



## Revivals And Church History :: Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival

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### Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival

by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

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In dealing with Jonathan Edwards and the crucial importance of revival, we are really but continuing and concluding what has been the general theme of this Conference from the beginning - the Puritan experiment in New England. Why have we considered this theme? We have done so primarily because we wanted to pay tribute to our friends in America who are celebrating the Bi-Centenary of their liberation from the yoke of England, and the celebration of their independence. But we had a subsidiary reason or motive, and that was that we might learn from what happened in that new land in the 18th century. In other words what we have been considering in this Conference has pinpointed once more, or underlined, what constitutes the essence of Puritanism.

There is much debate at the present time as to what Puritanism really is; and I believe that that experiment in New England has reminded us, and shown us clearly what Puritanism is in its essence. It is concerned with the nature of the Christian church. Some would have us believe that Puritanism is essentially an interest in pastoral theology; but that was incidental. The essence of Puritanism was the desire to carry the reform, which had already happened in the matter of doctrine, further into the nature and the life and polity of the Christian church. The theme of this Conference demonstrates that in this way. Here were a number of men who for a number of reasons - the main one being persecution - crossed the Atlantic and went to live in this new country. They had all been Anglicans, but the moment they had the freedom to do what they really believed they ceased to be Anglicans. They dropped episcopacy and they introduced the Congregational idea of the church. That is the lesson which stands out very clearly. The same happened later in this country to most of the Puritans; but these men, with the opportunity, and the liberty to do what they wanted to do, and what they believed, did immediately what was only done some 30 years later in this country at the time of the war, the rebellion, against Charles I, and then during the Commonwealth, and eventually in the Great Ejection of 1662. I argue therefore that what happened in New England is one of the most vital bits of evidence with regard to the character and nature of Puritanism.

However, I am to deal with Jonathan Edwards in particular. I take for granted the main facts concerning him. He was born in 1703 and died in 1758. Curiously enough he died as a result of being vaccinated against smallpox. He was a man who had a very curious and active mind. He was interested in scientific matters as well as theology, and that was the immediate cause of his death. He received the education that was available in New England at that time, and went to Yale University. In 1727 he was ordained as assistant pastor of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, in the town of Northampton, Massachusetts. Within a year or so the old man died and Jonathan Edwards became the sole pastor. There he remained until 1750 when he was literally turned out of his church. That was one of the most amazing things that ever happened, and it should come as a word of encouragement to ministers and preachers. Here was this towering genius, this mighty preacher, this man at the center of a great revival, yet he was literally voted out of his church by 230 votes against 23 in 1750. Do not be surprised then, brethren, as to what may happen to you in your churches!

Having been driven from his church in Northampton in that way, he went to a place that was on the frontier in those days, amongst Indians, called Stockbridge. I believe that in the providence of God he was sent there; because he wrote some of his greatest masterpieces while he was there. In the same way as the imprisonment of John Bunyan for 12 years in Bedford gave us his classics, so, I believe, this isolation of Jonathan Edwards was the means of giving us some of his classics. From there he was called to be the President of the then College of New Jersey, now known as the Princeton University, and after having been there a very short time he died in the way I have described.

However, the thing that stands out in the life of this man was the remarkable revival that broke out under his ministry in Northampton, beginning at the end of 1734, and in 1735, and then later his participation with others in the so-called Great Awakening in connection with the visit of George Whitefield and others in 1740. Those are the salient facts in the life of this great man.

There are certain points of difference between him and those of whom we have heard hitherto in the Conference. He was an 18th-century man, not a 17th-century man. He was born in America. Most of those of whom we have been hearing were born in this country and then went over to America. I believe also that we are entitled to say that with Jonathan Edwards a new element or a new factor can be seen in Puritanism. Most of the great Puritans had a strain or a strand of what one is compelled to describe as scholasticism in them. That led to the involved character of their style, and the divisions and sub-divisions which characterize their works. Edwards is comparatively free from that, and the result is that his method is more direct, more living. Furthermore, I am going to suggest that the element of the Holy Spirit is more prominent in Edwards than in any other of the Puritans.

Yet he belongs to the tradition which we have been considering. He believed in the Covenant theology, but he rejected the Halfway Covenant idea completely. In a sense that was indirectly the cause of his being turned out of his church in 1750. He would not baptize the children of certain people, and he insisted upon a certain standard of behavior and conduct in those who were to be admitted to the communion table. In addition Jonathan Edwards would have nothing to do with the teaching of preparation. He belongs here to John Cotton rather than to Thomas Hooker. He puts his view in this way, "Everything in the Christian scheme argues, that man's title to, and fitness for heaven, depends on some great divine influence, at once causing a vast change, and not any such gradual change as is supposed to be brought to pass by men themselves in the exercise of their own power. The exceeding diversity of the states of men in another world argues it;" (Works Vol. 2, 557). As I am going to show he believed in a direct and immediate influence of the Spirit, and in sudden and dramatic conversion. But, like the other men, he was fond of reading the works of William Ames and was indebted to them, and adopted much of Ames' teaching, as did the others, in his preaching. He, of course, as they were, was a Calvinist and a Congregationalist, and he put great emphasis, as they all did, on the moral and the ethical elements in the Christian faith and Christian living. However, I venture to make the assertion that in Edwards we come to the very zenith or acme of Puritanism, for in him we have what we find in all the others, but in addition, this spirit, this life, this additional vitality. Not that the others were entirely lacking in that, but it is such an outstanding characteristic in him that I would assert that Puritanism reached its fullest bloom in the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards.

He came upon the scene after a period of considerable lifelessness in the churches. It is very important that we should realize this. It is most comforting for us because we live in a very similar period. Here is a description of the period immediately preceding this great revival, as given by the Rev W. Cooper, one of the ministers at that time, in his preface to Edwards' Distinguishing Marks of a Work of Spirit of God: "But what a dead and barren time has it now been, nor a great while, with all the churches of the Reformation. The golden showers have been restrained; the influences of the Spirit suspended; and the consequence has been, that the gospel has not had any eminent success. Conversions have been rare and dubious; few sons and daughters have been born to God and the hearts of Christians not so quickened, warmed and refreshed under the ordinances, as they have been. That this has been the sad state of religion among us in this land, for many years (except one or two distinguished places which have at times been visited with a shower of mercy while other towns and churches have not been rained upon) will be acknowledged by all who have spiritual senses exercised, as it has been lamented by faithful ministers and serious Christians" (Vol. 2, 257).

As Mr. Cooper says, there had been some touches here and there, and particularly in the church of which Jonathan Edwards became minister, under the ministry of his grandfather, old Mr. Stoddard. But they had not spread, and they had been periodic, and had more or less finished altogether. So there had been this lifeless condition of 'the church; but now something new happened. After the drought, came showers; life began to make itself manifest once more. Something happened which continued to affect the life of America most profoundly for at least 100 years, and indeed even until today.

It is quite astonishing to notice the new interest in Jonathan Edwards during the last 40 years or so. I can illustrate this from my own experience. Just before I entered the ministry in 1927 I sought help as regards reading from a friend of mine who not long before had taken first class Honors in Divinity in the University of Oxford. He recommended a large number of books which he had been reading himself for his degree. Among the books was one called Protestant thought before Kant by a man called McGiffert. The only thing that impressed me in that book was a chapter on a man called Jonathan Edwards, though he was dealt with mainly as a philosopher. But my interest was aroused immediately. The next time I met my friend I asked, "Could you tell me where I can find out something further about this man Jonathan Edwards? Who is he?" he said! He knew nothing about him, and although I made many inquiries I could not find anybody who could tell me anything about Edwards or about his works. It was not until some two years later, quite by accident, that I found the two volumes of the complete works of Jonathan Edwards which I then purchased for five shillings. I was like the man in our Lord's parable who found a pearl of great price. Their influence upon me I cannot put into words.

However, since then, and beginning in the early 1930's there has been a revival of interest in Edwards in a most astonishing

hing manner. Professor Perry Miller is largely responsible for this, but he is not the only one. Every year several books seem to appear on Jonathan Edwards. There are two men who spend their vacations in the library of Yale University going through manuscript sermons by Jonathan Edwards. In other words, they are reprinting the complete works of Edwards - a definitive edition. I had the privilege of meeting these two men in 1967 and of handling some of the manuscripts of the sermons of this great man. The two volumes recently republished by the Banner of Truth Trust have often been regarded as the Complete Works, but they are not. A man published a book in the 1860's consisting of numerous other things which are not in these two volumes, and there are still more - sermons, letters, occasional remarks, miscellanies and so on. They are all going to be reprinted in the definitive edition.

The explanation of this astounding fact is, of course, that Jonathan Edwards, amongst other things, is America's greatest philosopher. Everyone seems to grant that, and so they are interested in him. I would issue a word of warning at this point. You must be careful and discriminating as you read some of these newer books on Jonathan Edwards. Several of them are written by Professors of English literature, others by philosophers; and they are interested in him chiefly as a great thinker, as a great writer, as a man who had a dominating influence even upon the literature of the United States, and who in a sense, was a precursor of the Romantic Movement in English literature. But as many of these men are not Christians they tend unconsciously, and unwittingly, to misinterpret him and to misrepresent him. So they must be read with discrimination. But I am calling attention to the fact that this amazing man who died more than two hundred years ago is still exerting this powerful influence upon the thought life of America as he continued to do through last century as well. Of course, he divided opinion. He has been denounced without measure. For instance, Oliver Wendell Holmes writes about Jonathan Edwards, thus: 'Edwards had a theology rooted in the deepest depths of hell', and he wrote in 'a language which shocks the sensibilities of a later generation'. He goes on to say, 'Had Edwards lived longer I have no doubt his creed would have softened into a kindly, humanized belief'. In other words Edwards would have written the kind of literature written by 'The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table'. Thank God, we have Edwards as he is, not as Oliver Wendell Holmes, the humanist, who never understood Edwards at all, would like him to be.

Clarence Darrow, the man who defended that schoolmaster, Scopes, who was prosecuted for teaching evolution in the early 1920's and who stood against William Jennings Bryan in the famous 'monkey trial', wrote, 'It is not surprising that Edwards' main business in the world was to scare silly women and little children, and blaspheming the God he professed to adore.... Nothing but a disturbed or a diseased mind could have produced his 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'; I quoted that because of that reference to the sermon preached by Edwards under that title, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. You can hear references to that sermon not infrequently on the television and elsewhere. The fact is that all most people seem to know of Edwards is that he once preached a sermon bearing that title. That is all they know about him, and they probably have not even read that sermon. They just go on repeating what others have said about it, and it is regarded, as you see from the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, as just an assault, a ranting assault upon the sensibilities, and as violence done to reason, and soon. This is, of course, quite ridiculous.

Anyone who knows anything about Jonathan Edwards knows that he was as far removed from being a ranter as it is possible for a man to be. But he did say some very strong and very alarming things which are liable to be misunderstood. Edwards himself has answered this particular criticism. He says: 'Another thing that some ministers have been greatly blamed for, and I think unjustly, is speaking terror to them who are already under great terrors, instead of comforting them. Indeed if ministers in such a case go about to terrify persons with that which is not true, or to affright them by representing their case worse than it is, or in any respect otherwise than it is, they are to be condemned; but if they terrify them only by still holding forth more light to them, and giving them to understand more of the truth of their case, they are altogether to be justified. When consciences are greatly awakened by the Spirit of God, it is but light imparted, enabling men to see their case, in some measure, as it is; and, if more light be let in, it will terrify them still more. But ministers are not therefore to be blamed that they endeavor to hold forth more light to the conscience, and do not rather alleviate the pain they are under, by intercepting and obstructing the light that shines already. To say any thing to those who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, to represent their case any otherwise than exceeding terrible, is not to preach the word of God to them; for the word of God reveals nothing but truth; but this is to delude them' (Vol. 1, 392). In other words, Edwards believed the Bible which says terrifying things about any man who dies in his sins. That is all Edwards did. It was pure reasoning from the words of Scripture. It was not what Edwards said, it was what the Scriptures said; and he felt it to be his duty to warn the people. But he qualifies that, saying, 'I know of but one case, wherein the truth ought to be withheld from sinners in distress of conscience, and that is the case of melancholy; and it is not to be withheld from them, as if the truth tends to do them hurt; but because, if we speak the truth to them, sometimes they will be deceived, and led into error by it, through that strange disposition there is in them to take things wrong' (Vol.1, 392). In other words, no man was further removed from the violence of a ranting traveling evangelist than Jonathan Edwards. That is the defense which one s

ould make when one hears people referring to him as that terrible man who preached the sermon on 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'.

Now let us look at this man who has had such a lasting influence, and who seems to be becoming again almost a dominating influence in religious thought in America. I confess freely that this is one of the most difficult tasks I have ever attempted. The theme is almost impossible, and very largely for the reason that I have already given, namely the influence of Edwards upon me. I am afraid, and I say it with much regret, that I have to put him ahead even of Daniel Rowland and George Whitefield. Indeed I am tempted, perhaps foolishly, to compare the Puritans to the Alps, Luther and Calvin to the Himalayas, and Jonathan Edwards to Mount Everest! He has always seemed to me to be the man most like the apostle Paul. Of course, Whitefield was a great and mighty preacher as was Daniel Rowland but so was Edwards. Neither of them had the mind, neither of them had the intellect, neither of them had the grasp of theology that Edwards had; neither of them was the philosopher he was. He stands out, it seems to me, quite on his own amongst men. So the task confronting me, if I may follow my analogy of Mount Everest, is to decide whether to approach him by the south Col or by the north Col. There are so many approaches to this great summit; but not only so, the atmosphere is so spiritually rarefied, and there is this blazing whiteness of the holiness of the man himself, and his great emphasis upon the holiness and the glory of God; and above all the weakness of the little climber as he faces this great peak pointing up to heaven. All I can hope to do is to give some glimpses of this man and his life, and what he did, with the ultimate end and object of persuading every one to buy these two volumes of his works, and to read them!

Let us start with the man himself. The first thing that must be said is that he was a phenomenon. Here is a man brought up in that, as yet, undeveloped country. Of course, there were able men there, and Colleges had come into being - Harvard and Yale were in existence. But they do not explain him. He was born in a comparatively isolated area, and yet he stands out as a sheer genius, ridiculing any notions of evolution, or the theory of acquired characteristics and soon. Unlike most of the other men we have been hearing about in this Conference, he had been neither to Oxford nor Cambridge. He was an original, suddenly shot forth, a mighty intellect, accompanied by a brilliant imagination, amazing originality; but above all by honesty. He is one of the most honest expositors I have ever read. He never evades a problem; he faces them all. He does not skirt round a difficulty; he had this curious interest in truth in all its aspects, and then with all those scintillating gifts there is his humility and modesty, and added to that his exceptional spirituality. He knew more about experimental religion than most men; and he placed great emphasis upon the heart. In other words, what strikes one about Edwards as one looks at the man as a whole is the completeness, the balance. He was a mighty theologian and a great evangelist at the same time. How foolish we have become! This man was both, as was the apostle Paul. He was also a great pastor; he dealt with souls and their problems. He was equally expert with adults as with children; and he was a great defender of conversion in children, and paid great attention to children, even allowing them to have meetings on their own. He seems to be everything and to be perfectly balanced. He opposed Hyper-Calvinism and was equally opposed to Arminianism. This element of balance in his teaching, and in his position, is shown in the following statement: 'In efficacious grace 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' (Vol. 2, 557, para. 64).

Now that was Edwards' position, and we note this element of balance which I am emphasizing. There is no contradiction there: the ultimate antinomy is presented perfectly.

What then was the secret of this man? I have no hesitation in saying this: the spiritual always controlled the intellectual in him. I believe he must have had a great struggle with his towering intellect, and his original thinking. Moreover he was a voracious reader, and it would have been the simplest thing in the world for such a man to have become a pure intellectual such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Perry Miller and many others wished he had become. But as they put it, theology kept breaking in. But that constitutes the special glory of this man - and this is what explains him - that he always kept his philosophy and his speculations subservient to the Bible and regarded them as mere servants. Whatever he might be tempted to think, the Bible was supreme: everything was subordinate to the Word of God. All his rich and brilliant gifts were not only held to be subservient, but were used as servants. In other words he was God dominated. Someone has said of him that 'he combined passionate devotion and a profoundly integrated mind'.

Let us now look at him for a moment as a preacher, for he was preeminently a preacher. This is what he wanted to be, and this is what he continued to be until that very short time at Princeton. Had he had his way I believe he would have continued always as a preacher, an evangelist and a teacher. Let us start by looking at his view of religion. What is true religion? Here is a question we need to ask ourselves; and in the case of Edwards the answer is perfectly clear. It is what is called today an existential meeting with God. It is a living meeting with God. God and myself, these 'two only realities'. Religion is something, to Edwards, that belongs essentially to the heart. It is essentially experimental, essentially practical.

This is made clear in the famous account he gives of an experience he once had. Do not forget that we are dealing with one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known and the greatest American philosopher of all times. This is what he tells us:

'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 and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception - 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. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust; and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have several other times had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.

'I have, many times, had a sense of the glory of the Third Person in the Trinity, and his office as Sanctifier; in his holy operations, communicating divine light and life to the soul. God in the communications of his Holy Spirit, has appeared as an infinite fountain of divine glory and sweetness; being full, and sufficient to fill and satisfy the soul; pouring forth itself in secret communications; like the sun in its glory, sweetly and pleasantly diffusing light and life. And I have sometimes an affecting sense of the excellency of the word of God as a word of life; as the light of life; a Sweet, excellent, life-giving word; accompanied with a thirsting after that word, that it might dwell richly in my heart' (Vol.1,47).

Now that represents his essential view of religion. Another quotation also helps to bring out the same emphasis:

'All will allow that true virtue or holiness has its seat chiefly in the heart, rather than in the head. It therefore follows, from what has been said already, that it consists chiefly in holy affections. The things of religion take place in men's hearts, no further than they are affected with them. The informing of the understanding is all vain, any farther than it affects the heart, or, which is the same thing, has influence on the affections. Those gentlemen, who make light of these raised affections in religion, will doubtless allow that true religion and holiness, as it has its seat in the heart, is capable of very high degrees, and high exercises in the soul' (Vol. I, 367).

There we have his essential view of religion; it is mainly a matter of the heart, and unless it affects the heart it is of no value, whatever it may do in the head. One further quotation helps to emphasize this matter. It is out of one of Edwards' greatest sermons which bears the title: 'A Divine and Supernatural Light, immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God, shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine'. I tend to agree here with Professor Perry Miller. He says that in this one sermon - and it is a comparatively short one - you have a synopsis of the whole of Edwards' teaching. He defines positively what this spiritual and divine light is:

'A true sense of the divine and superlative glory in these things; an excellency that is of vastly higher kind, and more sublime nature, than in other things; a glory greatly distinguishing them from all that is earthly and temporal. He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness. There is not only a speculatively judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is on account of the beauty of this divine attribute' (Vol.2, 14).

There, then, we have some idea of Edwards' view of religion. That is what religion is, and this is the test by which we should examine ourselves.

Let us now turn to Edwards' method of preaching. We note at once that he preached sermons, and that he did not deliver lectures. Edwards did not lecture about Christian truths. I am told frequently these days that many preachers seem to be lecturers rather than preachers. Preaching is not lecturing. Neither did Edwards just give a running commentary on a passage. That is not preaching either; though many today seem to think that it is. That was not Edwards' idea of preaching; and it has never been the classical idea of preaching. He started with a text. He was always Scriptural. He did not merely take a theme and speak on it, except when he was expounding some doctrine, but even then he chose a text. He was always expository. He was also invariably analytical. He had an analytical mind. He divides up his text, his statement; he wants to get at the essence of the message; so the critical, analytical element in his wonderful mind comes into play. He does this in order that he may arrive at the doctrine taught in the verse or section; and then he reasons about this doctrine, shows how it is to be found elsewhere in Scripture, and its relationship to other doctrines, and then establishes its

truth. But he never stops at that. There is always the application. He was preaching to people and not giving a dissertation, not giving expression in public to his private thoughts in the study. He was always concerned to bring home the truth to the listeners, to show the relevance of it. But, above all, and I quote him, he believed that preaching should always be 'warm and earnest'. I remind you again that we are dealing here with a giant intellect and brilliant philosopher; and yet this is the man who places all this emphasis upon warmth and upon feeling. This is how he states this principle:

'The frequent preaching that has lately obtained, has in a particular manner been objected against as being unprofitable and prejudicial. It is objected that, when sermons are heard so very often, one sermon tends to thrust out another; so that persons lose the benefit of all. They say, two or three sermons in a week is as much as they can remember and digest. Such objections against frequent preaching, if they be not from an enmity against--religion, are for want of duly considering the way that sermons usually profit an auditory. The main benefit obtained by preaching is by impression made upon the mind at the time, and not by an effect that arises afterwards by a remembrance of what was delivered. And though an after-remembrance of what was heard in a sermon is oftentimes very profitable; yet, for the most part, that remembrance is from an impression the words made on the heart at the time; and the memory profits, as it renews and increases that impression' (Vol. I, 394).

I would add that I have often discouraged the taking of notes while I am preaching. It is becoming a custom among evangelical people; but it is not, as many seem to think, the hallmark of spirituality!

The first and primary object of preaching is not only to give information. It is, as Edwards says, to produce an impression. It is the impression at the time that matters, even more than what you can remember subsequently. In this respect Edwards is, in a sense, critical of what was a prominent Puritan custom and practice. The Puritan father would catechize and question the children as to what the preacher had said. Edwards, in my opinion, has the true notion of preaching. It is not primarily to impart information; and while you are writing your notes you may be missing something of the impact of the Spirit. As preachers we must not forget this. We are not merely imparters of information. We should tell our people to read certain books themselves and get the information there. The business of preaching is to make such knowledge live. The same applies to lecturers in Colleges. The tragedy is that many lecturers simply dictate notes and the wretched students take them down. That is not the business of a lecturer or a professor. The students can read the books for themselves; the business of the professor is to put that on fire, to enthuse, to stimulate, to enliven. And that is the primary business of preaching. Let us take this to heart. Edwards laid great emphasis upon this; and what we need above everything else today is moving, passionate, powerful preaching. It must be 'warm' and it must be 'earnest'. Edwards sometimes wrote out his manuscript sermon in full, and then read it to the congregation; but not always. He sometimes preached from notes.

Now look at Edwards the theologian! I can but glance at this; but it is all to be found in the two volumes of his Works. In those two volumes, if you have no more, you have a compendium of theology. Remember that he was teaching this to people like ourselves; indeed to people who had not had the education that most have had today. He deals with all the major themes, Original Sin, the Freedom of the Will, Justification by Faith, A History of the Work of Redemption. He lays down the principles of evangelism in sermons; he has Five Discourses on the Soul's Eternal Redemption. He paid much attention to Eschatology, the doctrine of the last things, and the ultimate glory that awaits us as children of God. He was, as I say, a mighty theologian; and if you really want to know something about these various themes turn to Edwards. You will find the doctrine in a form which you can easily follow, and you will be greatly benefited as a result of so doing.

But we must leave that and come to what, after all, is the most remarkable thing of all about Jonathan Edwards. He was preeminently the theologian of Revival, the theologian of experience, or as some have put it 'the theologian of the heart'. The most astonishing thing about this phenomenon, this mighty intellect, was that no man knew more about the workings of the human heart, regenerate and unregenerate, than Jonathan Edwards. If you want to know anything about the psychology of religion, conversion, revivals, read Jonathan Edwards. When you have read him you will find that William James' Varieties of Religious Experience is like turning from a solid book to a paper-back. The same applies to Starbuck, and, of course, still more so to the idle vapourings of William Sargant who refers to the famous sermon on 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. You will find the complete answer to all that if you read the works of Edwards. These men are mere tyros, merely paddling at the edge of the ocean, whereas Edwards takes you out into the depths where you begin to see man face to face with his Maker.

In this field Edwards stands out supremely and without a peer. An American of the name of Hofstadter published a book in the 60's entitled Anti-Intellectualism in American Life. Some English Evangelicals seem to have discovered this recently, and reversing their previous practice, are now telling us to put great emphasis upon the intellect. The answer to that, once more, is to read Jonathan Edwards. It is not anti-intellectualism. You cannot use the term anti-intellectual when you

are talking about Jonathan Edwards! It is quite the reverse; in him you have an intellect fired by, and filled with, the Holy Spirit. That is what should be true of all of us. My contention is that what Edwards wrote in this connection is a unique literature; and that there is nothing anywhere that I know of, or have heard referred to, which is in any way comparable to what he has written. He did this in various ways. He gives personal accounts of people's experiences; and I have already quoted something of his own experience. There is more in his Personal Narrative, in his diaries. He gives us an extended account of some of the amazing experiences that came to his wife. Jonathan Edwards' wife was as great a saint as Jonathan Edwards himself, and she had some almost incredible experiences. He gives an account of them and examines them. One of the treatises in the two Volumes is called 'A Narrative of Surprising Conversions'. It is the most exciting, thrilling reading you can ever find. Have you read them? Well, read them! You will not be able to stop once you start.

Another most important group of his writings consists of his accounts of revivals. He was asked to do this. One of his treatises was on the Revival of Religion in New England. It was sent to friends in Boston and then to this country, and it was read with great avidity by men in England and Scotland. There are references to revivals, and what happened in them, in many of his letters, and also frequently in his sermons. But what is unique and superlative is the way in which he analyses experiences - both individual experiences and revival in general. It is here that he is pre-eminently the expert. If you want to know anything about true revival, Edwards is the man to consult. His knowledge of the human heart, and the psychology of human nature, is quite incomparable.

Edwards wrote these things because in a sense he was compelled to do so, because of criticisms and misunderstandings. He was always fighting on two fronts right through his life. A movement of the Spirit took place in his own church, and spread to other churches in quite an extensive area, and then came the Great Awakening in 1740 associated with his name and also Whitefield and others. All this divided the people and the churches into two groups. There were some who were totally opposed to the revival. They were orthodox men who held the same theology as Edwards. They were Calvinists, but they disliked revival. They disliked the emotional element, they disliked the novelty. They had many objections to what was happening; and Edwards had to defend the revival against these critics. But then there were men at the other extreme, the wild men; and with them the wild fire came in that always tends to come in during a revival. These were the enthusiasts, the men who went to extremes, the men who were guilty of folly. Edwards had to deal with them also; so here he was, fighting on the two fronts. But, of course, his one interest was the glory of God and the benefit of the church. He had no desire to be a controversialist, but he had to write for and defend the truth.

The main works containing these analyses of experiences and these justifications of experiences and revivals are found in works like A Treatise concerning the Religious Affections. That is one of his most famous books. It really consisted of a series of sermons on one verse - I Peter 1:8: 'Whom having not seen ye love, in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' What he does in these books is to show the difference between the true and the false in the realm of experience. That is the theme of all these different treatises and it is worked out on the two sides in order to deal with the opponents and the enthusiasts at the same time. Here is the way in which he divides up the subject in the Treatise concerning the Religious Affections. He divides it into three parts. Here are his headings: Part one 'Concerning the nature of the affections and their importance in religion.' He has to establish that they are legitimate. The opponents of revival preached their great doctrinal sermons but they were cold, and any emotion or any fervor was automatically taboo. Edwards therefore has to justify them and to show that there is a place for them. Then he goes on to show that 'True religion lies much in affections', then 'Inferences from this'. Then part two, 'Showing that there are no certain signs that religious affections are truly gracious or that they are not'. That is typical Edwards - the negative and the positive. He goes on to show that the fact that affections 'are raised very high is no sign' that they are true; the fact that there are 'great effects on the body is no sign', 'fluency and fervor are no sign', 'that they are not excited by us is no sign', 'that they come with texts of Scripture is no proof that they are real', 'that there is an appearance of love is no sign', 'religious affections of many kinds are no signs' 'joys following in a certain order are no sign', 'much time and zeal in duty', 'many expressions of praise, great confidence, affecting relations are no sign'. None of these are true signs of necessity either that they are or that they are not genuine. Then part three shows what are distinguishing signs of truly gracious and holy affections. 'Gracious affections are from Divine influence.' 'Their object is the excellence of Divine things. . . . 'Christian practice is the chief sign to others and to ourselves.'

That was Edwards. He is not credulous, and he is not hypercritical. He examines the two sides always. He had to defend a number of unusual and remarkable phenomena that occurred in the revival of the 1740's. He had to defend, and does defend, the fact that even the body may be affected. Edwards' wife, on one occasion, exhibited the phenomenon which is known as levitation. She was literally carried from one part of the room to another without making any effort or exertion herself. Sometimes people would swoon and become unconscious in meetings. Edwards did not teach that such phenomena were of the devil. He has some striking things to say about this. He was always warning on both sides, warning against quenching the Spirit, warning also against being carried away by the flesh and being deluded by Satan through th

e flesh. He warned everybody. On one occasion Edwards even warned George White-field, who was staying with him. Whitefield had a tendency to obey and to listen to 'impulses' and he would act on them. Edwards ventured to criticize Whitefield on that score, and to warn him against possible dangers.

Here are some illustrations of the way in which Edwards does this wonderful work. They will show how he warned some people against the danger of rejecting the revival as a whole in terms of philosophy or history, and the danger of looking at particular aspects of revival only and not regarding it as a whole and its remarkable results. But nothing is more important than the way in which he warned people against the terrible danger of judging in these matters in terms of their own personal experiences, instead of in terms of the teaching of the Scriptures. One of our greatest dangers in the Christian church, and particularly in evangelical churches, today, is the habit of reducing some of the great statements of the Scripture to the level of our own experiences. Take for example that verse on which Edwards preached in connection with his Treatise on the Religious Affections, 'Whom having not seen ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Pet. 1:8). There are many today who interpret that in terms of their own experience and who know nothing about a joy which is 'unspeakable and full of glory'. They say that that is experience by every Christian. This is how Edwards warns against that danger:

'I would propose it to be considered, whether or no some, instead of making the Scriptures their only rule to judge of this work, do not make their own experience the rule, and reject such and such things as are now professed and experienced, because they themselves never felt them. Are there not many, who, chiefly on this ground, have entertained and vented suspicions, if not peremptory condemnations, of those extreme terrors, and those great, sudden, and extraordinary discoveries of the glorious perfections of God, and of the beauty and love of Christ? Have they not condemned such vehement affections, such high transports of love and joy, such pity and distress for the souls of others, and exercises of mind that have such great effects, merely, or chiefly, because they knew nothing about them by experience? Persons are very ready to be suspicious of what they have not felt themselves. It is to be feared that many good men have been guilty of this error; which however does not make it the less unreasonable. And perhaps there are some who upon this ground do not only reject these extraordinary things, but all such conviction of sin, discoveries of the glory of God, excellency of Christ, and inward conviction of the truth of the gospel, by the immediate influence of the Spirit of God, now supposed to be necessary to salvation. These persons who thus make their own experiences their rule of judgment, instead of bowing to the wisdom of God, and yielding to His word as an infallible rule, are guilty of casting a great reflection upon the understanding of the Most High' (Vol. 1, 371).

Or take again his defense of unusual or high experiences of God the work of the Spirit. He writes:

'It is no argument that a work is not of the Spirit of God, that some who are the subjects of it have been in a kind of ecstasy, wherein they have been carried beyond themselves, and have had their minds transported into a train of strong and pleasing imaginations, and a kind of visions, as though they were rapt up even to heaven, and there saw glorious sights. I have been acquainted with some such instances, and I see no need of bringing in the help of the devil into the account that we give of these things, nor yet of supposing them to be of the same nature with the visions of the prophets, or St. Paul's rapture into paradise. Human nature, under these intense exercises and affections, is all that need be brought into the account' (Vol. 2, 263).

Look now at what he says about the witness of the Spirit with our spirits. There is much confusion about this at the present time. How do you interpret Romans 8:1-16? This is how Jonathan Edwards deals with the witness of the Spirit:

'There have been instances before now, of persons crying out in transports of divine joy in New England. We have an instance in Captain Clap's memoirs (published by the Rev Mr. Prince), not of a silly woman or child, but a man of solid understanding, that, in a high transport of spiritual joy, was made to cry out aloud on his bed. His words, p.9, are 'God's Holy Spirit did witness (I do believe) together with my spirit, that I was a child of God; and did fill my heart and soul with such full assurance that Christ was mine, that it did so transport me, as to make me cry out upon my bed, with a loud voice, He is come, He is come' (Vol.1, 70).

Does every Christian feel and know this witness of the Spirit? God forbid that we should reduce these glorious statements to the level of our poor and puny experiences. In the same paragraph he refers to that never-to-be-forgotten experience that John Flavel had on a certain occasion when he was traveling on a journey.

Here is his defense of the astonishing experiences which were given to his wife. Having given an extensive account of her experiences he analyses them and evaluates them. There were many then, and there are many still, who would dismiss it all as ecstasy, fancy, an over-wrought imagination and so on. This is how Edwards comments on it: 'Now if such thi



ings are enthusiasm, or the offspring of a distempered brain, let my brain be possessed ever more of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be all seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatific, glorious distraction! What notion have they of true religion, who reject what has here been described! What shall we find to correspond with these expressions of Scripture. The peace of God that passeth all understanding: Rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: God's shining into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ: with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of God, and being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord:

Being called out of darkness into marvelous light: and having the day-star arise in our hearts? What, let me ask, if these things that have been mentioned do not correspond with these expressions, what else can we find that does correspond with them?' (Vol.1, 69).

In that way Edwards defended the unusual and exceptional experiences that were being vouchsafed to certain people at that particular time. Yet, with all his analysis, negative and positive, and his examination and questioning and querying, he never leaves us confused and despondent as Thomas Shepard does in his study of the 'Parable of the Ten Virgins'. Edwards always elevates, always stimulates, and does not make us feel hopeless. He creates within us a desire to know something of these things.

Let me conclude with a word of application. To end without application would be false to the memory of this great man of God. What are the lessons for today from Jonathan Edwards? No man is more relevant to the present condition of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards. None is more needed. Take all we have been considering, and on top of that take the treatise he wrote in 1748 with the title *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and for the Advancement of Christ's kingdom on Earth*. Some friends in Scotland had been meeting together to pray in this way, and they wrote to Edwards and told him about this. They asked whether he agreed with this and whether he would write about it. So he wrote this great treatise pleading with people to join together, and to agree to do so once a month and in various other ways. He argues and pleads very specially in terms of what he and they regarded then as the nearness of the second coming of Christ and the glory that was to be revealed. It is a mighty and a glorious statement. Surely revival is the only answer to the present need and condition of the church. I would state it thus. An apologetic which fails to put supreme emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is doomed to be a complete failure. But that is what we have been doing. We have brought out an apologetic which is highly philosophical and argumentative. We have argued about modern art, modern literature, modern drama, politics and social views as if this is what is needed. What is needed is an effusion, an outpouring of the Spirit; and any apologetic which does not finally bring us to the need of such an outpouring will ultimately be useless. I believe we are again in much the same position as that which obtained before those great things happened in the 30'S of the eighteenth century. The Boyle lectures had been instituted in the previous century to provide an apologetic, and to defend religion and the gospel. And we have been doing the same with much assiduity. Not only so, Bishop Butler's famous Analogy had appeared in defense of the gospel in a different manner. But these were not the factors that changed the entire situation. It was revival; and our only hope is revival. We have tried everything else, Edwards reminds us once more of the supreme need of revival.

Let us be clear as to what he said about this. We must know what revival means. We must know the difference between an evangelistic campaign and revival. They are not to be compared. We must realize the difference between experiencing the power of the Spirit in revival and the calling of people to make a decision. Some years ago a certain well-known and prominent Evangelical leader at the time was urging me to attend a certain evangelistic campaign, and full of enthusiasm said, 'You must go. It's marvelous. Wonderful! People go streaming forward. No emotion. No emotion!' He kept on repeating 'No emotion'. He had not read Jonathan Edwards! We should be seriously concerned if there is no emotion. If people can take some supposed decision for Christ with no emotion, what is it that really happens? Is it conceivable that a soul may realize the danger of spending eternity in hell, know something about the holiness of God, and believe that the Son of God came into the world and even died on a cruel cross and rose again from the dead that he might be saved, and yet feel no emotion?

Read Edwards on revival. The term he used always is 'an outpouring of the Spirit'. Today, we are hearing much about what is called 'renewal'. They dislike the term revival; they prefer 'renewal'. What they mean by that is that we have all been baptized with the Spirit at the moment of regeneration, and that all we have to do therefore is to realize what we already have and yield ourselves to it. That is not revival! You can do all they teach and derive many benefits; but you still have not had revival. Revival is an out-pouring of the Spirit. It is something that comes upon us, that happens to us. We are not the agents, we are just aware that something has happened. So Edwards reminds us again of what revival really is.

That leads to a warning to those who are quenching the Spirit; and there are many who are guilty of that at the present time. A book by the late Ronald Knox on Enthusiasm has become popular among certain Evangelicals. He was an intellectual Roman Catholic ignorant of these things. He, of course, mentions Edwards and the famous sermon. The New Testament warns us against 'quenching the Spirit'. We can be guilty of doing so in many ways. We can quench the Spirit by being exclusively interested in theology. We can do so also by being concerned only about the application of Christianity to industry, to education, to art, to politics etc. At the same time Edwards gives similar warnings to those who emphasize experience only. Nothing is more striking than the balance of this man. You must have the theology; but it must be theology on fire. There must be warmth and heat as well as light. In Edwards we find the ideal combination - the great doctrines with the fire of the Spirit upon them.

I close with two special words of application. The first is to preachers. What Edwards said to preachers in his own day is urgently needed by us at this present time:

'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 the subject. I know it has long been fashionable to despise a very earnest and pathetic way of preaching; and they only have been valued as preachers, who have shown the greatest extent of learning, 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. Though, as I said before, clearness of distinction, illustration, and strength of reason, and a good method in the doctrinal handling of the truths of religion, is in many ways needful and profitable, and not to be neglected; yet an increase in speculative knowledge in divinity is not what is so much needed by our people as something else. Men may abound in this sort of light and have no heat. How much has there been of this sort of knowledge, in the Christian world, in this age! Was there ever an age, wherein strength and penetration of reason, extent of learning, exactness of distinction, correctness of style, and clearness of expression, did so abound? And yet, was there ever an age, wherein there has been so little sense of the evil of sin, so little love to God, heavenly-mindedness, and holiness of life, among the professors of the true religion? Our people do not 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 which has the greatest tendency to do this' (Vol.1.391).

Then a word to church members. Does all I have said make you feel that you are hopeless? Does it make you doubt perhaps whether you are Christian? My advice to you is: Read Jonathan Edwards. Stop going to so many meetings; stop craving for the various forms of entertainment which are so popular in evangelical circles at the present time. Learn to stay at home. learn to read again, and do not merely read the exciting stories of certain modern people. Go back to something solid and deep and real. Are we losing the art of reading? Revivals have often started as the result of people reading volumes such as these two volumes of Edwards' works. So read this man. Decide to do so. Read his sermons; read his practical treatises, and then go on to the great discourses on theological subjects.

But above all, let all of us, preachers and listeners, having read this man, try to capture and to lay hold upon his greatest emphasis of all - the glory of God. Let us not stop at any benefit we may have had, and not even with the highest experiences we may have enjoyed. Let us seek to know more and more of the glory of God. That is what leads always to a true experience. We need to know the majesty of God, the sovereignty of God, and to feel a sense of awe, and of wonder. Do we know this? Is there in our churches a sense of wonder and of amazement? This is the impression Jonathan Edwards always conveys and creates. He teaches that these things are possible for the humblest Christian. He was preaching and ministering to most ordinary people, and yet he tells them that these things are possible to all of them. Then, beyond all, and at a time of crisis and uncertainty like the present, I know nothing more wonderful than his emphasis on the 'blessed hope'. Read the sermon which he preached at the funeral of David Brainerd. It is an account of heaven and of the glory that awaits us as God's children. In a collapsing world with everything dissolving before our eyes, is it not time that we lifted up our heads and our eyes, and looked to the glory that is coming. Let the financial position of this country collapse, let everything collapse, God's purposes are sure and certain. Nothing 'can make Him His purpose forego'; and there is a glory awaiting us which baffles description. It has been prepared for us, and there it awaits all who truly look to these things, and 'the blessed appearing of our great God and Savior'.

So, let us leave Jonathan Edwards by quoting what he himself said of David Brainerd. I cannot think of anything better to say about Edwards himself:

'How much is there, in particular, in the things that have been observed of this eminent minister of Christ, to excite us, who are called to the same great work of the gospel-ministry, to earnest care and endeavors, that we may be in like manner

er faithful in our work; that we maybe filled with the same spirit, animated with the like pure and fervent flame of love to God, and the like earnest concern to advance the kingdom and glory of our Lord and Master, and the prosperity of Zion! How amiable did these principles render this servant of Christ in his life, and how blessed in his end! The time will soon come, when we also must leave our earthly tabernacles, and go to our Lord that sent us to labor in his harvest, to render an account of ourselves to him. Oh how does it concern us so to run as not uncertainly; so to fight, not as those that beat the air! And should not what we have heard excite us to depend on God for his help and assistance in our great work, and to be much in seeking the influences of his Spirit, and success in our labors, by fasting and prayer; in which the person spoken of was abundant? This practice he earnestly recommended on his death-bed, from his own experience of its great benefits, to some candidates for the ministry that stood by his bedside. He was often speaking of the great need ministers have of much of the Spirit of Christ in their work, and how little good they are like to do without it; and how, 'when ministers were under the special influences of the Spirit of God, it assisted them to come at the consciences of men, and (as he expressed it) as it were to handle them with hands: whereas, without the Spirit of God, said he, whatever I reason and oratory we make use of, we do but make use of stumps, instead of hands'.

'Oh that the things that were seen and heard in this extraordinary person, his holiness, heavenliness, labor, and self-denial in his life, his so remarkably devoting himself and his all, in heart and practice to the glory of God, and the wonderful frame of mind manifested in so steadfast a manner, under the expectation of death, and the pains and agonies that brought it on, may excite in us all, both ministers and people, a due sense of the greatness of the work we have to do in the world, the excellency and amiableness of thorough religion in experience and practice, and the blessedness of the end of such a life, and the infinite value of their eternal reward, when absent from the body and present with the Lord; and effectually stir us up to endeavors that, in the way of such a holy life, we may at last come to so blessed an end' (Vol.2, 35-36).