

Crossway: Why do you think interest in Jonathan Edwards and his work has endured and even experienced a revival of sorts?

Justin Taylor: That has to be answered, I suppose, in two ways, for there are two levels of interest. First, there's the academic revival. When their ongoing publication project is complete, the Yale University Press edition of Edwards's works will total twenty-seven volumes. Perry Miller, who was instrumental in sparking this renewed interest in Edwards, wrote that Edwards, "the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene," was "so far ahead of his time that our own can hardly be said to have caught up with him." At the purely intellectual level, then, you have a figure who is simply fascinating to study. But the interest surely goes beyond that to another level. Many of us have turned to Edwards not simply as the object of historical inquiry, but as a guide to help us think through difficult issues and worship God in a deeper way. One of the reasons is that Edwards is just so *different* than what we see around us today. No one combines the head and the heart better than Edwards—the Puritans called it "logic on fire." We find ourselves, therefore, returning to him again and again, and encouraging others to do the same.

Crossway: Edwards's work has the reputation of being difficult for the modern reader to understand. Why do you think that reading Edwards is worth the effort?

Justin Taylor: Modern readers first need to be persuaded that "difficult reading" in general is something to be pursued, not shunned. John Piper has a great quote on this: "Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves. Digging is hard, but you might find diamonds." To avoid "chronological snobbery," C. S. Lewis recommended that every third book you read should be outside your own century. So my first thought is that we should intentionally seek to read books that are challenging, where the meaning is not always apparent on a skim through the pages. But I'd also hasten to add that, with Edwards's writings in particular, it depends upon where you start. Edwards wrote some difficult theological-philosophical works. And yet he preached sermons every week to the average folks of Northampton. The sermons—along with Edwards's personal narrative about his life—are usually the best place to begin. Is Edwards worth the effort? One of the reasons we compiled this book is to argue that he is. Edwards was far

from perfect, but he saw things and said thing about God that are absolutely stunning. To ignore him is to deprive ourselves of serious joy and insight into the ways of God.

Crossway: Many people may know only Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” because of its inclusion in American literature courses. Do you think of this work as the one that best represents his thought?

Justin Taylor: Even some who admire Edwards seem rather embarrassed or apologetic about “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” If is read carefully—cognizant of the horrific biblical imagery that Edwards is drawing upon and aware that Edwards is tearfully yearning and pleading for his people to awaken to eternal reality—it is a deeply moving and biblical sermon. So, yes, I think it is a fine representation of Edwards’s thought. But it doesn’t represent *all* of Edwards’s theology, which is the tragic misconception of many who have read only this sermon. John Gerstner once wrote that “Edwards did know his hell . . . [but] he knew his heaven better.” For those who think of Edwards only as a grim and graceless fire-and-brimstone Puritan, we hope our book will change their mind and give Edwards a hearing! Many will be surprised to discover a deeply joyful and profoundly beautiful vision of the Christian life lived to the glory of God.

Crossway: The book’s title, *A God-Entranced Vision*, is unusual. What is its genesis?

Justin Taylor: Mark Noll first used the phrase twenty years ago in an article on Edwards. He observed that the revivalists had drawn upon Edwards’s piety and that academic Calvinists had utilized his theology, but that there were no successors to his “God-entranced worldview.” You can describe this worldview a number of different ways—God-centered, God-intoxicated, God-besotted, God-entranced—but they all mean the same thing. Edwards took very seriously the idea that absolutely everything is from God, through God, and to his glory alone (Rom. 11:36). This God-centered Edwardsean legacy is desperately needed today within the evangelical church.

Crossway: How did you and your co-editor, John Piper, select this group of

contributors?

Justin Taylor: The pool of experts on Edwards continues to grow exponentially each year, with the total number of articles, books, and dissertations now nearing 4,000. We wanted to assemble a team that not only *understood* Edwards's life, historical situation, and theology, but who enthusiastically *loved* and *embraced* his God-entranced vision. None of our contributors has approached Edwards from a dispassionate, neutral perspective. They know their material, and they love Edwards's God, which is why it is such an honor to have them contributing to this book.

Crossway: You include discussions of *Original Sin*, *Freedom of the Will*, and *Religious Affections*. Why choose these three in particular to unpack?

Justin Taylor: Most of the chapters in the book had their genesis as part of a conference that Desiring God Ministries held to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Edwards's birth. The missing element, however, was an exposition and guide to Edwards's major theological writings. We not only wanted to introduce our readers to Edwards's life and thought, but we hoped that this book would be a catalyst for the reading of Edwards's own writings. Toward that end, we commissioned three essays to summarize and explain these three works—which are three of Edwards's most important theological writings. They continue to have relevance for contemporary theological discussion and the living of the Christian life, as we seek to understand the affections, the will, and why and how they have fallen.

Crossway: What do you believe was Edwards's understanding of revivals and revivalism?

Justin Taylor: This is the question we posed to J. I. Packer, who answers the question for us in a wonderful chapter of the book. Defining and discerning true revival was crucial for Edwards as he sought to shepherd his flock and write for the wider church during New England's Great Awakening. His term for revival was the "reviving of religion," which occurs when God pours out his Spirit in our hearts and intensifies divine realities in our lives. The true signs of this reviving work involve honor to Christ, opposition to sin, submission to Scripture, awakening to truth, and love to God and man. But revivals are always a mixed bag. Along with genuine joy and repentance

comes false teaching, false claims, and what Edwards would call “enthusiasms.” So how do we tell what is genuine and what is false? Prayers for—and problems with—revival continue in our own day, which is why many are returning to Edwards’s insights for wisdom and direction.

Crossway: Edwards definitely experienced some trying times as a minister. What lessons would you find applicable for modern-day ministers from his approach to these situations?

Justin Taylor: Some don’t know that Edwards was fired in 1750 by a congregational vote at his church in Northampton, after he had served there for 25 years. The situation—described in a chapter by Mark Dever in our book—had to do with the partaking of Communion. Was a Christian profession of faith a prerequisite for participating in the Lord’s Supper? Edwards said yes; the congregation said no. Edwards’s answer—though not necessarily all aspects of his approach—has important ramifications for our church today. If we care about the health of the church, the salvation of souls, and the glory of God, we will be interested in this painful aspect of Edwards’s ministry. On a personal level, we witness Edwards’s graciousness, humility, tenderness, and love for this flock that he had shepherded for a quarter of a century. His “Farewell Sermon”—one of the most beautiful and moving sermons I’ve ever read—should be required reading for everyone, especially pastors and seminarians.