

# Wrong Revival Principles - Part 4

by Jonathan Edwards

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*Jonathan Edwards warns against the dangers of admitting uneducated ministers and the importance of proportionate experiences in Christianity, highlighting the potential consequences of unproportionate experiences.*

**Duration:** 44:10

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 4:2, Psalm 119:105, Jeremiah 7:31, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 23:33, John 4:24, 2 Timothy 3:16-17

**Topics:** "Audio Books"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the natural inclinations that humans have and how they can be regulated in a way that is not sinful or selfish. It emphasizes the importance of parents praying for the salvation of their children and ministers being concerned for the souls of their congregation. The transcript also warns about the potential dangers of unsuitable behavior during religious meetings and the need to be aware of the external appearances that can hide the true beauty of grace. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to discern what is genuine and to support and discourage accordingly.

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## Transcript

If once it should become a custom or a thing generally approved and allowed of to admit uneducated persons to the work of the ministry, because of their remarkable experiences and good understanding, how many lay persons would soon appear as candidates for the work of the ministry? I doubt not, but that I have been acquainted with scores that would have desired it. And how shall we know where to stop? If one is admitted because his experiences are remarkable, another will think his experiences also remarkable, and we perhaps shall not be able to deny but that they are nearly as great. If one is admitted because, besides experiences, he has good natural abilities, another by himself and many of his neighbors may be thought equal to him.

It will be found of absolute necessity that there should be some certain visible limits fixed to avoid bringing odium upon ourselves and breeding uneasiness and strife amongst others. And I know of none better, and indeed no other, that can be well fixed than what the prophet Zechariah fixes, that those only should be appointed to be pastors or shepherds, and God's church should have been taught to keep cattle from their youth, or that they have had an education for that purpose. Those ministers who would break over these limits and make a practice of it would break down that fence which they themselves, after they have been worried with the ill consequences, would be glad to have somebody else build up for them, not but that

there may probably be some persons in the land who have had no education at college that are in themselves better qualified for the work of the ministry than some others who have taken their degrees and are now ordained.

But yet I believe the breaking over those bounds which have hitherto been set in ordaining such persons would in its consequences be a greater calamity than the missing such persons in the work of the ministry. Opening a door for the admission of unlearned men to the work of the ministry, though they should be persons of extraordinary experience, would on some accounts be especially prejudicial at such a day as this, because such persons, for want of extensive knowledge, are oftentimes forward to lead others into those things which a people are in danger of at such a time. Above all others, impulses, vain imaginations, superstition, indiscreet zeal, and such like extremes.

Another erroneous principle that some have been at least in danger of is that ministers, because they speak as Christ's ambassadors, may assume the same style and speak as with the same authority that the prophets of old did, yea, that Jesus Christ himself did in the twenty-third of Matthew. Ye serpents, ye generations of vipers, and so on, and that not only when they are speaking to the people, but also to their brethren in the ministry. The principle is absurd, because it makes no difference in the degrees and orders of messengers, though God has made a very great difference.

For though they all come in some respect in the name of God, and with something of His authority, yet certainly there is a vast difference in the degree of authority with which God has invested them. Jesus Christ was sent into the world as God's messenger, and so was one of His apostles, and so also as an ordinary pastor of a church. But yet it does not follow that because Jesus Christ and an ordinary minister are both messengers of God, that therefore an ordinary minister in His office is vested with an equal degree of authority that Christ was in His.

As there is a great difference in their authority, and as Christ came as God's messenger in a vastly higher manner, so another style became Him, more authoritative than is proper for us worms of the dust, though we also are messengers of inferior degree. It would be strange if God, when He has made so great a difference in the degree in which He has invested different messengers with His authority, should make no difference as to the outward appearance and show of authority. Though God has put great honor upon ministers, and they may speak as His ambassadors, yet He never intended that they should have the same outward appearance of authority and majesty, either in their behavior or speech, as His Son shall have when He comes to judgment at the last day, though both come in the name of the Lord.

Alas, can it enter into the hearts of worms of the dust that it is fit and suitable it should be so? Section number 3 A third cause of errors in conduct is being ignorant or unobservant of some things by which the devil has special advantage. And here I would particularly notice some things with respect to the inward experiences of Christians themselves, and something with regard to the external effects of experiences. Number one, inward experiences.

There are three things I would notice with regard to the experiences of Christians by which the devil has many advantages against us. One, the first thing is a mixture there oftentimes is in the experiences of true Christians, whereby when they have truly gracious experiences, and divine and spiritual discoveries and exercises, they have something else mixed with them, besides what is spiritual. There is a mixture of that which is natural and that which is corrupt with that which is divine.

The great imperfection of grace, the feebleness and infancy of the new nature, and the great remains of corruption, together with our circumstances in this world, where we are encompassed with what tends to pollute us, exposed to this. And indeed it is not to be supposed that Christians ever have any experiences in this world that are wholly pure, entirely spiritual, without any mixture of what is natural and carnal. The beam of light as it comes from the fountain of light upon our hearts is pure, but as it is reflected thence it is mixed.

The seed as sent from heaven and planted in the heart is pure, but as it springs up out of the heart is impure. Yea, there is commonly a much greater mixture than persons for the most part seem to imagine. I have often thought that the experiences of true Christians are very frequently as it is with some sorts of fruits, which are enveloped in several coverings of thick shells or pods, that are thrown away by him that gathers the fruit, and but a very small part of the whole bulk is a pure kernel that is good to eat.

The things of all which there is frequently some mixture with gracious experiences, yea, with very great and high experiences, are these three, human or natural affection and passions, impressions on the imagination, and a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride. There is very often with that which is spiritual a great mixture of that affection or passion which arises from natural principles, so that nature has a very great hand in those vehement motions and flights of the passions that appear. Hence, to the same degree, the divine communications from heaven shall have vastly different effects in what outwardly appears in persons of different natural tempers.

The great mixture of that which is natural with that which is spiritual is very manifest in the peculiar effects that divine influences have in some certain families, or persons of such a blood in distinguishing the operations of the passions and affections and the manner of their outward expressions. I know some remarkable instances of this. The same is also evident by the different effects of divine communications on the same person at different times and in different circumstances.

The novelty of things or the sudden transition from an opposite extreme and many other things that might be mentioned greatly contribute to the raising of the passions and sometimes there is not only a mixture of that which is common and natural with gracious experience, but even that which is animal, what is in a great measure from the body and is properly the result of the animal frame. In what true Christians feel of affections towards God, all is not always purely holy and divine. Everything that is felt in the affections does not arise from spiritual principles, but common and natural principles have a very great hand and improper self-love may have a great share in the affect.

God does not love for his own sake or for the excellency and beauty of his own perfections as he ought to be, nor have these things in any wise that proportion in the affect that they ought to have. So, in the love true Christians have one to another, very often there is a great mixture of what arises from common and natural principles with grace. Self-love has a great hand.

The children of God are not loved purely for Christ's sake, but there may be a great mixture of that natural love which many sects of heretics have boasted of, who have been greatly united one to another because they were of their company on their side against the rest of the world. Yea, there may be a mixture of natural love to the opposite sex with Christian and divine love. So there may be a great mixture in that sorrow for sin which the godly have and also in their joys.

Natural principles may greatly contribute to what is felt a great many ways as might easily be shown. There is nothing that belongs to a Christian experience more liable to a corrupt mixture than zeal. Though

it be an excellent virtue, a heavenly flame when it is pure, yet as it is exercised in those who are so little sanctified and so little humbled as we are in the present state, it is very apt to be mixed with human passion, yea, with corrupt hateful affections, pride in uncharitable bitterness, and other things that are not from heaven, but from hell.

Another thing often mixed with what is spiritual in the experiences of Christians is an impression on the imagination whereby godly persons, together with a spiritual understanding of divine things, and conviction of their reality and certainty, and a deep sense of their excellency or great importance upon their hearts, have strongly impressed on their minds external ideas or images of things. A degree of imagination in such a case is unavoidable and necessarily arises from human nature as constituted in the present state and often is of great benefit, but when it is in too great a degree it becomes an impure mixture that is prejudicial. This mixture very often arises from the constitution of the body.

It commonly greatly contributes to the other kind of mixture mentioned before of natural affections and passions. It helps to raise them to a great height. Another thing that is often mixed with the experiences of true Christians, which is the worst mixture of all, is a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride.

This is often mixed with the joys of Christians. Their joy is not purely the joy of faith or a rejoicing in Christ Jesus, but is partly a rejoicing in themselves. There is oftentimes in their elevations a looking upon themselves and a viewing their own high attainments.

They rejoice partly because they are taken with their own experiences and great discoveries, which makes them in their own apprehensions so to excel, and this heightens all their passions and especially those effects that are more external. There is a much greater mixture of these things in the experiences of some Christians than others, and some the mixture is so great as very much to obscure and hide the beauty of grace in them like a thick smoke that hinders all the shining of the fire. The things we ought to be well aware of that we may not take all for gold that glitters, and that we may know what to countenance and encourage and what to discourage, otherwise Satan will have a vast advantage against us for he works in the corrupt mixture.

Sometimes, for want of persons distinguishing the ore from the pure metal, those experiences are most admired by the persons themselves and by others that are not the most excellent. The great external effects and vehemence of the passions and violent agitations of the animal spirits is sometimes much owing to the corrupt mixture, as is very apparent in some instances, though it be not always so. I have observed a great difference among those of high affections who seem disposed to be earnestly talking to those about them.

Some insist much more in their talk on what they behold in God and Christ, the glory of the divine perfections, Christ's beauty and excellency, and wonderful condescension and grace, and their own unworthiness, and the great and infinite obligations that they themselves and others are under to love and serve God. Others insist almost wholly on their own high privileges, their assurance of God's love and favor, and the weakness and wickedness of opposers, and how much they are above their reach. The latter may have much of the presence of God, but their experiences do not appear to be so solid and unmingled as the former.

And there is a great deal of difference in persons' earnestness in their talk and behavior. In some it seems to come from the fullness of their hearts and from the great sense they have of truth. They have a deep sense of the certainty and infinite greatness, excellency, and importance of divine and eternal things,

attended with all appearances of great humility.

In others their earnestness seems to arise from a great mixture of human passion and an undue and intemperate agitation of their spirits, which appears by their earnestness and vehemence not be in proportion to the nature of the subject they insist on, but they are violent in everything they say, as much when they are talking of things of smaller importance as when speaking of things of greater weight. I have seen it thus in an instance or two in which this vehemence at length issued in distraction, and there have been some few instances of a more extraordinary nature still, even of persons finding themselves disposed earnestly to talk and cry out from an unaccountable kind of bodily pressure without any extraordinary view of anything in their minds or sense of anything upon their hearts, wherein probably there was the immediate hand of the devil. 2. Another thing by which the devil has great advantage is the unheeded defects there sometimes are in the experiences of true Christians, connected with those high affections wherein there is much that is truly good.

I do not mean that defect or imperfection of degree which is in every holy disposition and exercise in this life and the best of the saints, but I aim at experiences being especially defective in some particular thing that ought to be in them, which, though it be not an essential defect, or such as is in the experiences of hypocrites, which renders them utterly vain, monstrous, and altogether abominable to God, is such as maims and deforms the experience. The essence of truly Christian experiences is not wanting, but that is wanting which is very needful in order to the proper beauty of the image of Christ in such a person's experiences. Things are very much out of a due proportion.

There is indeed much of some things, but at the same time there is so little of some other things that should bear a proportion that the defect very much deforms the Christian and is truly odious in the sight of God. What I observed before was something too much, something mixed, not belonging to the Christian as such. What I speak of now is something not enough, something wanting that does not belong to the Christian as such.

The one deforms the Christian as a monstrous excrescence. By the other the new creature is maimed, some member in a great measure is wanting, or so small and withering as to be very much out of due proportion. This is another spiritual calamity that the saints are liable to through the great imperfection of grace in this life.

Thus a chicken and the egg in the beginning of its formation has indeed the rudiments or liniments of all the parts, yet some few parts only are plainly seen when others are hid, so that without a microscope it appears very monstrous. When this deficiency and disproportion is great, as sometimes it is in real saints, it is not only a great deformity in itself, but has many ill consequences. It gives the devil great advantages, leaves a door open for corruption, exposes to very deformed and unlovely actions, and issues oftentimes in the great wounding of the soul.

For the better understanding of this matter, we may observe that God, in the revelation that He has made of Himself to the world by Jesus Christ, is taking care to give a proportional manifestation of two kinds of excellencies or perfections of His nature, those that especially tend to possess us with awe and reverence, and to search and humble us, and those that tend to win to draw and encourage us. By the one He appears as an infinitely great, pure, holy, and heart-searching judge. By the other, as a gentle and gracious father and a loving friend.

By the one, He is a pure searching and burning flame. By the other, a sweet refreshing light. These two kinds of attributes are, as it were, admirably tempered together in the revelation of the gospel.

There is a proportional manifestation of justice and mercy, holiness and grace, majesty and gentleness, authority and condescension. God has thus ordered that His diverse excellencies, as He reveals Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, should have a proportional manifestation herein provided for our necessities. He knew it to be of great consequence that our apprehensions of these diverse perfections of His nature should be duly proportioned one to another.

In effect, on the one hand, having a discovery of His love and grace without a proportionable discovery of His awful majesty, His holy and searching purity would tend to spiritual pride, carnal confidence and presumption. And in effect, on the other hand, having a discovery of His holy majesty without a proportionable discovery of His grace tends to unbelief, a sinful fearfulness and spirit of bondage. And therefore herein chiefly consists that deficiency of experiences that I am now speaking of.

The revelation God has made of Himself in His word and the provision made for our spiritual welfare in the gospel are perfect, but the actual light and communications we have are in many ways exceedingly imperfect and maimed, and experience plainly shows that Christians may have high manifestations in some respects, and yet their circumstances may be unhappy in this regard, that their discoveries are no more general. There is a great difference among Christians in this respect. Some have much more general discoveries than others, who are upon many accounts the most amiable Christians.

Christians may have experiences that are very high, and yet there may be very much of this deficiency and disproportion. Their high experiences are truly from the Spirit of God, but sin comes in by the defect, as indeed all sin is originally from a defective, privative cause. And in such a case, high discoveries, at the same time that they are enjoyed, may be and sometimes are the occasion or quasi-synchronon of sin.

Sin may come in at the back door, the gap that is left open, as spiritual pride often does. And many times the Spirit of God is quenched by this means, and God punishes the pride and presumption that rises by bringing such darkness and suffering, such awful consequences and horrid temptations, as are enough to make one's hair stand on end to hear them. Christians, therefore, should diligently observe their own hearts as to this matter, and should pray to God that He would give them experiences in which one thing may bear a proportion to another, that God may be honored in their souls edified thereby.

And ministers should have an eye to this in their private dealings with the souls of their people. It is chiefly from such a defect of experiences that some things have arisen which have been pretty common among true Christians of late, though supposed by many to have risen from a good cause, as particularly talking of divine and heavenly things, and expressing divine joys with laughter or light behavior. I believe in many instances such things have arisen from a good cause as their quasi-synchronon.

High discoveries and gracious joyful affections have been the occasion of them, but the proper cause has been sin, even that odious defect in their experience whereby there has been wanting a sense of the awful and holy majesty of God is present with them in their nothingness and vileness before Him proportionable to the sense they have had of God's grace and the love of Christ. And the same is true in many cases of unsuitable boldness, a disposition to speak with authority, intemperate zeal, and many other things that sometimes appear under great religious affections, and sometimes the vehemence of the motion of the animal spirits under great affections is owing in considerable measure to experiences being thus partial. I have known it in several instances that persons have been greatly affected with the dying love of Christ

and the consideration of the happiness of the enjoyment of Him in heaven and other things of that nature, and their animal spirits at the same time have been in a great emotion, but in the midst of it they have had such a deep sense of the awful, holy majesty of God as at once composed them in quieted animal nature without diminishing their comfort, but only has made it of a better and more solid nature.

When they have had a sense both of the majesty and grace of God, one thing has, as it were, balanced another and caused a more happy sedateness and composure of body and mind. From these things we may learn how to judge of experiences and to estimate their goodness. Those are not always the best which are attended with the most violent affections and most vehement motions of the animal spirits, or have the greatest effects on the body, nor are they always the best that most dispose persons to abound in talk to others and to speak in the most vehement manner, though these things often arise from the greatness of spiritual experiences.

But those are the most excellent experiences that are qualified as follows, number one, that have the least mixture or are the most purely spiritual, number two, that are the least deficient and partial in which the diverse things that appertain to Christian experience are proportionable one to another, and number three, that are raised to the highest degree. It is no matter how high they are raised if they are qualified as before mentioned, the higher the better. Experiences thus qualified will be attended with the most amiable behavior, will bring forth the most solid and sweet fruits, will be the most durable, and will have the greatest effect on the abiding temper of the soul.

If God is pleased to carry on this work and it should prove to be the dawning of a general revival of the Christian church, it may be expected that the time will come before long when the experiences of Christians shall be much more generally thus qualified. We must expect green fruits before we have ripe ones. It is probable that hereafter the discoveries which the saints shall have of divine things will be in a much higher degree than yet have been, but yet shall be so ordered of an infinitely wise and all-sufficient God that they shall not have so great an effect and proportion on the body and will be less oppressive to nature.

The outward manifestations will rather be like those that were in Stephen when he was full of the Holy Ghost, when all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Their inward fullness of the Spirit of God in his divine, amiable, and sweet influences shall as it were shine forth in the heavenly aspect in the manner of speech and behavior. But, number three, there is another thing concerning the experiences of Christians of which it is of yet greater importance that we should be aware than of the preceding, and that is the degenerating of experiences.

What I mean is something diverse from the mere decay of experiences, or their gradually vanishing by persons losing their sense of things. Experiences growing by degrees worse and worse in their kind, more and more partial and deficient, in which things are more out of due proportion, and also have more and more of a corrupt mixture. The spiritual part decreases, and the other useless and hurtful parts greatly increase.

This I have seen in very many instances, and greater the mischiefs that have risen through want of being more aware of it. There is commonly, as I have observed before, in high experiences, besides that which is spiritual, a mixture of three things, natural or common affections, workings of the imagination, and a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride. Now it often comes to pass that through persons not distinguishing the wheat from the chaff, or for want of watchfulness and humble jealousy of themselves,

and by laying great weight on a natural and imaginary part, yielding to it and indulging it, whereby that part grows and increases, and the spiritual part decreases, the devil sets in and works in the corrupt part, and cherishes it to his utmost.

At length, the experiences of some persons who began well come to little else but violent motions of carnal affections with great heats of the imagination, a degree of enthusiasm and swelling of spiritual pride, very much like some fruits which bud, blossom, and kernel well, but afterwards are blasted with an excess of moisture, so that though the bulk is monstrously great, yet there is little else in it but what is useless and unwholesome. It appears to me very probable that many of the heresies that have arisen and sects that have appeared in the Christian world in one age and another, with wild enthusiastic notions and practices, began at first by this means, that it was such a degenerating of experiences which first gave rise to them, or at least led the way to them. Nothing in the world so much exposes to this as an unheated spiritual pride and self-confidence, and persons being conceited of their own stock without an humble daily and continual dependence on God.

This very thing seems to be typified of old by the corrupting of the manna. Some of the children of Israel, because they had gathered a store of manna, trusted in it, there being, as they apprehended, sufficient in the store they had gathered and laid up, without humbly looking to heaven and stooping to the earth for daily supplies, and the consequence was that their manna bred worms and stank. Exodus 16 verse 20 Pride above all things promotes this degeneracy of experiences because it grieves and quenches the spirit of the Lamb of God, and so it kills the spiritual part, cherishes the natural part, inflames the carnal affections, and heats the imagination.

The unhappy subject of such a degeneracy for the most part is not sensible of his own calamity, but because he finds himself still violently moved, has greater heats of zeal, and more vehement motions of his animal spirits, thinks himself fuller of the spirit of God than ever, but indeed it is with him as the apostle says of the Galatians, Galatians 3 verse 3, having begun in the spirit, they are made perfect by the flesh. By the mixture there is of common affection with love to God, the love of true Christians is liable to degenerate, but to be more and more built on a supposition of being his high and peculiar favorites, and less and less on an apprehension of the excellency of God's nature as he is in himself, so the joy of Christians by reason of the mixture there is with spiritual joy is liable to degenerate, and to become little else but joy in itself, joy in a person's own supposed imminency and distinction from others in the favor of God, so zeal that at first might be in a great part spiritual, yet in a long continuance of opposition and controversy may degenerate more and more into human and proud passion, and may become to bitterness and even a degree of hatred, and so love to the brethren may by degrees come to little else but fondness and zeal for a party, yea, through a mixture of a natural love to the opposite sex may degenerate more and more till it issues in that which is criminal and gross, and I leave it with those who are better acquainted with ecclesiastical history to inquire whether such a degeneracy of affections as this might not be the first thing that led the way and gave occasion to the rise of the abominable notions of some sex that have arisen concerning the community of women, however that is, yet certainly the mutual embraces and kisses of persons of different sexes under the notion of Christian love and holy kisses are utterly to be disallowed and abominated as having the most direct tendency quickly to turn Christian love into unclean and brutish lust, which will not be the better but ten times the worse for being Christian by the name of Christian love. I should also think it advisable that meetings of young people of both sexes in the evening by themselves without a minister or any elder people amongst them for religious exercises should be avoided, for though for the present while their minds are greatly solemn with lively impressions and a deep

sense of divine things, there may appear no ill consequence, yet we must look to the further end of things and guard against future dangers and advantages that Satan might gain against us.

As a lively, solemn sense of divine things on the minds of young persons may gradually decay, so there will be danger that an ill improvement of these meetings may gradually prevail, if not in any unsuitable behavior while together in the meeting, yet when they break up to go home they may naturally consort together in couples for other than religious purposes, and it may at last so terminate that young persons may go to such meetings chiefly for the sake of such an opportunity for company keeping. The defect there sometimes is in the experiences of Christians exposes them to degenerate as well as the mixture that they have. Deficient maimed experiences do sometimes become more and more so, the mind being wholly intent upon those things that are in view, and those that are most wanting being neglected, there is less and less of them, and so the gap for corruption to come in grows wider and wider, and commonly both these causes operate together.

We had need to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, as the apostle was over the Christian Corinthians, lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so our minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. God indeed will never suffer his true saints totally and finally to fall away, but yet may punish their pride and self-confidence by suffering them to be long led into dreadful wilderness by the subtle serpent to the great wounding of their own souls in the interest of religion. Before I dismiss this head of the degenerating of experiences, I would mention one thing more that tends to it, and that is persons aiming in their experiences to go beyond the rule of God's word, in other words, aiming at that which is indeed in some respect beyond the rule.

Thus, some persons have endeavored utterly to root out and abolish all natural affection, or any special affection, or respect to their near relations under a notion that no other love ought to be allowed but spiritual love, and that all other love is to be abolished as carnal, and that it becomes Christians to love none upon the account of anything else but the image of God, and that therefore love should go out to one another only in that proportion in which the image of God is seen in them. They might as well argue that a man ought utterly to disallow of and endeavor to abolish all love or appetite to his daily food under a notion that it is a carnal appetite, and that no other appetite should be tolerated but spiritual appetite. Why should the saint strive after that as a high attainment in holiness, which the apostle in Romans 1, 31, mentions as one instance wherein the heathen had got to the most horrid path in wickedness, being without natural affection? Some have doubted whether they might pray for the conversion and salvation of the souls of their children any more than for the souls of others, because the salvation of the souls of others would be as much to God's glory as the salvation of their children.

And they have supposed that to pray most for their own would show a selfish disposition. So they have been afraid to tolerate a compassionate grief and concern for their nearest friends, for fear it would be an argument of want of resignation to God. It is true there is great danger of persons setting their hearts too much upon their earthly friends.

Our love to earthly friends ought to be under the government of the love of God and should be attended with the spirit of submission and resignation to His will, and everything should be subordinated to His glory. But that is no argument that these affections should be entirely abolished. The Creator of the world has put them in us for the good of mankind, and because He saw they would be needful for them, as they must be united in society in the present state, and are of great use when kept in their proper place.

And to endeavor totally to root them out would be to reproach and oppose the wisdom of the Creator, nor is the being of these natural inclinations, if well regulated, inconsistent with any part of our duty to God or any argument of a sinful selfishness, any more than our natural abhorrence of pain and the natural inclination to ease that was in the man Christ Jesus Himself. It is the duty of parents to be more concerned and to pray more for the salvation of their children than for the children of their neighbors, as it is the duty of a minister to be more concerned for the salvation of the souls of his flock, and to pray more for them than those of other congregations, because they are committed to his care. So our near friends are more committed to our care than others and our near neighbors and those that live at a great distance, and the people of our own land and nation are more in some sense committed to our care than the people of China, and we ought to pray more for them, and to be more concerned that the kingdom of Christ should flourish among them than in another country, where it would be as much and no more for the glory of God.

Compassion ought to be especially exercised towards friends. Job 6, 14 Christ did not frown upon a special affection and compassion for near friends, but rather countenance and encouraged it from time to time, and those who, in the exercise of such an affection and compassion, applied to him for relief for their friends, as in the instances of the woman of Canaan, Jairus, Mary, and Martha, the centurion, the widow of Nain, and many others. The apostle Paul, though as much resigned and devoted to God and under the power of his love, perhaps, as any mere man that ever lived, had a peculiar concern for his countrymen, the Jews, though rather on that account that they were his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh.

He had a very high degree of compassionate grief for them, insomuch that he tells us he had great heaviness and continual sorrow apart for them, and could wish himself a curse from Christ for them. Many things are proper for the saints in heaven, which are not suitable to our state in this world, and for Christians in these and other instances to affect, to go beyond the present state of mankind. And what God has appointed as fit for it is an instance of that which the wise man calls being righteous over much, and has a tendency to open a door for Satan and to cause religious affections to degenerate into something very unbecoming Christians.

Thus, I have, as I propose, taken notice of some things with regard to the inward experiences of Christians by which Satan has an advantage. I now proceed number two to take notice of something with regard to the external effects of experiences, which also gives Satan an advantage. What I refer to is this unaccountable influence that custom has upon persons with respect to the external effects and manifestations of the inward affections of the mind.

By custom, I mean both a person's being accustomed to a thing in himself, in his own common allowed and indulged practice, and also the countenance and approbation of others amongst whom he dwells by their general voice and practice. It is well known and appears sufficiently by what I have said already in this treatise and elsewhere that I am far from ascribing all the late uncommon effects and outward manifestations of inward experiences to custom and fashion if some do. I know it to be otherwise.

If it be possible for me to know anything of this nature by the most critical observation under all manner of opportunities of observing, but yet this also is exceeding evident by experience that custom has a strange influence in these things. I know it by the different manners and degrees of external effects and manifestations of great affections and high discoveries in different towns according to what persons are gradually led into and to which they are insensibly habituated by example and custom and also in the same place at different times according to their conduct. If some person conducts them that much countenances and encourages some kind of outward manifestations of great affections they naturally and

insensibly prevail and grow by degrees unavoidable, but when afterwards they come under another kind of conduct the manner of external appearances will strangely alter.

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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 731, 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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