

Wrong Revival Principles - Part 3

by Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards warns against the dangers of wrong revival principles, emphasizing the importance of humility, discretion, and caution in ministry.

Duration: 48:00

Scripture: Mark 4:33, Acts 16:3, Romans 12:18, Romans 14:19, Romans 15:1-2, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Hebrews 5:11-14

Topics: "Audio Books"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prudence and caution when introducing new things into the church. He warns against being influenced by indiscreet zeal and rushing into actions without proper preparation. The speaker uses the analogy of a farmer preparing his field and a wise builder planning a structure to illustrate the need for a comprehensive view and orderly approach in the work of the ministry. He also highlights the significance of unity and order in the visible church, drawing references from 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The speaker suggests that if the rules of Christian charity, meekness, gentleness, and prudence had been observed more diligently, the progress of the church would have been greater.

Transcript

The adoption of wrong principles in a revival continued. Again, another way that many have been deceived is by drawing false conclusions from true premises. Many true and eminent saints have been led into mistakes and snares by arguing that they have prayed in faith.

They have, indeed, been greatly assisted in prayer for such a particular mercy, and have had the true spirit of prayer and exercise in their asking it of God. But they have concluded more from these premises than is a just consequence from them. That they have thus prayed is a sure sign that their prayer is accepted and heard, and that God will give a gracious answer according to His own wisdom, and that the particular thing asked shall be given, or that which is equivalent.

This is a just consequence from it. But it is not inferred by any new revelation now made, but by the promises made to the prayer of faith in the Holy Scriptures. But that God will answer them in that individual thing they ask, if it be not a thing promised in God's word, or they do not certainly know that it is what will be most for the good of God's church in the advancement of Christ's kingdom and glory, nor whether it will be best for them, is more than can be justly concluded from it.

If God remarkably meets with one of His children while he is praying for a particular mercy of great importance, for himself or some other person, or any society of men, and does by the influences of His Spirit greatly humble him, and empty him of himself in his prayer, and manifests himself remarkably in His excellency, sovereignty, and all sufficient power and grace in Jesus Christ, and in a remarkable manner enables a person to come to Him for that mercy, poor in spirit, and with humble resignation to God, and with a great degree of faith in the divine sufficiency, and the sufficiency of Christ's mediation, that person has indeed a great deal the more reason to hope that God will grant that mercy than otherwise He would have. The greater probability is justly inferred, agreeable to the promises of the Holy Scripture, and that such prayer is accepted and heard, and it is much more probable that a prayer that is heard will be returned with a particular mercy that is asked, than one that is not so. And there is no reason at all to doubt, but that God sometimes especially enables to the exercises of faith, when the minds of His saints are engaged in thoughts of and prayer for some particular blessing they greatly desire, in other words, God is pleased especially to give them a believing frame, a sense of His fullness, and a spirit of humble dependence on Him at such times.

When they are thinking of and praying for such mercy, He gives them a particular sense of His ability, and of the sufficiency of His power to overcome obstacles, and the sufficiency of His mercy, and of the blood of Christ for the removal of the guilt that is in the way of the bestowment of such a mercy in particular. When this is the case, it makes a probability still much greater that God intends to bestow the particular mercy sought in His own time, in His own way. But here is nothing of the nature of a revelation in the case, but only a drawing rational conclusions from the particular manner and circumstances of the ordinary gracious influences of God's Spirit.

And as God is pleased sometimes to give His saints particular exercises of faith in His sufficiency, with regard to particular mercies, so He is sometimes pleased to make use of His word in order to it, and helps the actings of faith with respect to such a mercy. The strengthening of their faith in God's sufficiency in this case is therefore a just improvement of such scriptures. It is no more than what those scriptures as they stand in the Bible hold forth.

But to take them as new whispers or revelations from heaven is not making a just improvement of them. If persons have thus a spirit of prayer remarkably given them, concerning particular mercy, from time to time, so as evidently to be assisted to act faith in God in that particular, in a very distinguishing manner, the argument in some cases may be very strong that God does design to grant that mercy, not from any revelation now made of it, but from such a kind and manner of the ordinary influence of His spirit with respect to that thing. But here a great deal of caution and circumspection must be used in drawing inferences of this nature.

There are many ways by which persons may be misled and deluded. The ground on which some expect that they shall receive the thing they have asked for is rather a strong imagination than any true, humble faith in the divine sufficiency. They have a strong persuasion that the thing asked shall be granted, which they can give no reason for, without any remarkable discovery of that glory and fullness of God in Christ that is the ground of faith.

And sometimes the confidence that their prayer shall be answered is only a self-righteous confidence and no true faith. They have a high conceit of themselves as imminent saints and special favorites of God, and have also a high conceit of the prayers they have made because they were much enlarged and affected in them, and hence they are positive in it that the thing will come to pass. And sometimes when once they

have conceived such a notion they grow stronger and stronger in it, as if they think as from an immediate divine hand upon their minds to strengthen their confidence, whereas it is only by their dwelling in their minds on their own excellency and high experiences and great assistances whereby they look brighter and brighter in their own eyes.

Hence it is found by observation and experience that nothing in the world exposes so much to enthusiasm as spiritual pride and self-righteousness. In order to draw any just inference from the supposed assistance we have had in prayer for a particular mercy, and judging of the probability of the bestowment of that individual mercy, many things must be considered. We must consider the importance of the mercy sought, and the principle whence we so earnestly desire it, how far it is good and agreeable to the mind and will of God, the degree of love to God that we exercised in our prayer, the degree of discovery that is made of the divine sufficiency, and the degree in which our assistance is manifestly distinguishing with respect to that mercy.

There is nothing of greater importance in the argument than the degree of humility, poverty of spirit, self-emptiness in resignation to the holy will of God exercised in seeking that mercy. Praying for a particular mercy with much of these things, I have often seen blessed with a remarkable bestowment of the particular thing asked for. From what has been said, we may see which way God may, only by the ordinary gracious influences of His Spirit, sometimes give His saints special reason to hope for the bestowment of a particular mercy they prayed for, and which we may suppose He oftentimes gives eminent saints who have great degrees of humility and much communion with God.

And here, I humbly conceive, some eminent servants of Jesus Christ that we read of in ecclesiastical story have been led into a mistake, and through want of distinguishing such things as these from immediate revelations, have thought that God has favored them, in some instances, with the same kind of divine influences that the apostles and prophets had of old. Another erroneous principle that some have embraced, and which has been a source of many errors in their conduct, is that persons ought always to do whatsoever the Spirit of God, though but indirectly inclines them to. Indeed, the Spirit of God is in itself infinitely perfect, and all His immediate actings, simply considered, are perfect, and there can be nothing wrong in them.

And therefore, all that the Spirit of God inclines us directly and immediately to, without the intervention of any other cause that shall pervert and misimprove what is from Him, ought to be done. But there may be many things, disposition to do, which may indirectly be from the Spirit of God, that we ought not to do. The disposition in general may be good and from the Spirit of God, but the particular determination of that disposition, as to particular actions, objects, and circumstances, may be from the intervention or interposition of some infirmity, blindness, inadvertence, deceit, or corruption of ours.

So that, although the disposition in general ought to be allowed and promoted, and all those actings of it that are simply from God's Spirit, yet the particular ill direction or determination of that disposition, which is from some other cause, ought not to be followed. As, for instance, the Spirit of God may cause a person to have a dear love to another, and so great a desire of, and delight in his comfort, ease, and pleasure, this disposition in general is good and ought to be followed. But yet through the intervention of indiscretion, or some other bad cause, it may be ill directed, and have a bad determination as to particular acts.

And the person indirectly, through that real love he has to his neighbor, may kill him with kindness. He may do that out of sincere good will to him, which may tend to ruin him. A good disposition may, through

some inadvertence or delusion, strongly incline a person to that which, if he saw all things as they are, would be most contrary to that disposition.

The true loyalty of a general, and his zeal for the honor of his prince, may exceedingly animate him in war. But this good disposition, through indiscretion and mistake, may push him forward to those things that give the enemy great advantage, and may expose him and his army to ruin, and may tend to the ruin of his master's interest. The apostle does evidently suppose that the Spirit of God, and His extraordinary, immediate, and miraculous influences on men's minds, may in some respect excite inclinations, which, if gratified, would tend to confusion, and therefore must sometimes be restrained, and then their exercise must be under the government of discretion.

1 Corinthians 14 31-33 For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Hereby the spirits of the prophets, according to the known phraseology of the apostle, is meant the Spirit of God acting in the prophets according to those special gifts with which each one was endued. And here it is plainly implied that the Spirit of God, thus operating in them, may be an occasion of their having sometimes an inclination to do that in the exercise of those gifts, which it was not proper, decent, or profitable that they should, and that therefore the inclination, though indirectly from the Spirit of God, should be restrained, that it ought to be subject to the discretion of the prophets as to the particular time and circumstances of its exercise. I make no doubt but that it is possible for a minister to have by the Spirit of God such a sense of the importance of eternal things, and the misery of mankind, so many of whom are exposed to eternal destruction, together with such a love to souls, that he might find in himself a disposition to spend all his time, day and night, in warning, exhorting, and calling upon men, and so that he must be obliged, as it were, to do violence to himself, ever to refrain, so as to give himself any opportunity to eat, drink, or sleep.

And so I believe there may be a disposition in like manner, indirectly excited in lay persons, through the intervention of their infirmity, to do what only belongs to ministers, yea, to do those things that would not become either ministers or people. Through the influence of the Spirit of God, together with want of discretion, and some remaining corruption, women and children might feel themselves inclined to break forth aloud to great congregations, warning and exhorting the whole multitude, and to scream in the streets, or to leave their families, and go from house to house, earnestly exhorting others. But yet it would by no means follow that it was their duty to do these things, or that they would not have a tendency to do ten times as much hurt as good.

Another wrong principle, from whence have arisen errors in conduct, is that whatsoever is found to be of present and immediate benefit, may not to be practiced, without looking forward to future consequences. Some persons seem to think that it sufficiently justifies anything they say or do, that it is found to be for present edification, it assists and promotes their present affection, and therefore they think they should not concern themselves about future consequences, but leave them with God. Indeed, in things that are in themselves our duty, being required by moral rules or absolute positive commands of God, they must be done, and future consequences must be left with God.

Our discretion takes no place here, but in other things we are to be governed by discretion, and must not only look at the present good, but our view must be extensive, and we must look at the consequences of

things. It is the duty of ministers, especially to exercise this discretion. In things wherein they are not determined by an absolute rule, and not enjoined them by a wisdom superior to their own, Christ has left them to their own discretion.

With that general rule, they should exercise the utmost wisdom they can obtain, in pursuing that which, upon the best view of the consequences of things, will tend most to the advancement of his kingdom. This is implied in those words of Christ to his disciples, when he sent them forth to preach the gospel, Matthew 10, 16, Be ye wise as serpents. The scripture always represents the work of a gospel minister, by whose employments that especially require a wise foresight of, and provision for, future events and consequences.

So it is compared with the business of a steward, which in an imminent manner requires forecast, as for instance a wise laying in of provision for the supply of the needs of a family, according to its future necessities. So it is compared to the husbandman, that almost wholly consists in things done with a view to the future fruits and consequences of his labor. The husbandman's discretion and forecast is eloquently set forth in Isaiah 28, 24, and 25.

Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he has made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and the rye in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. So the work of the ministry is compared to that of a wise builder, or architect, who has a comprehensive view, and for whom it is necessary, that when he begins a building, he should have at once a view of the whole frame, and all the future parts of the structure, even to the pinnacle, that all may be fitly framed together. So also it is compared to the business of a trader or merchant, who is to gain by trading, a business that exceedingly requires forecast, and without which it is never like to be followed with success for any long time.

So it is represented by the business of a fisherman, which depends on peculiar skill, and to that of a soldier, which perhaps above any other secular business requires great foresight, and a wise provision for future events and consequences. And particularly, ministers ought not to be careless how much they discompose the minds of natural men, or how great an uproar they raise in the carnal world, and so lay blocks in the way of the propagation of religion. This certainly is not to follow the example of the zealous apostle Paul, who, though he would not depart from his duty to please carnal men, yet, wherein he might with a good conscience, exceedingly laid out himself to please them.

He avoided raising in the multitude prejudices, oppositions, and tumults against the gospel, and looked upon it as of great consequence. 1 Corinthians 10, 32, and 33 give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God, even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Yea, he declares that he laid himself out so much for this, that he made himself a kind of a servant to all sorts of men, conforming to their customs, and various humors, and everything, wherein he might, even in the things that were very burdensome to him, that he might not frighten men away from Christianity, and cause them to stand, as it were, braced and armed against it, but, on the contrary, if possible, might with condescension and friendship win and draw them to it.

1 Corinthians 9, 19-23 And agreeable hereto are the directions he gives to others, both ministers and people. So he directs the Christian Romans not to please themselves, but every one please his neighbor,

for his good to edification. Romans 15, 1 and 2 And to follow after the things that make for peace.

Chapter 14, verse 19 And he expresses it in terms exceeding strong. Romans 12, verse 18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. And he directs ministers to endeavor, if possible, to gain opposers by a meek condescending treatment, avoiding all appearance of strife or fierceness.

2 Timothy 2, 24-26 To the like purpose the same apostle directs Christians to walk in wisdom towards them that are without. Ephesians 4, 5 And to avoid giving offense to others, if we can, that our good may not be evil spoken of. Romans 14, verse 16 So that, it is evident, the most zealous and most successful propagator of vital religion that ever was looked upon it to be of great consequence to endeavor, as much as possible, by all the methods of lawful meekness and gentleness to avoid raising the prejudice and opposition of the world against religion.

When we have done our utmost, there will be opposition enough to vital religion against which the carnal mind of man has such an enmity. We should not, therefore, needlessly increase and raise that enmity. The apostle, though he took so much pains to please men, had persecution almost everywhere raised against him.

A fisherman is careful not needlessly to ruffle and disturb the water, lest he should drive the fish away from his net, but he will rather endeavor, if possible, to draw them into it. Such a fisherman was the apostle, 2 Corinthians 12, 15, and 16. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

But be it so, I did not burden you, nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. The necessity of suffering persecution, in order to be a true Christian, has undoubtedly, by some, been carried to an extreme, and the doctrine has been abused. It has been looked upon as unnecessary to uphold a man's credit, among others, as a Christian, that he should be persecuted.

I have heard it made an objection against the sincerity of particular persons, that they were no more hated and reproached. And the manner of glorying in persecution, or the cross of Christ, has in some been very wrong, bearing too much the appearance of lifting up themselves in it. That they were very much hated and reviled, more than most, as an evidence of their excelling others in being good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Such an improvement of the doctrine of the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and of the necessity of persecution, become incredible and customary, has a direct tendency to cause those that would be accounted true Christians to behave themselves so towards those that are not well affected to religion, as to provoke their hatred, or at least to be but very little careful to avoid it, and not very studiously and earnestly to strive, after the apostles' example and precepts, to please them to their edification, and by meekness and gentleness to win them, and by all possible means to live peaceably with them. I believe that saying of our Saviour, I came not to send peace on earth, but division has been abused, as though when we see great strife arise about religion, violent heats of spirit against the truly pious, and a loud clamor and uproar against the work of God, it was to be rejoiced in, because it is that which Christ came to send. It has almost been laid down as a maxim by some, that the more division and strife, the better sign, which naturally leads persons to seek and provoke it, or leads them to such a manner of behavior, such a roughness and sharpness, or such an effect of neglect, it has a natural tendency to raise prejudice and opposition, instead of striving, as the apostle did to his utmost, by all

meekness, gentleness, and benevolence of behavior to prevent or assuage it.

Christ came to send a sword on earth, and to cause division, no otherwise, and he came to send damnation. For Christ, that is set for the glorious restoration of some, is set for the fall of others, and to be a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense to them, and an occasion of their vastly more aggravated and terrible ruin. And this is always the consequence of a great revival of vital religion.

It is a means of the salvation of some, and a more aggravated damnation of others. But certainly this is no just argument that men's exposiveness to damnation is not to be lamented, or that we should not exert ourselves to our utmost, in all the messes that we can devise, that others might be saved. And to avoid all such behavior towards them is tends to lead them down to hell.

I know there is naturally a great enmity in the heart of man against vital religion, and I believe there would have been a great deal of opposition against this glorious work of God in New England, if the subjects and promoters of it had behaved themselves never so agreeably to Christian rules. And I believe if this work goes on and spreads much in the world, so as to begin to shake kingdoms and nations, it will dreadfully stir up the rage of earth and hell, and will put the world into the greatest uproar that ever it was in since it stood. I believe Satan's dying struggles will be the most violent, but yet a great deal might be done to restrain this opposition by a good conformity to that of the Apostle, James 3.13, who was a wise man and endued with knowledge.

Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. I also believe that if the rules of Christian charity, meekness, gentleness, and prudence had been duly observed by the generality of the zealous promoters of this work, it would have made three times the progress that it has, in other words, if it had pleased God in such a case to give a blessing to means and proportion as He has done. Under this head of carelessness about future consequences, it may be proper to say something of introducing things new and strange, and that have a tendency by their novelty to shock and surprise people.

Nothing can be more evident from the New Testament than that such things ought to be done with great caution and moderation to avoid the offense that may be thereby given and the prejudices that might be raised to clog and hinder the progress of religion. Yea, it ought to be thus in things that are in themselves good and excellent and of great weight, provided they are not things of absolute duty, which, though they may appear to be innovations, yet cannot be neglected without immorality or disobedience to the commands of God. What great caution and moderation did the apostles use in introducing things that were new and abolishing things that were old in their day! How gradually were the ceremonial performances of the law of Moses removed and abolished among the Christian Jews! And how long did even the Apostle Paul himself conform to those ceremonies which he calls weak and beggarly elements, yea, even to the rite of circumcision, Acts 16, verse 3, that he might not prejudice the Jews against Christianity! So it seems to have been very gradually that the Jewish Sabbath was abolished and the Christian Sabbath introduced for the same reason, and the apostles avoided teaching Christians in those earlier days, at least for a great while, some high and excellent divine truth because they could not bear them yet, 1 Corinthians 3, verse 1 and 2, Hebrews 5, verse 11, to the end.

Thus strictly did the apostles observe the rule that their blessed Master gave them of not putting new wine into old bottles, lest they should burst the bottles and lose the wine. And how did Christ himself, while on earth, forbear so plainly to teach His disciples the great doctrines of Christianity concerning His

satisfaction as the nature and manner of a sinner's justification in reconciliation with God and the particular benefits of His death, resurrection and ascension? Because in that infant state of the disciples their minds were not prepared for such instructions, therefore the more clear and full revelation of these things was reserved for the time when their minds should be further enlightened and strengthened by the outpouring of the Spirit after His ascension. John 16, 12 and 13, I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth. In Mark 4, 33, And with many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to bear it. These things might be enough to convince anyone who does not think himself wiser than Christ and His apostles, that great prudence and caution should be used in introducing things into the church of God that are very uncommon, though in themselves excellent.

Lest by our rashness and imprudent haste we hinder religion much more than we help it. Persons influenced by indiscreet zeal are always in too much haste. They are impatient of delays and therefore are for jumping to the uppermost step first, before they have taken the preceding steps, whereby they expose themselves to fall and break their bones.

They are delighted to see the building rise, and all their endeavor and strength is employed in advancing its height, without taking care proportionably of the bottom, whereby the whole is in danger of coming to the ground, or therefore putting on the cupola and pinnacle before the lower parts of the building are done, which tends at once to put a stop to the building and hinder its ever being a complete structure. Many that are thus imprudent and hasty with their zeal have a real eager appetite for that which is good, but like children are impatient to wait for the fruit, and therefore snatch it before it is ripe. Oftentimes in their haste they overshoot their mark and frustrate their own end.

They put that which they would obtain further out of reach than it was before, and establish and confirm that which they would remove. Things must have time to ripen. The prudent husbandman waits till the harvest is ripe before he reaps.

We are now just beginning to recover out of a dreadful disease, but to feed a man recovering from a fever with strong meat at once is a ready way to kill him. The reformation from potpourri was much hindered by this hasty zeal. Many were for immediately rectifying all disorders by force, which was condemned by Luther, and was a great trouble to him.

It is a vain prejudice that some have lately imbibed against such rules of prudence and moderation, but they will be forced to come to them at last. They will find themselves unable to maintain their cause without them, and if they will not hearken before, experience will convince them at last when it will be too late for them to rectify their mistake. Another error arising from an erroneous principle is a wrong notion that they have an attestation of divine providence to persons or things.

We go too far when we look upon the success that God gives to some persons in making them the instruments of doing much good, as a testimony of God's approbation of those persons in all the courses they take. It has been a main argument to defend the conduct of some ministers who have been blamed as imprudent and irregular that God has blessed them and given them great success, that however men charge them is guilty of wrong things, yet that God is with them, and then who can be against them? And probably some of those ministers themselves by this very means have had their ears stopped against all that has been said to convince them of their misconduct. But there are innumerable ways by which

persons may be misled in forming a judgment of the mind and will of God from the events of providence.

If a person's success be a reward of something in him that God approves, yet it is no argument that he approves of everything in him. Who can tell how far the divine grace may go in greatly rewarding some small good in a person, a good meaning, something good in his disposition, while he at the same time in sovereign mercy hides his eyes from a great deal that is bad, which it is his pleasure to forgive, and not to mark against a person, though in itself it be very ill. God has not told us after what manner he will proceed in this matter.

We go upon most uncertain grounds when we undertake to determine. It is an exceeding difficult thing to know how far love or hatred are exercised towards persons or actions by all that is before us. God was pleased in the sovereignty to give such success to Jacob in that which from beginning to end was a deceitful lying contrivance and proceeding of his.

In that way he obtained a blessing that was worth infinitely more than the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven, given to Esau in his blessing, yea, worth more than all that the world can afford. God was for a while with Judas, so that by God's power accompanying him, he wrought miracles and cast out devils. But this could not justly be interpreted as God's approbation of his person or the thievery in which he lived at the same time.

The dispensations and events of providence, with their reasons, are too little understood by us to be as our rule instead of God's word. God has his way in the sea and in his path in the mighty waters, and his footsteps are not known, and he gives us no account of any of his matters. And therefore we cannot safely take the events of his providence as a revelation of his mind concerning a person's conduct and behavior.

We have no warrant so to do. God has never appointed those things to be our rule. We have but one rule to go by, and that is his holy word.

And when we join anything else with it as having the force of a rule, we are guilty of that which is strictly forbidden. Deuteronomy 4 verse 2, Proverbs 30 verse 6, Revelations 22 verse 18 They who make what they imagine as pointed forth to them in providence a rule of behavior do err as well as those that follow impulses and impressions. We should put nothing in the room of the word of God.

It is to be feared that some have been greatly confirmed and emboldened by the great success that God has given them and some things that have really been contrary to the rules of God's holy word. If so, they have been guilty of presumption and abusing God's kindness to them and the great honor he has put upon them. They have seen that God was with them and made them victorious in their preaching, and this it is to be feared has been abused by some to a degree of self-confidence.

This has much taken off all jealousy of themselves. They have been bold, therefore, to go great lengths in a presumption that God was with them and would defend them and finally baffle all that found fault with them. Indeed, there is a voice of God in his providence that may be interpreted and well understood by the rule of his word, and providence may, to our dark minds and weak faith, confirm the word of God as it fulfills it.

But to improve divine providence thus is quite a different thing from making a rule of providence. Good use may be made of the events of providence, of our own observation and experience, and human histories and the opinion of eminent men, but finally all must be brought to one rule, the word of God, and that

must be regarded as our only rule. Nor do I think that they go upon sure ground who conclude they have not been in an error in their conduct, because at the time of their doing a thing for which they have been blamed and reproached by others, they were favored with special comforts of God's Spirit.

God's bestowing special mercies on a person is no sign that he approves of everything he sees in him at that time. David had the presence of God while he lived in polygamy, and Solomon had some very high favors and peculiar smiles of heaven, and particularly at the dedication of the temple, while he greatly multiplied wives to himself, and horses and silver and gold, all contrary to the most express command of God to the king, in the law of Moses, Deuteronomy 17, 16 and 17. We cannot tell how far God may hide his eyes from beholding iniquity in Jacob and seeing perverseness in Israel, we cannot tell what are the reasons of God's actions any further than he interprets for himself.

God sometimes gave some of the primitive Christians the extraordinary influence of his Spirit when they were out of the way of their duty, and even while they were abusing it, as is plainly implied, 1 Corinthians 14, 31-33. Suppose a person has done a thing for which he is reproached, and that reproach may be an occasion of his feeling sweet exercises of grace in his soul, I do not think that a certain evidence that God approves of the thing he is blamed for, for undoubtedly a mistake may be the occasion of stirring up the exercise of grace. If a person, through mistake, thinks he has received some particular great mercy, that mistake may be the occasion of stirring up the sweet exercises of love and true thankfulness to God.

Suppose one that is full of love to God should hear what he deems credible tidings concerning a remarkable deliverance of a child or a dear friend or of some glorious thing done for the city of God. No wonder if, on such an occasion, the sweet actings of love to God and delighting God should be excited, though indeed afterwards it should prove a false report that he had heard. So if one that loves God is much maligned and reproached for doing what he thinks God required and approves, no wonder that it is sweet to such an one to think that God is his friend, though men are his enemies.

No wonder at all that this is an occasion of his betaking himself to God as his sure friend and find sweet complacence in him, though he be indeed in a mistake concerning that which he thought was agreeable to God's will. As I have before shown, that the exercise of a truly good affection may be the occasion of error and may indirectly incline a person to do that which is wrong, so, on the other hand, error or a doing that which is wrong may be an occasion of the exercise of a truly good affection. The reason of it is this, that however all exercises of grace be from the Spirit of God, if he dwells and acts in the hearts of the saints in some measure, after the manner of a vital natural principle, a principle of new nature in them, whose exercises are excited by means in some measure as other natural principles are, though grace is not in the saints as a mere natural principle, but as a sovereign agent, and so its exercises are not tied to means by an immutable law of nature as in mere natural principles, yet God has so constituted that grace should dwell so in the hearts of the saints that its exercises should have some degree of connection with means after the manner of a principle of nature.

Another erroneous principle that has been an occasion of some mischief and confusion is that external order in matters of religion and use of the means of grace is but little to be regarded. It has been spoken lightly of under the names of ceremonies and dead forms and so on, and is probably the more despised by some because their opposers insist so much upon it, and because they are so continually hearing from them the cry of disorder and confusion. It is objected against the importance of external order that God does not look at the outward form, He looks at the heart.

But that is a weak argument against its importance that true godliness does not consist in it, for it may be equally made use of against all the outward means of grace whatsoever. True godliness does not consist in ink and paper, but yet that would be a foolish objection against the importance of ink and paper in religion when without it we could not have the word of God. If any external means at all are needful, any outward actions of a public nature, or wherein God's people are jointly concerned in public society, without doubt external order is needful.

The management of an external affair that is public, or wherein a multitude is concerned without order, is an everything found impossible. Without order there can be no general direction of a multitude to any particular designed end. Their purposes will cross and hinder one another.

A multitude cannot act in union one with another without order. Confusion separates and divides them, so that there can be no concert or agreement. If a multitude would help one another in any affair, they must unite themselves one to another in a regular subordination of members, in some measure as it is in the natural body, but this means they will be in some capacity to act with united strength.

And thus Christ has appointed that it should be in the visible church as 1 Corinthians 12, 14 and so on, and Romans 12, 4 to 8. Zeal without order will do but little, or at least it will be effectual but a little while. Let a company, however zealous against the enemy, go forth to war without any order, every one rushing forward as his zeal shall drive him, all in confusion. If they gain something at first onset by surprising the enemy, yet how soon do they come to nothing and fall an easy helpless prey to their adversaries.

Order is one of the most necessary of all external means of the spiritual good of God's church, and therefore it is requisite even in heaven itself, where there is a least need of any external means of grace. Order is maintained amongst the glorious angels there, and the necessity of it for carrying on any design wherein a multitude are concerned is so great that even the devils in hell are driven to something of it that they may carry on the designs of their kingdom. And it is very observable that those irrational creatures for whom it is needful that they should act in union and join as a multitude together to carry on any work for their preservation by a wonderful instinct that God has put into them, observe and maintain a most regular and exact order among themselves, such as bees and some others.

And order in the visible church is not only necessary for carrying on the designs of Christ's glory and the church's prosperity, but is absolutely necessary to its defense. Without it, it is like a city without walls and can be in no capacity to defend itself from any kind of mischief. And so, however it be an external thing, yet it is not to be despised on that account.

For though it be not the food of souls, yet it is in some respect their defense. The people of Holland would be very foolish to despise the dykes that keep out the sea from overwhelming them under the names of dead stones and vile earth, because the matter of which they are built is not good to eat. It seems to be partly on this foundation that some have seemed to act on that principle, that the power of judging and openly censoring others should not be reserved in the hands of particular persons or consistories appointed thereto, but ought to be left at large for anybody that pleases to take it upon them or that think themselves fit for it, but more of this afterwards.

On this foundation also, an orderly attending on the stated worship of God and families has been made too light of, and it has been in some places too much a common and customary thing to be absent from family worship and to be abroad late in the night at religious meetings or to attend religious conversation. Now that this may be done on certain extraordinary occasions, I have seen the case to be such in many

instances that I have thought did afford sufficient warrant for persons to be absent from family prayer and to be from home till very late in the night. But we should take heed that it do not become a custom or common practice.

If so, we shall soon find the consequences to be very ill. It seems to be on the same foundation the supposed unprofitableness of external order that it has been thought by some there is no need of religious services and performances being limited to any certain office in the church, of which more afterwards, and also that those officers themselves, particularly that of the gospel ministry, need not be limited, as it used to be, to persons of a liberal education, but some of late have been for having others whom they have supposed to be persons of eminent experience, publicly licensed to preach, yea, and ordained to the work of the ministry. And some ministers have seemed to favor such a thing, but how little do they seem to look forward and consider the unavoidable consequences of opening such a door.

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You may also request a free printed catalog. And remember that John Calvin, in defending the Reformation's regulative principle of worship, or what is sometimes called the scriptural law of worship, commenting on the words of God, which I commanded them not, neither came into my heart. From his commentary on Jeremiah 7:31, writes, God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, I have not commanded them whatever the Jews devised.

There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions than that they are not commanded by God. For when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to His commands, they pervert true religion. And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship in which they absurdly exercise themselves would fall to the ground.

It is indeed a horrible thing for the Papists to seek to discharge their duties towards God by performing their own superstitions. There is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears. Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying His word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error.

The prophet's words, then, are very important when he says that God had commanded no such thing, and that it never came to His mind, as though He had said that men assume too much wisdom when they devise what He never required, nay, what He never knew.

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