

# That the Outward Manifestations of Them, and the Relation Persons Give of Them, Are Very Affecting and Pleasing to the Godly, Is No Sign

by Jonathan Edwards

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*Jonathan Edwards emphasizes that true piety cannot be determined by outward appearances, but rather by the genuine fruits of a person's faith.*

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 16:7, Isaiah 11:3, Matthew 13:26, Romans 14:6, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 1 Peter 5:12, Revelation 2:17

**Topics:** "Spiritual Discernment", "Religious Affections"

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## Description

Jonathan Edwards preaches about the uncertainty of judging others' religious affections solely based on outward manifestations, emphasizing that true saints cannot discern the hearts of others and should proceed with caution in determining others' spiritual states. He warns against being quick to judge and highlights the danger of being deceived by outward appearances, as even bright professors of faith can fall away. Edwards explains that error or mistake may lead to gracious exercises of the Spirit of God, and that love flowing out towards others is not a reliable indicator of their true spiritual state.

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## Transcript

XII. Nothing can be certainly concluded concerning the nature of religious affections, that any are the subjects of, from this, that the outward manifestations of them, and the relation persons give of them, are very affecting and pleasing to the truly godly, and such as greatly gain their charity, and win their hearts. The true saints have not such a spirit of discerning that they can certainly determine who are godly, and who are not. For though they know experimentally what true religion is, in the internal exercises of it; yet these are what they can neither feel, nor see, in the heart of another.[31] There is nothing in others, that comes within their view, but outward manifestations and appearances; but the Scripture plainly intimates, that this way of judging what is in men by outward appearances, is at best uncertain, and liable to deceit: 1 Sam. 16:7, "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Isa. 11:3, "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears." [32] They commonly are but poor judges, and dangerous counselors in soul cases, who are quick and peremptory in determining persons' states, vaunting themselves in their extraordinary faculty of discerning and distinguishing, in these great affairs; as though all was open and clear to them. They betray one of

these three things: either that they have had but little experience; or are persons of a weak judgment; or that they have a great degree of pride and self-confidence, and so ignorance of themselves.

Wise and experienced men will proceed with great caution in such an affair. When there are many probable appearances of piety in others, it is the duty of the saints to receive them cordially into their charity, and to love them and rejoice in them, as their brethren in Christ Jesus. But yet the best of men may be, when the appearances seem to them exceeding fair and bright, as entirely to gain their charity, and conquer their hearts. It has been common thing in the church of God, for such bright professors, that are received as eminent saints, among the saints, to fall away and come to nothing.[33] And this we need not wonder at, if we consider the things that have been already observed; what things it has been shown may appear in men who are altogether graceless.

Nothing hinders but that all these things may meet together in men, and yet they be without a spark of grace in their hearts. They may have religious affections of many kinds together; they may have a sort of affection towards God, that bears a great resemblance of dear love to him; and so a kind of love to the brethren, and great appearances of admiration of God's perfections and works, and sorrow for sin, and reverence, submission, self-abasement, gratitude, joy, religious longings, and zeal for religion and the good of souls.

And these affections may come after great awakenings and convictions of conscience; and there may be great appearances of a work of humiliation: and counterfeit love and joy, and other affections may seem to follow these, and one another, just in the same order that is commonly observable in the holy affections of true converts. And these religious affections may be carried to a great height, and may cause abundance of tears, yea, may overcome the nature of those who are the subjects of them, and may make them affectionate, and fervent, and fluent, in speaking of the things of God, and dispose them to be abundant in it; and may be attended with many sweet texts of Scripture, and precious promises, brought with great impression on their minds; and may dispose them with their mouths to praise and glorify God, in a very ardent manner, and fervently to call upon others to praise him, crying out of their unworthiness, and extolling free grace.

And may, moreover, dispose them to abound in the external duties of religion, such as prayer, hearing the word preached, singing, and religious conference; and these things attended with a great resemblance of a Christian assurance, in its greatest height, when the saints mount on eagles' wings, above all darkness and doubting. I think it has been made plain, that there may be all these things, and yet there be nothing more than the common influences of the Spirit of God, joined with the delusions of Satan, and the wicked and deceitful heart.--To which I may add, that all these things may be attended with a sweet natural temper, and a good doctrinal knowledge of religion, and a long acquaintance with the saints' way of talking, and of expressing their affections and experiences, and a natural ability and subtlety in accommodating their expressions and manner of speaking to the dispositions and notions of the hearers, and a taking decency of expression and behavior, formed by a good education.

How great therefore may the resemblance be, as to all outward expressions and appearances, between a hypocrite and a true saint! Doubtless it is the glorious prerogative of the omniscient God, as the great searcher of hearts, to be able well to separate between sheep and goats. And what an indecent self-exaltation and arrogance it is, in poor, fallible, dark mortals, to pretend that they can determine and know, who are really sincere and upright before God, and who are not!

Many seem to lay great weight on that, and to suppose it to be what may determine them with respect to others' real piety, when they not only tell a plausible story, but when, in giving an account of their experiences, they make such a representation, and speak after such a manner, that they feel their talk; that is to say, when their talk seems to harmonize with their own experience, and their hearts are touched and affected and delighted, by what they hear them say, and drawn out by it, in dear love to them. But there is not that certainty in such things, and that full dependence to be had upon them, which many imagine. A true saint greatly delights in holiness; it is a most beautiful thing in his eyes; and God's work, in savingly renewing and making holy and happy, a poor, and before perishing soul, appears to him a most glorious work: no wonder, therefore, that his heart is touched, and greatly affected, when he hears another give a probable account of this work, wrought on his own heart, and when he sees in him probable appearances of holiness; whether those pleasing appearances have anything real to answer them, or no. And if he uses the same words, which are commonly made use of, to express the affections of true saints, and tells of many things following one another in an order, agreeable to the method of the experience of him that hears him, and also speaks freely and boldly, and with an air of assurance; no wonder the other thinks his experiences harmonize with his own. And if, besides all this, in giving his relation, he speaks with much affection; and, above all, if in speaking he seems to show much affection to him to whom he speaks, such an affection as the Galatians did to the Apostle Paul; these things will naturally have a powerful influence, to affect and draw his hearer's heart, and open wide the doors of his charity towards him. David speaks as one who had felt Ahithophel's talk, and had once a sweet savor and relish of it. And therefore exceeding great was his surprise and disappointment, when he fell; it was almost too much for him: Psal. 55:12, 13, 14, "It was not an enemy--then I could have borne it; but it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance: we took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company."

It is with professors of religion, especially such as become so in a time of outpouring of the Spirit of God, as it is with blossoms in the spring;[34] there are vast numbers of them upon the trees, which all look fair and promising; but yet many of them never come to anything. And many of those, that in a little time wither up, and drop off, and rot under the trees; yet for a while look as beautiful and gay as others; and not only so, but smell sweet, and send forth a pleasant odor; so that we cannot, by any of our senses, certainly distinguish those blossoms which have in them that secret virtue, which will afterwards appear in the fruit, and that inward solidity and strength which shall enable them to bear, and cause them to be perfected by the hot summer sun, that will dry up the others. It is the mature fruit which comes afterwards, and not the beautiful colors and smell of the blossoms, that we must judge by. So new converts (professedly so), in their talk about things of religion, may appear fair, and be very savory, and the saints may think they talk feelingly. They may relish their talk, and imagine they perceive a divine savor in it, and yet all may come to nothing.

It is strange how hardly men are brought to be contented with the rules and directions Christ has given them, but they must needs go by other rules of their counsels which Christ ever delivered more plainly, than the rule. I know of no directions or councils which Christ ever delivered more plainly, than the rule he has given us, to guide our judging of others' sincerity, viz., that we should judge of the tree chiefly by the fruit: but yet this will not do; but other ways are found out, which are imagined to be more distinguishing and certain. And woeful have been the mischievous consequences of this arrogant setting up men's wisdom above the wisdom of Christ. I believe many saints have gone much out of the way of Christ's word, in this respect: and some of them have been chastised with whips, and (I had almost said) scorpions, to bring them back again. But many things which have lately appeared, and do now appear,

may convince that ordinarily those who have gone farthest this way, that have been most highly conceited of their faculty of discerning, and have appeared most forward, peremptorily and suddenly to determine the state of men's souls, have been hypocrites, who have known nothing of true religion.

In the parable of the wheat and tares, it is said, Matt. 13:26, "When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." As though the tares were not discerned, nor distinguishable from the wheat, until then, as Mr. Flavel observes,[35] who mentions it as an observation of Jerome's, that "wheat and tares are so much alike, until the blade of the wheat comes to bring forth the ear, that it is next to impossible to distinguish them." And then Mr. Flavel adds, "How difficult soever it be to discern the difference between wheat and tares; yet doubtless the eye of sense can much easier discriminate them, than the most quick and piercing eye of man can discern the difference between special and common grace. For all saving graces in the saints, have their counterfeits in hypocrites; there are similar works in those, which a spiritual and very judicious eye may easily mistake for the saving and genuine effects of a sanctifying spirit."

As it is the ear of the fruit which distinguishes the wheat from the tares, so this is the true Shibboleth, that he who stands as judge at the passages of Jordan, makes use of to distinguish those that shall pass over Jordan into the true Canaan, from those that should be slain at the passages. For the Hebrew word Shibboleth signifies an ear of corn. And perhaps the more full pronunciation of Jephthah's friends, Shibboleth, may represent a full ear with fruit in it, typifying the fruits of the friends of Christ, the antitype of Jephthah; and the more lean pronunciation of the Ephraimites, his enemies, may represent their empty ears, typifying the show of religion in hypocrites, without substance and fruit. This is agreeable to the doctrine we are abundantly taught in Scripture, viz., that he who is set to judge those that pass through death, whether they have a right to enter into the heavenly Canaan or no, or whether they should not be slain, will judge every man according to his works.

We seem to be taught the same things, by the rules given for the priest's discerning the leprosy. In many cases it was impossible for the priest to determine whether a man had the leprosy, or whether he were clean, by the most narrow inspection of the appearances that were upon him, until he had waited to see what the appearances would come to, and had shut up the person who showed himself to him, one seven days after another; and when he judged, he was to determine by the hair, which grew out of the spot that was showed him, which was as it were the fruit that it brought forth.

And here, before I finish what I have to say under this head, I would say something to a strange notion some have of late been led away with, of certainly knowing the good estate that others are in, as though it were immediately revealed to them from heaven, by their love flowing out to them in an extraordinary manner. They argue thus, that their love being very sensible and great, it may be certainly known by them who feel it, to be a true Christian love: and if it be a true Christian love, the Spirit of God must be the author of it: and inasmuch as the Spirit of God who knows certainly, whether others are the children of God or no, and is a spirit of truth, is pleased by an uncommon influence upon them, to cause their love to flow out, in an extraordinary manner, towards such a person as a child of God; it must needs be, that this infallible Spirit, who deceives none, knows that that person is a child of God. But such persons might be convinced of the falseness of their reasoning, if they would consider whether or no it be not their duty, and what God requires of them, to love those as the children of God who they think are the children of God, and whom they have no reason to think otherwise of, from all that they can see in them, though God, who searches the hearts, knows them not to be his children.

If it be their duty, then it is good, and the want of it sin; and therefore surely the Spirit of God may be the author of it: the Spirit of God, without being a spirit of falsehood, may in such a case assist a person to do his duty, and keep him from sin. But then they argue from the uncommon degree and special manner, in which their love flows out to the person, which they think the Spirit of God never would cause, if he did not know the object to be a child of God. But then I would ask them, whether or no it is not their duty to love all such as they are bound to think are the children of God, from all that they can see in them, to a very great degree, though God, from other things which he sees, that are out of sight to them, knows them not to be so. It is men's duty to love all whom they are bound in charity to look upon as the children of God, with a vastly dearer affection than they commonly do. As we ought to love Christ to the utmost capacity of our nature, so it is our duty to love those who we think are so near and dear to him as his members, with an exceeding dear affection, as Christ has loved us; and therefore it is sin in us not to love them so. We ought to pray to God that he would by his Spirit keep us from sin, and enable us to do our duty: and may not his Spirit answer our prayers, and enable us to do our duty, in a particular instance, without lying? If he cannot, then the Spirit of God is bound not to help his people to do their duty in some instances, because he cannot do it without being a spirit of falsehood. But surely God is so sovereign as that comes to, that he may enable us to do our duty when he pleases, and on what occasion he pleases. When persons think others are his children, God may have other ends in causing their exceedingly endeared love to flow out to them, besides revealing to them whether their opinion of them be right or no: he may have that merciful end in it to enable them to know their duty, and to keep them from that dreadful infinite evil, sin. And will they say God shall not show them that mercy in such a case? If I am at a distance from home, and hear, that in my absence my house is burnt, but my family have, in some extraordinary manner, all escaped the flames; and everything in the circumstances of the story, as I hear it, makes it appear very credible, it would be sin in me, in such a case, not to feel a very great degree of gratitude to God, though the story indeed be not true. And is not God so sovereign, that he may, if he pleases, show me that mercy on that occasion, and enable me to do my duty in a much further degree than I used to do it, and yet not incur the charge of deceitfulness in confirming a falsehood?

It is exceeding manifest, that error or mistake may be the occasion of a gracious exercise, and consequently a gracious influence of the Spirit of God by Rom. 14:6: "He that eateth to the Lord he eateth, and giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks!" The apostle is speaking of those, who through erroneous and needless scruples, avoided eating legally unclean meats.--By this it is very evident, that there may be true exercises of grace, a true respect to the Lord, and particularly, a true thankfulness, which may be occasioned, both by an erroneous judgment and practice. And consequently, an error may be the occasion of those true holy exercises that are from the infallible Spirit of God. And if so, it is certainly too much for us to determine, to how great a degree the Spirit of God may give this holy exercise, on such an occasion.

This notion, of certainly discerning another's state, by love flowing out, is not only not founded on reason or Scripture, but it is anti-scriptural, it is against the rules of Scripture; which say not a word of any such way of judging the state of others as this, but direct us to judge chiefly by the fruits that are seen in them. And it is against the doctrines of Scripture, which do plainly teach us, that the state of others' souls towards God cannot be known by us, as in Rev. 2:17: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." And Rom. 2:29, "He is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God." That by this last expression, "whose praise is not of men, but of God," the apostle has respect to the

insufficiency of men to judge concerning him, whether he be inwardly a Jew or no (as they could easily see by outward marks, whether men were outwardly Jews), and would signify, that it belongs to God alone to give a determining voice in this matter, is confirmed by the same apostle's use of the phrase, in 1 Cor. 4:5: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:" and then shall every man have praise of God. The apostle, in the two foregoing verses, says, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." And again, it is further confirmed, because the apostle, in this second chapter to the Romans, directs his speech especially to those who had a high conceit of their own holiness, made their boast of God, and were confident of their own discerning, and that they knew God's will, and approved the things which were excellent, or tried the things that differ (as it is in the margin), ver. 19: "And were confident that they were guides of the blind, and a light to them which are in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes; and so took upon them to judge others." See ver. 1, and 17, 18, 19, 20.

And how arrogant must the notion be, that they have, who imagine they can certainly know others' godliness, when that great Apostle Peter pretends not to say any more concerning Sylvanus, than that he was a faithful brother, as he supposed! 1 Pet. 5:12. Though this Sylvanus appears to have been a very eminent minister of Christ, and an evangelist, and a famous light in God's church at that day, and an intimate companion of the apostles. See 2 Cor. 1:19, 1 Thess. 1:1, and 2 Thess. 1:1.

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