

An Account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton in 1740 - 1742

by Jonathan Edwards

The sermon recounts the revival of religion in Northampton, led by Mr. Whitefield, and the subsequent renewal of covenant with God.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Matthew 5:8, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Topics: "Revival History", "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

Jonathan Edwards recounts the revival of religion in Northampton from 1740 to 1742, highlighting the significant alterations in the town's moral behavior, increased religious activities, and charitable spirit. The sermon describes the impact of George Whitefield's visit, leading to a widespread awakening and deep concern among both young and old individuals. Edwards reflects on the purity of the early revival compared to later influences from external sources, cautioning against judging grace solely based on outward manifestations of religious affections.

Transcript

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As Communicated in a Letter to the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston, MA

Evidently intended for publication, this letter was entitled "The State of Religion at Northampton in the County of Hampshire, About 100 Miles Westward of Boston". It was published in *The Christian History*, I (Jan. 14, 21, 28, 1743), and also in *Dwight's, Life of President Edwards*

"Northampton, MA Dec.12, 1743.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

Ever since the great work of God that was wrought here about nine years ago, there has been a great and abiding alteration in this town in many respects. There has been vastly more religion kept up in the town, among all sorts of persons, in religious exercises, and in common conversation; there has been a great alteration among the youth of the town, with respect to revelry, frolicking, profane and licentious conversation, and lewd songs; and there has also been a great alteration, amongst both old and young, with regard to tavern-haunting. I suppose the town has been in no measure so free of vice in these

respects, for any long time together, for sixty years, as it has been these nine years past. There has also been an evident alteration with respect to a charitable spirit to the poor; though I think with regard to this, we in this town as well as the land in general, come far short of gospel rules. And though after that great work nine years ago, there has been a very lamentable decay of religious affections and the engagedness of people's spirit in religion; yet many societies for prayer and social worship were all along kept up, and there were some few instances of awakening and deep concern about the things of another world, even in the most dead time.

In the year 1740, in the spring before Mr. Whitefield came to this town, there was a visible alteration: there was more seriousness and religious conversation, especially among young people; those things that were of ill tendency among them were forborne; and it was a very frequent thing for persons to consult their minister upon the salvation of their souls; and in some particular persons there appeared a great attention about that time. And thus it continued until Mr. Whitefield came to town, which was about the middle of October following: he preached here four sermons in the meeting-house (besides a private lecture at my house), one on Friday, another on Saturday, and two upon the Sabbath. The congregation was extraordinarily melted by every sermon; almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of sermon time. Mr. Whitefield's sermons were suitable to the circumstances of the town; containing a just reproof of our backslidings, and in a most moving and affecting manner making we of our great professions and great mercies, as arguments with us to return to God from whom we had departed. Immediately after this, the minds of the people in general appeared more engaged in religion, showing a greater forwardness to make religion the subject of their conversation, and to meet frequently for religious purposes, and to embrace all opportunities to hear the word preached. The revival at first appeared chiefly among professors and those that had entertained hope that they were in a state of salvation, to whom Mr. Whitefield chiefly addressed himself; but in a very short time there appeared an awakening and deep concern among some young persons, that looked upon themselves in a Christless state; and there were some hopeful appearances of conversion, and some professors were greatly revived. In about a month or six weeks, there was a great attention in the town, both as to the revival of professors and the awakening of others. By the middle of December a considerable work of God appeared among those that were very young; and the revival of religion continued to increase, so that in the spring an engagedness of spirit about the things of religion was become very general amongst young people and children, and religious subjects almost wholly took up their conversation when they were together.

In the month of May, 1741, a sermon was preached to a company, at a private house. Near the conclusion of the discourse, one or two persons, that were professors, were so greatly affected with a sense of the greatness and glory of divine things, and the infinite importance of the things of eternity, that they were not able to conceal it - the affection of their minds overcoming their strength, and having a very visible effect upon their bodies. When the exercises were over, the young people that were present removed into the other room for religious conference; and particularly that they might have opportunity to inquire of those that were thus affected what apprehensions they had, and what things they were that thus deeply impressed their minds; and there soon appeared a very great effect of their conversation; the affection was quickly propagated throughout the room; many of the young people and children that were professors appeared to be overcome with a sense of the greatness and glory of divine things, and with admiration, love, joy, and praise, and compassion to others that looked upon themselves as in a state of nature; and many others at the same time were overcome with distress about their sinful and miserable estate and condition; so that the whole room was full of nothing but outcries, faintings, and the like.

Others soon heard of it in several parts of the town, and came to them; and what they saw and heard there was greatly affecting to them, so that many of them were overpowered in like manner, and it continued thus for some hours; the time being spent in prayer, singing, counseling, and conferring. There seemed to be a consequent happy effect of that meeting to several particular persons, and on the state of religion in the town in general. After this were meetings from time to time, attended with like appearances.

But a little after it, at the conclusion of the public exercises on the sabbath, I appointed the children that were under seventeen years of age, to go from the meeting-house to a neighboring house, that I might there further enforce what they had heard in public, and might give in some counsels proper for their age. The children were there very generally and greatly affected with the warnings and counsels that were given them, and many exceedingly overcome; and the room was filled with cries; and when they were dismissed, they almost all of them went home crying aloud through the streets, to all parts of the town.

The like appearances attended several such meetings of children that were appointed. But their affections appeared by what followed to be of a very different nature: in many, they appeared indeed but childish affections, and in a day or two would leave them as they were before; others were deeply impressed; their convictions took fast hold of them, and abode by them: and there were some that, from one meeting to another, seemed extraordinarily affected for some time, to but little purpose, their affections presently vanishing from time to time; but yet afterwards were seized with abiding convictions, and their affections became durable.

About the middle of the summer, I called together the young people that were communicants, from sixteen to twenty-six years of age, to my house; which proved to be a most happy meeting: many seemed to be very greatly and most agreeably affected with those views, which excited humility, self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, love, and joy: many fainted under these affections. We had several meetings that summer of young people, attended with like appearances. It was about that time that there first began to be cryings out in the meeting-house; which several times occasioned many of the congregation to stay in the house after the public exercises were over, to confer with those who seemed to be overcome with religious convictions and affections, which was found to tend much to the propagation of their impressions, with lasting effect upon many; conference being at these times commonly joined with prayer and singing. In the summer and autumn, the children in various parts of the town had religious meetings by themselves, for prayer, sometimes joined with fasting; wherein many of them seemed to be greatly and properly affected, and I hope some of them savingly wrought upon.

The months of August and September were the most remarkable of any this year for appearances of the conviction and conversion of sinners, and great revivings, quickenings, and comforts of professors, and for extraordinary external effects of these things. It was a very frequent thing to see a house full of out-cries, faintings, convulsions, and such like, both with distress, and also with admiration and joy. It was not the manner here to hold meetings all night, as in some places, nor was it common to continue them till very late in the night; but it was pretty often so, that there were some that were so affected, and their bodies so overcome, that they could not go home, but were obliged to stay all night where they were.

There was no difference that I know of here, with regard to these extraordinary effects, in meetings in the night and in the day time the meetings in which these effects appeared in the evening being commonly begun, and their extraordinary effects, in the day, and continued in the evening; and some meetings have been very remarkable for such extraordinary effects that were both begun and finished in the day time. There was an appearance of a glorious progress of the work of God upon the hearts of sinners, in

conviction and conversion, this summer and autumn, and great numbers, I think we have reason to hope, were brought savingly home to Christ.

But this was remarkable: the work of God in his influences of this nature, seemed to be almost wholly upon a new generation - those that were not come to years of discretion in that wonderful season, nine years ago; children, or those that were then children: others who had enjoyed that former glorious opportunity, without any appearance of saving benefit, seemed now to be almost wholly passed over and let alone. But now we had the most wonderful work among children that ever was in Northampton.

The former outpouring of the Spirit was remarkable for influences upon the minds of children, beyond all that had ever been before; but this far exceeded that. Indeed, as to influences on the minds of professors, this work was by no means confined to a new generation. Many of all ages partook of it; but yet in this respect it was more general on those that were of the young sort. Many who had been formerly wrought upon, and in the time of our declension had fallen into decays, and had in a great measure left God, and gone after the world now passed under a very remarkable new work of the Spirit of God, as if they had been the subjects of a second conversion.

They were first led into the wilderness, and had a work of conviction; having much deeper convictions of the sins of both nature and practice than ever before; though with some new circumstances, and something new in the kind of conviction in some with great distress beyond what they had felt before their first conversion. Under these convictions, they were excited to strive for salvation, and the kingdom of heaven suffered violence from some of them in a far more remarkable manner than before; and after great convictions and humblings, and agonizing with God, they had Christ discovered to them anew as an all-sufficient Savior, and in the glories of his grace, and in a far more clear manner than before; and with greater humility, self-emptiness, and brokenness of heart, and a purer, a higher joy, and greater desires after holiness of life; but with greater self-diffidence and distrust of their treacherous hearts.

One circumstance wherein this work differed from that which had been in the towns five or six years before was that conversions were frequently wrought more sensibly and visibly; the impressions stronger and more manifest by their external effects; the progress of the Spirit of God in conviction, from step to step, more apparent; and the transition from one state to another, more sensible and plain; so that it might, in many instances, be as it were seen by bystanders. The preceding season had been very remarkable on this account, beyond what had been before; but this more remarkable than that.

And in this season, these apparent or visible conversions (if I may so call them), were more frequently in the presence of others, at religious meetings, where the appearances of what was wrought on the heart fell under public observation.

After September, 1741, there seemed to be some abatement of these extraordinary appearances, yet they did not wholly cease, but there was something of them, from time to time, all winter. About the beginning of February, 1742, Mr. Buell came to this town. I was then absent from home, and continued so till about a fortnight after. Mr. Buell preached from day to day, almost every day, in the meeting-house. I had left to him the free use of my pulpit, having heard of his designed visit before I went from home. He spent almost the whole time in religious exercises with the people, either in public or private, the people continually thronging him. When he first came there came with him a number of the zealous people from Suffield, who continued here for some time. There were very extraordinary effects of Mr. Buell's labors; the people were exceedingly moved, crying out in great numbers in the meeting-house, and a great part of the

congregation commonly staying in the house of God for hours after the public service. Many also were exceedingly moved in private meetings where Mr. Buell was: almost the whole town seemed to be in a great and continual commotion, day and night, and there was indeed a very great revival of religion. But it was principally among professors; the appearances of a work of conversion were in no measure as great as they had been the summer before. When I came home, I found the town in very extraordinary circumstances, such as, in some respects, I never saw it in before. Mr. Buell continued here a fortnight or three weeks after I returned: there being still great appearances attending his labors; many in their religious affections being raised far beyond what they had ever been before: and there were some instances of persons lying in a sort of trance, remaining perhaps for a whole twenty-four hours motionless, and with their senses locked up; but in the mean time under strong imaginations, as though they went to heaven and had there a vision of glorious and delightful objects. But when the people were raised to this height, Satan took the advantage, and his interposition, in many instances, soon became very apparent: and a great deal of caution and pains were found necessary to keep the people, many of them, from running wild.

In the month of March, I led the people into a solemn public renewal of their covenant with God. To that end, having made a draft of a covenant, I first proposed it to some of the principal men in the church; then to the people, in their several religious associations in various parts of the town; then to the whole congregation in public; and then I deposited a copy of it in the hands of each of the four deacons, that all who desired it might resort to them, and have opportunity to view and consider it. Then the people in general that were above fourteen years of age first subscribed the covenant with their hands; and then, on a day of fasting and prayer, all together presented themselves before the Lord in his house, and stood up, and solemnly manifested their consent to it, as their vow to God. The covenant was as follows:

COPY OF A COVENANT

Entered into and subscribed by the people of God at Northampton, and owned before God in his house as their vow to the Lord, and made a solemn act of public worship, by the congregation in general that were above fourteen years of age, on a day of fasting and prayer for the continuance and increase of the gracious presence of God in that place.

March 16th, 1742. Acknowledging God's great goodness to us, a sinful, unworthy people, in the blessed manifestations and fruits of his gracious presence in this town, both formerly and lately, and particularly in the very late spiritual revival; and adoring the glorious majesty, power, and grace of God, manifested in the present wonderful outpouring of his Spirit, in many parts of this land, in this place; and lamenting our past backslidings and ungrateful departings from God, and humbly begging of God that he would not mark our iniquities, but, for Christ's sake, come over the mountains of our sins, and visit us with his salvation, and continue the tokens of his presence with us, and yet more gloriously pour out his blessed Spirit upon us, and make us all partakers of the divine blessings he is, at this day. bestowing here, and in many parts of this land; we do this day present our-selves before the Lord, to renounce our evil ways, we put away our abominations from before God's eyes, and with one accord, to renew our engagements to seek and serve God: and particularly do now solemnly promise and vow to the Lord as follows:

In all our conversation, concerns, and dealings with our neighbor, we will have a strict regard to rules of honesty, justice, and uprightness, that we don't overreach or defraud our neighbor in any matter, and either willfully, or through want of care, injure him in any of his honest possessions or rights, and in all our communication will have a tender respect, not only to our own interest, but also to the interest of our

neighbor; and will care-fully endeavor, in every thing, to do to others as we should expect, or think reasonable, that they should do to us, if we were in their case, and they in ours.

And particularly we will endeavor to render every one his due, and will take heed to ourselves, that we don't injure our neighbor, and give him just cause of offense, by willfully or negligently forbearing to pay our honest debts.

And wherein any of us, upon strict examination of our past behavior, may be conscious to ourselves, that we have by any means wronged any of our neighbors in their outward estate, we will not rest, till we have made that restitution, or given that satisfaction, which the rules of moral equity require; or if we are, on a strict and impartial search, conscious to ourselves that we have in any other respect considerably injured our neighbor, we will truly endeavor to do that which we in our consciences suppose Christian rules require, in order to a reparation of the injury. and removing the offense given thereby.

And furthermore we promise that we will not allow ourselves in backbiting; and that we will take great heed to ourselves to avoid all violations of those Christian rules, Titus 3:2. "Speak evil of no man"; James 4:2 "Speak not evil one of another, brethren"; and 2 Corinthians 12:20. "Let there be no strifes, backbitings. whisperings"; and that we will not only not slander our neighbor. but also will not feed a spirit of bitterness, ill will, or secret grudge against our neighbor. insist on his real faults needlessly. and when not called to it, or from such a spirit, speak of his failings and blemishes with ridicule, or all air of contempt.

And we promise that we will be very careful to avoid doing anything to our neighbor from a spirit of revenge. And that we will take great care that we do not' for private interest or our own honor, or to maintain ourselves against those of a contrary party, or to get our wills, or to promote any design in opposition to others, do those things which we on the most impartial consideration are capable of, can think in our consciences will tend to wound religion, and the interests of Christ's kingdom.

And particularly, that so far as any of us, by Divine Providence, have any special influence upon others, to lead them in the management of public affair., we will not rake our own worldly gain, or honor, or interest in the affections of others, or getting the better of any of a contrary party, that are in any respect our competitors, or the bringing or keeping them down, our governing aim, to the prejudice of the interest of religion, and the honor of Christ.

And in the management of any public affair, wherever there is a difference of opinions, concerning any outward possessions, privileges, rights, or properties, we will not willingly violate justice for private interest: and with the greatest strictness and watchfulness will avoid all unchristian bitterness, vehemence, and heat of spirit; yea, though we should think ourselves injured by a contrary party; and in the time of the management of such affairs will -ally watch over ourselves, our spirits, and our tongues, to avoid all unchristian inveighings, reproachings, bitter reflectings, judging and ridiculing others, either in public meetings or in private conversation, either to men's faces' or behind their backs; but will greatly endeavor, so far as we are concerned, that all should be managed with Christian humility, gentleness, quietness, and love.

And furthermore we promise that we will not tolerate the exercise of enmity and ill will, or revenge in our hearts against any of our neighbors; and we will often be strictly searching and examining our own hearts with respect to that matter.

And if any of us find that we have an old secret grudge against any of our neighbors, we will not gratify it but cross it, and endeavor to our utmost to root it out, crying to God for his help; and that we will make it our true and faithful endeavor, in our places, that a party spirit may not be kept up amongst us, but that it may utterly cease; that for the future, we may all be one united in undisturbed peace and unfeigned love.

And those of us that are in youth do promise never to allow ourselves in any diversions or pastimes, in meetings, or companies of young people, that we, in our consciences, upon sober consideration, judge not well to consist with, or would sinfully tend to hinder, the devoutest and most engaged spirit in religion, or indispose the mind for that devout and profitable attendance on the duties of the closet, which is most agreeable to God's will, or that we, in our most impartial judgment, can think tends to rob God of that honor which he expects, by our orderly serious attendance on family worship.

And furthermore we promise that we will strictly avoid all freedoms and familiarities in company, so tending either to stir up or gratify a lust of lasciviousness that we cannot in our consciences think will be approved by the infinitely pure and holy eye of God, or that we can think, on serious and impartial consideration, we should be afraid to practice, if we expected in a few hours to appear before that holy God, to give an account of ourselves to him, as fearing they would be condemned by him as unlawful and impure.

We also promise with great watchfulness to perform relative duties required by Christian rules, in the families we belong to, as we stand related respectively, towards parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, masters or mistresses, and servants.

And we now appear before God, depending on Divine grace. and assistance, solemnly to devote our whole lives, to be laboriously spent in the business of religion; ever making it our greatest business, without backsliding from such a way of living, not hearkening to the solicitations of our sloth, and other corrupt inclinations, or the temptations of the world, that tend to draw us off from it; and particularly that we will not abuse a hope or opinion that any of us may have, of our being interested in Christ, to indulge ourselves in sloth, or the more easily to yield to the solicitations of any sinful inclinations; but will run with perseverance the race that is set before us, and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

And because we are sensible that the keeping these solemn vows may hereafter, in many cases, be very contrary to our corrupt inclinations and carnal interest., we do now therefore appear before God to make a surrender of all to him, and to make a sacrifice of every carnal inclination and interest, to the great business of religion and the interest of our souls.

And being sensible of our weakness and the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and our proneness to forget our most solemn vows and lose our resolutions, we promise to be often strictly examining ourselves by these promises, especially before the sacrament of the Lord's supper; and beg of God that he would, for Christ's sake, keep us from wickedly dissembling in these our solemn vows; and that he who searches our hearts, and ponders the path of our feet, would, from time to time, help us in trying ourselves by this covenant, and help us to keep covenant with him, and not leave us to our own foolish, wicked, and treacherous hearts.

In the beginning of the summer of 1742, there seemed to be an abatement of the liveliness of people's affections in religion; but yet many were often in a great height of them. And in the fall and winter following, there were at times extraordinary appearances. But in the general, people's engagedness in religion, and the liveliness of their affections have been on the decline; and some of the young people especially have shamefully lost their liveliness and vigor in religion, and much of the seriousness and solemnity of their

spirits. But there are many that walk as becometh saints; and to this day there are a considerable number in town that seem to be near to God, and maintain much of the life of religion, and enjoy many of the sensible tokens and fruits of his gracious presence.

With respect to the late season of revival of religion amongst us for three or four years past, it has been observable, that in the former part of it, in the years 1740 and 1741, the work seemed to be much more pure, having less of a corrupt mixture than in the former great outpouring of the Spirit in 1735 and 1736. Persons seemed to be sensible of their former errors, and had learned more of their own hearts, and experience had taught them more of the tendency and consequences of things. They were now better guarded, and their affections were not only stronger but attended with greater solemnity, and greater humility and self-distrust, and greater engagedness after holy living and perseverance: and there were fewer errors in conduct. But in the latter part of it, in the year 1742, it was otherwise: the work continued more pure till we were infected from abroad: our people hearing of, and some of them seeing the work in other places, where there was a greater visible commotion than here, and the outward appearances were more extraordinary were ready to think that the work in those places far excelled what was amongst us, and their eyes were dazzled with the high profession and great show that some made who came hither from other places.

That those people went so far beyond them in raptures and violent emotions of the affections, and a vehement zeal, and what they call boldness for Christ our people were ready to think was owing to far greater attainments in grace, and intimacy with heaven: they looked little in their own eyes in comparison with them, and were ready to submit themselves to them, and yield themselves up to their conduct, taking it for granted that every thing was right that they said and did. These things had a strange influence on the people) and gave many of them a deep and unhappy tincture, from which it was a hard and long labor to deliver them, and from which some of them are not fully delivered to this day.

The effects and consequences of things among us plainly show the following things, viz. That the degree of grace is by no means to be judged of by the degree of joy, or the degree of zeal; and that indeed we cannot at all determine by these things who are gracious and who are not; and that it is not the degree of religious affections but the nature of them that is chiefly to be looked at. Some that have had very great raptures of joy, and have been extraordinarily filled (as the vulgar phrase is), and have had their bodies overcome, and that very often, have manifested far less of the temper of Christians in their conduct since than some others that have been still and have made no great outward show. But then again, there are many others that have had extraordinary joys and emotions of mind, with frequent great effects upon their bodies, that behave themselves steadfastly, as humble, amiable, eminent Christians.

'Tis evident that there may be great religious affections in individuals, which may in show and appearance resemble gracious affections, and have the same effects upon their bodies, but are far from having the same effect on the temper of their minds and the course of their lives. And likewise there is nothing more manifest, by what appears amongst us, than that the good estate of individuals is not chiefly to be judged of by any exactness of steps, and method of experiences, in what is supposed to be the first conversion; but that we must judge by the spirit that breathes, the effect wrought upon the temper of the soul in the time of the work and remaining afterwards. Though there have been very few instances among professors, amongst us, of what is ordinarily called scandalous sins, known to me; yet the temper that some of them show, and the behavior they have been of, together with some things in the nature and circumstances of their experiences, make me much afraid lest there be a considerable number that have woefully deceived themselves. Though, on the other hand, there is a great number whose temper and

conversation is such as justly confirms the charity of others towards them; and not a few in whose disposition and walk there are amiable appearances of eminent grace. And notwithstanding all the corrupt mixtures that have been in the late work here, there are not only many blessed fruits of it, in particular persons that yet remain, but some good effects of it upon the town in general. A spirit of party has more extensively subsided. I suppose there has been less appearance these three or four years past of that division of the town into two parties which has long been our bane, than has been at any time during the preceding thirty years; and the people have apparently had much more caution, and a greater guard on their spirit and their tongues, to avoid contention and unchristian hearts in town-meetings, and on other occasions. And 'tis a thing greatly to be rejoiced in that the people very lately came to an agreement and final issue, with respect to their grand controversy relating to their common lands; which has been, above any other particular thing, a source of mutual prejudices, jealousies, and debates, for fifteen or sixteen years past. The people also seem to be much more sensible of the danger of resting in old experiences, or what they were subjects of at their supposed first conversion; and to be more fully convinced of the necessity of forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing forward and maintaining earnest labor, watchfulness, and prayerfulness, as long as they live.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your friend and brother,

JONATHAN EDWARDS"

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