in the 1990s. Piper notes, “Edwards fitted me early and then refitted me for this battle.”²⁸⁵

Despite these foregoing reasons, Piper now judges that *The End for Which God Created the World* has the slight edge. He judges that it answers a higher-level or more ultimate question: given that God is sovereign over all actions in the universe, what is he up to? Toward what end is he aiming in governing the world this way? Even though the end of creation has been more dominant and prominent in Piper’s actual teaching and presentation, he still judges it a close call between these two books. “The subterranean influences of the river of God’s sovereignty may be a wider and deeper influence than the fact that ‘the end’ of it all is more prominent in one’s teaching.”²⁸⁶

With respect to the reversal of *Original Sin* and *Charity and Its Fruits*, we first have to see what Piper found so influential in the former. What was most memorable for Piper was the “stunning insight”²⁸⁷ into the morality of original sin in which Edwards offers a “remarkable analogy.”²⁸⁸ In addressing how one man (like us) can be morally implicated in the sin of another (like Adam), Edwards compares our own individual continuity. The reason that the “I” of today can be held responsible for acts done or left undone in the past is on account of a union between the “I” of today and the “I” of the past. The reason this is

so, Edwards avers, is that “God’s upholding created substance, or causing its existence in each successive moment, is altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing*, at each moment.”²⁸⁹

This union or identity of past and present “depends on the *arbitrary* constitution of the Creator; who by his wise sovereign establishment so unites these successive new effects, that he *treats them as one*, by communicating to them like properties, relations, and circumstances.”²⁹⁰ As Piper restates, “This means that ultimately the reason the me of today is morally responsible for the actions of the me of yesterday is that God has arbitrarily willed that it be so.”²⁹¹ It is not difficult to see how Edwards then extends the analogy to show the unity or identity of Adam and his posterity, so that in Adam’s sin the rest of humanity fell and was condemned (Rom. 5:18). For Edwards, after all, “a *divine constitution* is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature.”²⁹²

As we saw earlier with the influence of Edwards’s Trinitarianism on Piper, it was not so much that Edwards taught Piper a doctrine he didn’t know, but showed creatively that there was more to see in what he saw, giving him new conceptual tools to understand the doctrine more deeply. Regarding this analogical argument on original sin, Piper writes, “it certainly helped me, not by making it all simple and clear, but by showing me that there are possibilities of conceptuality and reality that I have not yet begun to think of. Which means it behooves me to keep my mouth shut rather than question a hard Biblical teaching. That is a humbling work, which Edwards has performed for me more than once.”²⁹³

But in now ranking *Charity and Its Fruit* higher than *Original Sin*, Piper writes, “I can’t escape the thought that Edwards’s exposition of ‘Love seeks not its own’ [1 Cor. 13:5] in *Charity* was more extensively influential than the solution to the morality of original sin... I am pretty sure that the impact of this chapter [i.e., sermon seven: “Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit”] was more influential than *Original Sin*.” In particular, Edwards showed him (as we saw above) that “seeks not its own” is not a prohibition on seeking one’s own joy but on seeking *confined* joy. Piper found this chapter especially illuminating in his attempts to communicate Christian hedonism, “because one of the hardest things for a 21st century person to get his mind around is the use of ‘disinterested’ in the 18th century. It did *not* mean the absence of love to happiness.”²⁹⁴ In our discussion above of *Charity and Its Fruits* and Christian hedonism, we saw that Edwards could use “self love” in two ways: in a neutral, observational sense (functionally, a reference to the will) and in a negative sense (akin to selfishness with the seeking of private or confined pleasures).

Similar ambiguity exists with respect to “disinterested love.” Piper explains: “When Edwards speaks of a *disinterested* love to God, he means a love that is grounded not in a desire for God’s gifts, but in a desire for God himself... It is simply his way (common in the eighteenth century) of stressing that we must seek our joy in God himself and not in the health, wealth, and prosperity he gives. It is a word designed to safeguard the God-centeredness of joy, not to oppose the pursuit of it.”²⁹⁵ Norman Fiering explains the Edwardsian reasoning: “Disinterested love to God is impossible because the desire for happiness is intrinsic to

all willing or loving whatsoever, and God is the necessary end of the search for happiness. Logically one cannot be disinterested about the source or basis of all interest.”⁹⁶ Bringing the discussion of self-love and disinterested love full circle, Piper concludes, “*Disinterestedness* is affirmed only to preserve the centrality of God himself as the object of our satisfaction. And *self-love* is rejected only when it is conceived as a narrow love for happiness that does not have love as its supreme focus.”⁹⁷

NOTES

- 200 Edwards had preached this sermon on Deuteronomy 32:35 (“Their foot shall slide in due time”) to his congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts, to unknown effect, but famously re-preached it on July 8, 1741, at the Second Meeting House of the congregational church in Enfield, Massachusetts, and the sermon was published later that year. (In 1748, the town seceded from Massachusetts on account of a surveyor’s error, thus the present-day location is in Connecticut.) For the text and background of this sermon, see Wilson Kimnach, Caleb Maskell, and Kenneth Minkema, eds., *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: A Casebook* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 201 John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards (With the Complete Text of The End for Which God Created the World)* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 83. When asked whether it is accurate to call Edwards a “fire and brimstone” preacher, Piper responded, “It’s accurate, if it’s not lopsided.” He went on to explain that Edwards spoke true things about hell, but spoke beautiful things about heaven far more often. See “Interview with John Piper on Jonathan Edwards” (Preaching Today broadcast, October 27, 1984), <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/interviews/interview-with-john-piper-on-jonathan-edwards> (accessed October 20, 2013).

- 202 For the distinction between living and dead teachers, see Mortimer Adler's chapter, "Teachers, Dead or Alive," in his book *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education*, 1st ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), 48–64.
- 203 Fuller's School of Psychology had begun just a few years earlier, in 1965.
- 204 John Piper, "Books that Have Influenced Me Most" (November 1, 1993), <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/books-that-have-influenced-me-most> (accessed October 20, 2013).
- 205 John Piper, "The Pastor as Scholar: A Personal Journey and the Joyful Place of Scholarship," in D. A. Carson and John Piper, *The Pastor as Scholar and the Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, ed. Owen Strachan and David Mathis (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 39–40.
- 206 Jonathan Edwards, *Discourse on the Trinity, Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [hereafter, *WJE*], vol. 21 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 109–145. Edwards began writing this essay in early 1730 and continued working on it into the mid 1730s.
- 207 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 84.
- 208 John Piper, "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards," *The Reformed Journal* 28 (November 1978): 13.

- 209 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 84.
- 210 Edwards, *Discourse on the Trinity*, 139.
- 211 Piper, "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards," 13, emphasis added.
- 212 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 86.
- 213 Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *WJE*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957).
- 214 John Piper, "Freedom of the Will by Jonathan Edwards: A Review" (September 21, 1970).
- 215 Piper, "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards," 13.
- 216 Piper, "Freedom of the Will by Jonathan Edwards," 13.
- 217 Piper, "A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards," 14.
- 218 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 83.
- 219 Piper, "Books that Have Influenced Me Most."
- 220 Jonathan Edwards, *Nature of True Virtue*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *Ethical Writings, WJE*, vol. 8 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 539–627.
- 221 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 90.
- 222 Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, The American Man of Letters Series (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), 286.

- 223 John Piper, “Journal: Thoughts, vol. VI” (July 14, 1971; entry 383).
- 224 Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 602–603.
- 225 *Ibid.*, 601.
- 226 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 108.
- 227 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 228 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 229 Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey: Together with a Number of His Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1765). Hopkins (1721–1803), who had studied theology with Edwards, described him as “the *greatest*—best—and most useful of men.” Hopkins used Edwards’s diary, *Personal Narrative*, resolutions, and letters, as well as his own eyewitness recollections, to set forth a “faithful and plain narrative of matters of fact” about Edwards, offering him as an example to follow. For more information on the book and its subsequent reprints, see M. X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 54.
- 230 Henry Bamford Parkes, *Jonathan Edwards, the Fiery Puritan* (New York: Menton, Balch & Co., 1930). Parkes (1904–1972), professor of history at New York University, saw Edwards as the “Father

of American Puritanism” and argued that his Calvinistic philosophy was either “repulsive or absurd,” so though Edwards was America’s “biggest intellect” he was a “most tragic” and “not truly an American.” For a fuller summary, see Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards*, 163.

- 231 Jonathan Edwards preached this sermon series in 1738 and it was published posthumously. Paul Ramsey says “the sermons on 1 Corinthians 13 may be interpreted (a) as a finely woven systematic treatise on the Christian moral life, (b) as one that follows the story line of the work of redemption, and (c) as one of Edwards’ major accounts, composed in the context of the revivals, of gracious affections (divine love) in heart and life” (“Editor’s Introduction,” *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *WJE*, vol. 8 [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989], 2). The text of *Charity and Its Fruits* is found in this volume, 129–397.
- 232 Piper, “A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards,” 14.
- 233 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 259–260.
- 234 John Piper, “Was Jonathan Edwards a Christian Hedonist?” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/was-jonathan-edwards-a-christian-hedonist> (accessed October 18, 2013).
- 235 Ibid.
- 236 Ibid.

- 237 Jonathan Edwards, Miscellany no. 448, ed. Thomas Schafer, *The “Miscellanies,” Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, *WJE*, vol. 13 (1994), 495.
- 238 Ibid.
- 239 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 257, 258; the first two italics are my emphasis.
- 240 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 91.
- 241 John Piper to Justin Taylor (July 8, 2013); personal correspondence, on file.
- 242 For a helpful overview of this concept, with particular attention to its function in the prelapsarian state, see Peter Beck, “The Fall of Man and the Failure of Jonathan Edwards,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 79:3 (2007): 209–225.
- 243 John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012), 388.
- 244 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 253.
- 245 Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, 577.
- 246 Ibid., 254. 247 Ibid., 254–255.
- 248 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 106.
- 249 Ibid., 107.
- 250 Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 530, in *The “Miscellanies,” 501–832*, ed. Ava Chamberlain, *WJE*, vol. 18 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 73.

- 251 Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 257.
- 252 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 105.
- 253 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 254 Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, in *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *WJE*, vol. 8 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 403–536.
- 255 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 21.
- 256 Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, 526, 531.
- 257 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 91.
- 258 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 259 In a letter to Daniel Fuller dated December 22, 1973 (Wheaton Archives), Piper writes, “Perhaps most exciting of all is the reception in the mail of Jonathan Edwards’ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* printed in 1796 in London. I have only read 17 pages but can hardly do my other work for my desire to pick it up.” A month later (January 23, 1974), he mentions the book again in a letter to Fuller: “One of my latest book delights is finding a copy of Jonathan Edwards’ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, published in 1796. So far I’ve read 170 pages in coveted periods on the weekend. It is very timely in view of the prevalence of much and various spiritual experiences today. I’m sure I will not be the same, having read it” (Wheaton Archives).

- 260 John Piper, “The Lips of Knowledge Are a Precious Jewel” (October 5, 1980), <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-lips-of-knowledge-are-a-precious-jewel> (accessed October 20, 2013).
- 261 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 92.
- 262 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *WJE*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959).
- 263 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 93.
- 264 *Ibid.*, 94.
- 265 Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703–1758: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940). Winslow (1885–1977) won the 1941 Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography for this work. Contra Parkes, she argues in this full-length biography that Edwards was “neither Puritan nor fiery.” For more, see Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards*, 179–180.
- 266 Sereno Edwards Dwight, ed., *Life of President Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (New York: S. Converse 1829). Dwight (1786–1850) was a great-grandson of Edwards. This set of Edwards works was ten volumes, and this extensive biography was dependent, in part, on the work of Samuel Finley and Samuel Hopkins.
- 267 Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*. Miller (1905–1963), a professor at Harvard University, is most famous for his monograph a decade earlier, *The New England*

Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1939).

- 268 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 95. In a sermon from 1993, Piper said, "Suppose you read slowly like I do—about the same speed as you speak—200 words a minute. If you read 15 minutes a day for one year (just 15 minutes, say just before supper, or just before bed), you will read 5,475 minutes in the year. Multiply that by 200 words a minute and you get 1,095,000 words that you would read in a year." John Piper, "If My Words Abide in You..." sermon accessed online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/if-my-words-abide-in-you>.
- 269 Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*, ed. David D. Hall, *Ecclesiastical Writings, WJE*, vol. 12 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 167–349.
- 270 Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended, Evidences of Its Truth Produced, and Arguments to the Contrary Answered*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook, *Original Sin, WJE*, vol. 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 102–437.
- 271 Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*, ed. C. C. Goen, *WJE*, vol. 4 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 97–212.

- 272 Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, *WJE*, vol. 21 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 149–198.
- 273 Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson, *WJE*, vol. 9 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 274 Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit, *WJE*, vol. 7 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984). For Piper’s explication of Brainerd’s life with lessons, see his essay, “‘Oh, That I Might Never Loiter on My Heavenly Journey!’ Misery and Mission in the Life of David Brainerd,” *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd*, *The Swans Are Not Silent* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 123–159.
- 275 John Piper, “James D. Strauss’ Critique of Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*” (November 1, 1976), <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articlesjames-d-strauss-critique-of-jonathan-edwards-freedom-of-the-will>. Piper is responding to James D. Strauss, “A Puritan in a Post-Puritan World—Jonathan Edwards,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Press, 1975), 242–264.
- 276 John Piper, “Jonathan Edwards on the Problem of Faith and History,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31 (June 1978): 217–228. This article, his only academic

foray into Edwardsian studies, affords the best window into his awareness of and appropriation of the growing secondary literature. In addition to Winslow's biography (*op. cit.*), Piper lists the following monographs in his endnotes: Douglas Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); David Levin, ed., *The Puritan in the Enlightenment: Franklin and Edwards* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963); Alfred O. Aldridge, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966); Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1966); Edward H. Davidson, *Jonathan Edwards, the Narrative of a Puritan Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966); James Carse, *Jonathan Edwards and the Visibility of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967); Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968); John Opie, ed., *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1969); David Levin, ed., *Jonathan Edwards, a Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969); Elizabeth Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man, the "Uncommon Union" of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971); Dorus Paul Rudisill, *The Doctrine of the Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and His Successors* (New York: Poseidon Books, Inc., 1971); Clyde A. Holbrook, *The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan

Press, 1973); Harold Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974). Of these, he cites the following throughout the essay: Carse, *Jonathan Edwards and the Visibility of God*; Opie, ed. *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment*; Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart*.

- 277 Piper, “Jonathan Edwards on the Problem of Faith and History,” 227–228.
- 278 This essay, *op. cit.*, was then revised and incorporated into the first half of Piper’s *God’s Passion for His Glory*.
- 279 Piper, “Books that Have Influenced Me Most.”
- 280 John Piper to Justin Taylor (August 7, 2013).
- 281 Ibid.
- 282 Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 431.
- 283 Piper to Taylor (August 7, 2013).
- 284 Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 431.
- 285 Piper to Taylor (August 7, 2013).
- 286 Ibid.
- 287 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 96.
- 288 Piper to Taylor (August 7, 2013).
- 289 Edwards, *Original Sin*, 402.
- 290 Ibid., 403.

- 291 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 96.
- 292 Edwards, *Original Sin*, 404.
- 293 Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 96–97.
- 294 Piper to Taylor (August 7, 2013).
- 295 Piper, *Future Grace*, 393.
- 296 Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981), 161.
- 297 Piper, *Future Grace*, 395.

Appendix 2

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