

Articles and Sermons :: Directions for Judging a Person's Experiences ~ Edwards**Directions for Judging a Person's Experiences ~ Edwards - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/12/18 5:14**

by Jonathan Edwards

I. "Look to see:

- 1) That the influence be upon the will or heart, not on the imagination, nor on the speculative understanding or thought processes of the mind, even if these processes sweep the emotions along with them as a consequence. That the disturbance in their thinking not be excessive, in that their thinking is bothered by those things it has reason to be disturbed about; and that the troubling of their minds seems to function in such a way, with the kind of troubling and exercising of the mind that is thoughtful: meaning that it is based on reasonable, solid consideration; a solid perception and conviction of truth, that is, of things as they really are.
- 2) That it is because their state appears terrifying on account of those things, because their state is indeed a dreadful one; and that their concern over their state be of a substantial quality, not so much characterised by pangs of conscience and sudden changes of emotion, abnormal and frightened behavior, and a capriciousness of mind.
- 3) That according to their expressed opinion, their state really is one of sin; that they are convinced of their guilt which consists in offending and insulting so great a God: One who hates sin and has set himself against it to punish it, etc.
- 4) That they are convinced of sins, both inward and outward: that their outward show of the sense of sin in the heart is not apart from a reflection on their wicked lifestyle; and also that they are not only convicted of sin in their lifestyle, but of sin in their heart. And in both, that what is disturbing them are those things in which their sinfulness is the real cause.
- 5) That they are convicted of sins of the spirit, which find their origin in their spiritual defects, such as living without love for God, without accepting Christ, without thankfulness to Him, etc.
- 6) That the opinions that they hold concerning the insufficiency and uselessness of their own doing, are not simply from some imaginative wandering of their thoughts brought on by bad behavior, but are rather from a conviction that they did their duties in a defective way, that it, not being done from a right motivation; with the conclusion that it is not some good mixed with the bad, but that they are entirely corrupt.
- 7) That it is truly a conviction of sin that convinces them that God would be just in their eternal condemnation, in rejecting their prayers, in paying no attention to their sorry state along with all their desires and attempts to find deliverance, etc. and is not simply an imagination or pang of conscience, and cooling of emotion through some real or supposed sign of Divine Goodness.
- 8) That they are so convinced of sin that in their inward thoughts and reasonings they do not make excuses, and implicate through a quarrel with God that they are in some way unable: for instance, they do not make excuses for ignoring Christ, for lack of love for Him, on the basis that they are not able to honor and love him.
- 9) That they do not introspectively consider their conviction as being so important, and that they are humble now. That which is chiefly their focus of attention is the Gospel. If this conviction is genuine, we will not need to insist on it, otherwise it will become obvious that it was purely out of works, having nothing to do with grace.

So with regard to conviction and humbling, look to see if the mind is really convinced of these things, even while looking for that which many theologians insist we look for, things that are actually only outward works. But also look for convictions that seem to be deep and fixed, that have a powerful controlling influence on the character of their thinking, with a direct relationship to lifestyle.

II. Look to see:

- 1) That they have not only a appearance of conviction of sin; but a fitting sorrow for sin. That is, that sin is a burden to th

em, and their hearts are tender and sensitized to how they relate to it - as the object of concern and anxiety.

2) That God Himself and spiritual things are to be admired on account of the beauty of their inherent goodness.

3) That it can be discerned in their perception of the sufficiency of Christ, a sense of that divine, supreme and spiritual superiority of Christ; and that their understanding of this inherent superiority is the real foundation of their satisfaction that He is sufficient.

4) That their deeply held view of the truth of the things of God is discerned to be in actuality in some way or other primarily based on a perception of their spiritual superiority.

5) That their ideas, enlightened thoughts, and experiences in general, are not superficial pangs of conscience, flashes of spirituality, imagination, or unusual occurrences, but solid, substantial, deep, and worked into the very fiber and character of their souls, and found to be directly related to a lifestyle.

6) That they desire to be holy, and that all their experiences increase this longing. Ask them about their attitude and willingness to bear the Cross, giving up everything for Christ, choosing instead to wait for their possessions till heaven, etc. - that is, whether their spiritual experience has a direct relationship to their lifestyle in these ways.

7) That their behavior at present seems to agree with such experiences - meaning, whether this experience inclines them to think much of how they are living now, and even more of how wrong their past lifestyle was. Is there an attitude of disgust toward past evil practice? Is there a longing for a complete freedom from sin, and a longing for those things that are holy, along with determined and strong resolutions, combined with fear and a jealous guarding of their own hearts.

whether, when relating these experiences, they put on an air expecting to be admired or applauded, and would be disappointed if they do not see something of that admiration in you; but are shocked and displeased if you do admire them. Inquire whether their joy truly and in a proper way is joy in God and in Christ, joy in His Divine Goodness; or whether their joy is completely directed to themselves, joy in their own superiority or privileges, in their experiences; what God has done for them, or what He has promised He will do for them; and whether they are not taken with their own ideas and feelings."