

Persons Having Religious Affections of Many Kinds, Accompanying One Another, Is No Sign

by Jonathan Edwards

The sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning between true and false religious affections, highlighting the ease with which counterfeit affections can be mistaken for true ones.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 24:16

Topics: "True Religion", "False Idolatry"

Description

Jonathan Edwards discusses how having various religious affections does not necessarily indicate true gracious affections. He explains that false religion can manifest in different forms, resembling genuine affections, such as love for God, godly sorrow for sin, fear of God, gratitude, joy, zeal, desires for eternal life, and hope. Edwards emphasizes that both true and false affections stem from love, with counterfeit love leading to other false affections. He compares human nature to channels from a fountain and branches from a tree, illustrating how the nature of the 'water' or 'sap' (love) determines the authenticity of the affections and actions that flow from it.

Transcript

VII. Persons having religious affections of many kinds, accompanying one another, is not sufficient to determine whether they have any gracious affections or no.

Though false religion is wont to be maimed and monstrous, and not to have that entireness and symmetry of parts, which is to be seen in true religion: yet there may be a great variety of false affections together, that may resemble gracious affections.

It is evident that there are counterfeits of all kinds of gracious affections; as of love to God, and love to the brethren, as has been just now observed; so of godly sorrow for sin, as in Pharaoh, Saul, and Ahab, and the children of Israel in the wilderness, Exod. 9:27, 1 Sam. 24:16, 17, and 31:21, 1 Kings 21:27, Numb. 14:39, 40; and of the fear of God, as in the Samaritans, "who feared the Lord, and served their own gods at the same time," 2 Kings 17:32, 33; and those enemies of God we read of, Psal. 66:3, who, "through the greatness of God's power, submit themselves to him," or, as it is in the Hebrew, "lie unto him," i.e., yield a counterfeit reverence and submission. So of a gracious gratitude, as in the children of Israel, who sang God's praise at the Red Sea, Psal. 106:12; and Naaman the Syrian, after his miraculous cure of his leprosy, 2 Kings 5:15, &c.

So of spiritual joy, as in the stony ground hearers, Matt. 13:20, and particularly many of John the Baptist's hearers, John 5:35. So of zeal, as in Jehu, 2 Kings 10:16, and in Paul before his conversion, Gal. 1:14, Phil. 3:6, and the unbelieving Jews, Acts 22:3, Rom. 10:2. So graceless persons may have earnest religious desires, which may be like Baalam's desires, which he expresses under an extraordinary view that he had of the happy state of God's people, as distinguished from all the rest of the world, Numb. 23:9, 10. They may also have a strong hope of eternal life, as the Pharisees had.

And as men, while in a state of nature, are capable of a resemblance of all kinds of religious affections, so nothing hinders but that they may have many of them together. And what appears in fact, does abundantly evince that it is very often so indeed. It seems commonly to be so, that when false affections are raised high, many false affections attend each other. The multitude that attended Christ into Jerusalem, after that great miracle of raising Lazarus, seem to have been moved with many religious affections at once, and all in a high degree.

They seem to have been filled with admiration, and there was a show of a high affection of love, and also of a great degree of reverence, in their laying their garments on the ground for Christ to tread upon; and also of great gratitude to him, for the great and good works he had wrought, praising him with loud voices for his salvation; and earnest desires of the coming of God's kingdom, which they supposed Jesus was now about to set up, and showed great hopes and raised expectations of it, expecting it would immediately appear; and hence were filled with joy, by which they were so animated in their acclamations, as to make the whole city ring with the noise of them; and appeared great in their zeal and forwardness to attend Jesus, and assist him without further delay, now in the time of the great feast of the Passover, to set up his kingdom.

And it is easy, from nature, and the nature of the affections, to give an account why, when one affection is raised very high, that it should excite others; especially if the affection which is raised high, be that of counterfeit love, as it was in the multitude who cried Hosanna. This will naturally draw many other affections after it. For, as was observed before, love is the chief of the affections, and as it were the fountain of them. Let us suppose a person who has been for some time in great exercise and terror through fear of hell, and his heart weakened with distress and dreadful apprehensions, and upon the brink of despair, and is all at once delivered, by being firmly made to believe, through some delusion of Satan, that God has pardoned him, and accepts him as the object of his dear love, and promises him eternal life; as suppose through some vision, or strong idea or imagination, suddenly excited in him, of a person with a beautiful countenance, smiling on him, and with arms open, and with blood dropping down, which the person conceives to be Christ, without any other enlightening of the understanding, to give a view of the spiritual divine excellency of Christ and his fullness; and of the way of salvation revealed in the gospel: or perhaps by some voice or words coming as if they were spoken to him, such as these, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee;" or, "Fear not, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," which he takes to be immediately spoken by God to him, though there was no preceding acceptance of Christ, or closing of the heart with him: I say, if we should suppose such a case, what various passions would naturally crowd at once, or one after another, into such a person's mind!

It is easy to be accounted for, from mere principles of nature, that a person's heart, on such an occasion, should be raised up to the skies with transports of joy; and be filled with fervent affection, to that imaginary God or Redeemer, who he supposes has thus rescued him from the jaws of such dreadful destruction, that his soul was so amazed with the fears of, and has received him with such endearment, as a peculiar favorite; and that now he should be filled with admiration and gratitude, and his mouth should be opened,

and be full of talk about what he has experienced; and that, for a while he should think and speak of scarce anything else, and should seem to magnify that God who has done so much for him, and call upon others to rejoice with him, and appear with a cheerful countenance, and talk with a loud voice: and however, before his deliverance, he was full of quarrellings against the justice of God, that now it should be easy for him to submit to God, and own his unworthiness, and cry out against himself, and appear to be very humble before God, and lie at his feet as tame as a lamb; and that he should now confess his unworthiness, and cry out, "Why me?"

Why me?" (Like Saul, who when Samuel told him that God had appointed him to be king, makes answer, "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" Much in the language of David, the true saint, 2 Sam. 7:18, "Who am I, and what is my father's house, that thou has brought me hitherto?") Nor is it to be wondered at, that now he should delight to be with them who acknowledge and applaud his happy circumstances, and should love all such as esteem and admire him and what he has experienced, and have violent zeal against all such as would make nothing of such things, and be disposed openly to separate, and as it were to proclaim war with all who be not of his party, and should now glory in his sufferings, and be very much for condemning and censuring all who seem to doubt, or make any difficulty of these things; and while the warmth of his affections lasts, should be mighty forward to take pains, and deny himself, to promote the interest of the party who he imagines favors such things, and seem earnestly desirous to increase the number of them, as the Pharisees compassed sea and land to make one proselyte.[20] And so I might go on, and mention many other things, which will naturally arise in such circumstances. He must have but slightly considered human nature, who thinks such things as these cannot arise in this manner, without any supernatural interposition of divine power.

As from true divine love flow all Christian affections, so from a counterfeit love in like manner naturally flow other false affections. In both cases, love is the fountain, and the other affections are the streams. The various faculties, principles, and affections of the human nature, are as it were many channels from one fountain: if there be sweet water in the fountain, sweet water will from thence flow out into those various channels; but if the water in the fountain be poisonous, then poisonous streams will also flow out into all those channels. So that the channels and streams will be alike, corresponding one with another; but the great difference will lie in the nature of the water. Or, man's nature may be compared to a tree, with many branches, coming from one root: if the sap in the root be good, there will also be good sap distributed throughout the branches, and the fruit that is brought forth will be good and wholesome; but if the sap in the root and stock be poisonous, so it will be in many branches (as in the other case), and the fruit will be deadly. The tree in both cases may be alike; there may be an exact resemblance in shape; but the difference is found only in eating the fruit. It is thus (in some measure at least) oftentimes between saints and hypocrites. There is sometimes a very great similitude between true and false experiences, in their appearance, and in what is expressed and related by the subjects of them: and the difference between them is much like the difference between the dreams of Pharaoh's chief butler and baker; they seemed to be much alike, insomuch that when Joseph interpreted the chief butler's dream, that he should be delivered from his imprisonment, and restored to the king's favor, and his honorable office in the palace, the chief baker had raised hopes and expectations, and told his dream also; but he was woefully disappointed; and though his dream was so much like the happy and well boding dream of his companion, yet it was quite contrary in its issue.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jonathan-edwards/persons-having-religious-affections-of-many-kinds-accompanying-one-another-is-no/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net