

They Arise From the Mind's Being Enlightened to Understand or Apprehend Divine Things.

by Jonathan Edwards

Gracious affections arise from the mind's being enlightened to understand divine things, and spiritual understanding consists in a sense of the heart of the supreme beauty and sweetness of divine things.

Scripture: Psalm 43:3, Luke 11:52, John 6:45, Romans 10:2, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Philippians 1:9, Colossians 1:9, Colossians 3:10, 1 John 3:6, 1 John 4:7

Topics: "Spiritual Enlightenment", "Holy Affections"

Description

Jonathan Edwards preaches about how gracious affections arise from the mind being enlightened to understand divine things. Holy affections are not merely emotional but are rooted in spiritual knowledge and understanding of God and Christ. Affections that do not stem from spiritual enlightenment are not genuine. Spiritual understanding is a supernatural discernment of divine things that natural men do not possess, and it primarily involves perceiving the beauty and excellence of God's moral perfection.

Transcript

IV. Gracious affections do arise from the mind's being enlightened, richly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things. Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from the information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. The child of God is graciously affected, because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ, and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel; he has some clearer and better view than he had before, when he was not affected: either he receives some understanding of divine things that is new to him; or has his former knowledge renewed after the view was decayed: 1 John 4:7, "Everyone that loveth, knoweth God."

Phil. 1:9, "I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment." Rom. 10:2, "They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Col. 3:10, "The new man, which is renewed in knowledge." Psalm 43:3, 4, "O send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill." John 6:45, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

Knowledge is the key that first opens the hard heart, and enlarges the affections, and so opens the way for men into the kingdom of heaven; Luke 11:52, "Ye have taken away the key of knowledge." Now there are

many affections which do not arise from any light in the understanding. And when it is thus, it is a sure evidence that these affections are not spiritual, let them be ever so high.[52] Indeed they have some new apprehensions which they had not before. Such is the nature of man, that it is impossible his mind should be affected, unless it be by something that he apprehends, or that his mind conceives of.

But in many persons those apprehensions or conceptions that they have, wherewith they are affected, have nothing of the nature of knowledge or instruction in them. As for instance, when a person is affected with a lively idea, suddenly excited in his mind, of some shape or very beautiful pleasant form of countenance, or some shining light, or other glorious outward appearance: here is something apprehended or conceived by the mind; but there is nothing of the nature of instruction in it; persons become never the wiser by such things, or more knowing about God, or a Mediator between God and man, or the way of salvation by Christ, or anything contained in any of the doctrines of the gospel.

Persons by these external ideas have no further acquaintance with God, as to any of the attributes or perfections of his nature; nor have they any further understanding of his word, or any of his ways or works. Truly spiritual and gracious affections are not raised after this manner; these arise from the enlightening of the understanding to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ, in a new manner, the coming to a new understanding of the excellent nature of God, and his wonderful perfections, some new view of Christ in his spiritual excellencies and fullness, or things opened to him in a new manner, that appertain to the way of salvation by Christ, whereby he now sees how it is, and understands those divine and spiritual doctrines which once were foolishness to him.

Such enlightenings of the understanding as these, are things entirely different in their nature from strong ideas of shapes and colors, and outward brightness and glory, or sounds and voices. That all gracious affections do arise from some instruction or enlightening of the understanding, is therefore a further proof, that affections which arise from such impression on the imagination, are not gracious affections, besides the things observed before, which make this evident.

Hence also it appears, that affections arising from texts of Scripture coming to the mind: are vain, when no instruction received in the understanding from those texts, or anything taught in those texts, is the ground of the affection, but the manner of their coming to the mind. When Christ makes the Scripture a means of the heart's burning with gracious affection, it is by opening the Scriptures to their understandings; Luke 24:32, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" It appears also that the affection which is occasioned by the coming of a text of Scripture must be vain, when the affection is founded on some thing that is supposed to be taught by it, which really is not contained in it nor in any other Scripture; because such supposed instruction is not real instruction, but a mistake and misapprehension of the mind. As for instance, when persons suppose that they are expressly taught by some Scripture coming to their minds, that they in particular are beloved of God, or that their sins are forgiven, that God is their Father, and the like, this is a mistake or misapprehension; for the Scripture nowhere reveals the individual persons who are to be loved, expressly; but only by consequence, by revealing the qualifications of persons that are beloved of God: and therefore this matter is not to be learned from Scripture any other way than by consequence, and from these qualifications; for things are not to be learned from the Scripture any other way than they are taught in the Scripture.

Affections really arise from ignorance, rather than instruction, in these instances which have been mentioned; as likewise in some others that might be mentioned. As some, when they find themselves free of speech in prayer, they call it God's being with them; and this affects them more; and so their affections

are set agoing and increased; when they look not into the cause of this freedom of speech, which may arise many other ways besides God's spiritual presence. So some are much affected with some apt thoughts that come into their minds about the Scripture, and call it the Spirit of God teaching them. So they ascribe many of the workings of their own minds, which they have a high opinion of, and are pleased and taken with, to the special immediate influences of God's Spirit; and so are mightily affected with their privilege. And there are some instances of persons, in whom it seems manifest, that the first ground of their affection is some bodily sensation. The animal spirits, by some cause (and probably sometimes by the devil) are suddenly and unaccountably put into a very agreeable motion, causing persons to feel pleasantly in their bodies; the animal spirits are put into such a motion as is wont to be connected with the exhilaration of the mind; and the soul, by the laws of the union of soul and body, hence feels pleasure. The motion of the animal spirits does not first arise from any affection or apprehension of the mind whatsoever; but the very first thing that is felt, is an exhilaration of the animal spirits, and a pleasant external sensation it may be in their breasts. Hence through ignorance the person being surprised, begins to think, surely this is the Holy Ghost coming into him. And then the mind begins to be affected and raised. There is first great joy; and then many other affections, in a very tumultuous manner putting all nature, both body and mind, into a mighty ruffle. For though, as I observed before, it is the soul only that is the seat of the affections; yet this hinders not but that bodily sensations may, in this manner, be an occasion of affections in the mind.

And if men's religious affections do truly arise from some instruction or light in the understanding; yet the affection is not gracious, unless the light which is the ground of it be spiritual. Affections may be excited by that understanding of things, which they obtain merely by human teaching, with the common improvement of the faculties of the mind. Men may be much affected by knowledge of things of religion that they obtain this way; as some philosophers have been mightily affected and almost carried beyond themselves, by the discoveries they have made in mathematics and natural philosophy. So men may be much affected from common illuminations of the Spirit of God, in which God assists men's faculties to a greater degree of that kind of understanding of religious matters, which they have in some degree, by only the ordinary exercise and improvement of their own faculties. Such illuminations may much affect the mind; as in many whom we read of in Scripture, that were once enlightened; but these affections are not spiritual.

There is such a thing, if the Scriptures are of any use to teach us anything, as a spiritual, supernatural understanding of divine things, that is peculiar to the saints, and which those who are not saints have nothing of. It is certainly a kind of understanding, apprehending or discerning of divine things, that natural men have nothing of, which the apostle speaks of, 1 Cor. 2:14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is certainly a kind of seeing or discerning spiritual things peculiar to the saints, which is spoken of, 1 John 3:6: "Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him." 3 John 11, "He that doeth evil, hath not seen God." And John 6:40, "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." Chap. 14:19, "The world seeth me no more; but ye see me." Chap. 17:3, "This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Matt. 11:27, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." John 12:45, "He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me." Psal. 9:10, "They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee." Phil. 3:8, "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:"--ver. 10, "That I may know him." And innumerable other places there are, all over the Bible, which show the same. And that there is such a thing as an understanding of divine things, which in its nature and

kind is wholly different from all knowledge that natural men have, is evident from this, that there is an understanding of divine things, which the scripture calls spiritual understanding, Col. 1:9: "We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." It has been already shown, that that which is spiritual, in the ordinary use of the word in the New Testament, is entirely different in nature and kind, from all which natural men are, or can be the subjects of.

From hence it may be surely inferred wherein spiritual understanding consists. For if there be in the saints a kind of apprehension or perception, which is in its nature perfectly diverse from all that natural men have, or that it is possible they should have, until they have a new nature; it must consist in their having a certain kind of ideas or sensations of mind, which are simply diverse from all that is or can be in the minds of natural men. And that is the same thing as to say, that it consists in the sensations of a new spiritual sense, which the souls of natural men have not; as is evident by what has been before, once and again observed. But I have already shown what that new spiritual sense is which the saints have given them in regeneration, and what is the object of it. I have shown that the immediate object of it is the supreme beauty and excellency of the nature of divine things, as they are in themselves. And this is agreeable to the Scripture; the apostle very plainly teaches, that the great thing discovered by spiritual light, and understood by spiritual knowledge, is the glory of divine things, 2 Cor. 4:3, 4: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them;" together with ver. 6: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." And chap. 3:18, preceding: "But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." And it must needs be so, for, as has been before observed, the Scripture often teaches that all true religion summarily consists in the love of divine things. And therefore that kind of understanding or knowledge, which is the proper foundation of true religion, must be the knowledge of the loveliness of divine things. For doubtless, that knowledge which is the proper foundation of love, is the knowledge of loveliness. What that beauty of divine things is, which is the proper and immediate object of a spiritual sense of mind, was showed under the last head insisted on, viz., that it is the beauty of their moral perfection. Therefore it is in the view or sense of this, that spiritual understanding does more immediately and primarily consist. And indeed it is plain it can be nothing else; for (as has been shown) there is nothing pertaining to divine things besides the beauty of their moral excellency, and those properties and qualities of divine things which this beauty is the foundation of, but what natural men and devils can see and know, and will know fully and clearly to all eternity.

From what has been said, therefore, we come necessarily to this conclusion, concerning that wherein spiritual understanding consists, viz., that it consists in "a sense of the heart, of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and knowledge of things of religion, that depends upon, and flows from such a sense."

Spiritual understanding consists primarily in a sense of heart of that spiritual beauty. I say, a sense of heart; for it is not speculation merely that is concerned in this kind of understanding; nor can there be a clear distinction made between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately, in this matter. When the mind is sensible of the sweet beauty and amiableness of a thing, that implies a sensibleness of sweetness and delight in the presence of the idea of it: and this sensibleness of the amiableness or delightfulness of beauty, carries in the very nature of it the sense of the heart; or an

effect and impression the soul is the subject of, as a substance possessed of taste, inclination and will.

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