

# That They Dispose Persons to Spend Much Time in Religion, and to Be Zealously Engaged in the External Duties of Worship, Is No Sign

by Jonathan Edwards

---

*Spending time in prayer and worship is not a certain sign of true salvation, as false religion can also cause people to be zealous in external duties.*

**Scripture:** Acts 2:46

**Topics:** "True Religion", "False Worship"

---

## Description

Jonathan Edwards discusses how spending much time in religious activities like reading, praying, singing, and hearing sermons is not a certain sign of true religion, as both those with and without grace can be zealously engaged in external worship. True grace, as seen in the lives of Anna, the primitive Christians, Daniel, and David, causes delight in religious exercises and worship. However, false religion can also lead people to delight in religious duties without genuine spiritual transformation, as seen in the Israelites, Pharisees, and others who outwardly appeared devout but lacked true faith.

---

## Transcript

IX. It is no certain sign that the religious affections which persons have are such as have in them the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they dispose persons to spend much time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship. This has, very unreasonably of late, been looked upon as an argument against the religious affections which some have had, that they spend so much time in reading, praying, singing, hearing sermons, and the like.

It is plain from the Scripture, that it is the tendency of true grace to cause persons to delight in such religious exercises. True grace had this effect on Anna the prophetess: Luke 2:27, "She departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." And grace had this effect upon the primitive Christians in Jerusalem: Acts 2:46, 47, "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God."

Grace made Daniel delight in the duty of prayer, and solemnly to attend it three times a day, as it also did David: Psal. 55:17, "Evening, morning, and at noon will I pray." Grace makes the saints delight in singing

praises to God: Psal. 135: 3, "Sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant." And 147:1, "Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely." It also causes them to delight to hear the word of God preached: it makes the gospel a joyful sound to them, Psal. 89:15, and makes the feet of those who publish these good tidings to be beautiful: Isa. 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!" &c.

It makes them love God's public worship: Psal. 26:8, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth." And 27:4, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." Psal. 84:1, 2, &c. "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.--Yea, the sparrow hath found a house and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Blessed is the man in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca--go from strength to strength, everyone of them in Zion appeareth before God." Ver 10, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." This is the nature of true grace. But yet, on the other hand, persons' being disposed to abound and to be zealously engaged in the external exercises of religion, and to spend much time in them, is no sure evidence of grace; because such a disposition is found in many that have no grace.

So it was with the Israelites of old, whose services were abominable to God; they attended the "new moons, and Sabbaths, and calling of assemblies, and spread forth their hands, and made many prayers," Isa. 1:12-15. So it was with the Pharisees; they "made long prayers, and fasted twice a week." False religion may cause persons to be loud and earnest in prayer: Isa. 58: 4, "Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to cause your voice to be heard on high." That religion which is not spiritual and saving, may cause men to delight in religious duties and ordinances: Isa. 58:2, "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice: they take delight in approaching to God."

It may cause them to take delight in hearing the word of God preached, as it was with Ezekiel's hearers: Ezek. 33:31, 32, "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not."

So it was with Herod; he heard John the Baptist gladly, Mark 6:20. So it was with others of his hearers, "for a season they rejoiced in his light," John 5:35. So the stony ground hearers heard the word with joy.

Experience shows, that persons, from false religion, may be inclined to be exceeding abundant in the external exercises of religion; yea, to give themselves up to them, and devote almost their whole time to them. Formerly a sort of people were very numerous in the Romish church, called recluses, who forsook the world, and utterly abandoned the society of mankind, and shut themselves up close in a narrow cell, with a vow never to stir out of it, nor to see the face of any of mankind any more (unless that they might be visited in case of sickness), to spend all their days in the exercise of devotion and converse with God. There were also in old time, great multitudes called Hermits and Anchorites, that left the world to spend all their days in lonesome deserts, to give themselves up to religious contemplations and exercises of

devotion; some sorts of them having no dwellings, but the caves and vaults of the mountains, and no food, but the spontaneous productions of the earth. I once lived, for many months, next door to a Jew (the houses adjoining one to another), and had much opportunity daily to observe him; who appeared to me the devoutest person that I ever saw in my life; great part of his time being spent in acts of devotion, at his eastern window, which opened next to mine, seeming to be most earnestly engaged, not only in the daytime, but sometimes whole nights.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jonathan-edwards/that-they-dispose-persons-to-spend-much-time-in-religion-and-to-be-zealously-eng/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**