

# That They Have Great Effects on the Body, Is No Sign

by Jonathan Edwards

---

*The sermon emphasizes that significant bodily effects do not necessarily indicate the authenticity of spiritual affections.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 84:2, Psalm 119:120, Daniel 10:8, Habakkuk 3:16, Revelation 1:17

**Topics:** "Spiritual Affections", "Emotional Worship"

---

## Description

Jonathan Edwards discusses the effects of affections on the body, emphasizing that all affections, whether spiritual or not, have some impact on the body due to the close connection between the soul and body. He argues that great effects on the body do not necessarily indicate spiritual affections, as strong emotions can also arise from temporal or natural sources. Edwards challenges the notion that high spiritual affections cannot have a significant effect on the body, pointing out that divine revelations of God's glory can overwhelm the physical frame. He highlights biblical examples where intense religious affections led to bodily manifestations, suggesting that such bodily effects can be a sign of genuine spiritual experiences.

---

## Transcript

II. It is no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they have great effects on the body.

All affections whatsoever, have in some respect or degree, an effect on the body. As was observed before, such is our nature, and such are the laws of union of soul and body, that the mind can have no lively or vigorous exercise, without some effect upon the body. So subject is the body to the mind, and so much do its fluids, especially the animal spirits, attend the motions and exercises of the mind, that there cannot be so much as an intense thought, without an effect upon them. Yea, it is questionable whether an imbodyed soul ever so much as thinks one thought, or has any exercise at all, but that there is some corresponding motion or alteration of motion, in some degree, of the fluids, in some part of the body. But universal experience shows, that the exercise of the affections have in a special manner a tendency to some sensible effect upon the body. And if this be so, that all affections have some effect upon the body, we may then well suppose, the greater those affections be, and the more vigorous their exercise (other circumstances being equal) the greater will be the effect on the body. Hence it is not to be wondered at,

that very great and strong exercises of the affections should have great effects on the body. And therefore, seeing there are very great affections, both common and spiritual; hence it is not to be wondered at, that great effects on the body should arise from both these kinds of affections. And consequently these effects are no signs, that the affections they arise from, are of one kind or the other.

Great effects on the body certainly are no sure evidences that affections are spiritual; for we see that such effects oftentimes arise from great affections about temporal things, and when religion is no way concerned in them. And if great affections about secular things, that are purely natural, may have these effects, I know not by what rule we should determine that high affections about religious things, which arise in like manner from nature, cannot have the like effect.

Nor, on the other hand, do I know of any rule any have to determine, that gracious and holy affections, when raised as high as any natural affections, and have equally strong and vigorous exercises, cannot have a great effect on the body. No such rule can be drawn from reason: I know of no reason, why a being affected with a view of God's glory should not cause the body to faint, as well as being affected with a view of Solomon's glory. And no such rule has as yet been produced from the Scripture; none has ever been found in all the late controversies which have been about things of this nature. There is a great power in spiritual affections: we read of the power which worketh in Christians,[2] and of the Spirit of God being in them as the Spirit of power,[3] and of the effectual working of his power in them.[4] But man's nature is weak: flesh and blood are represented in Scripture as exceeding weak; and particularly with respect to its unfitness for great spiritual and heavenly operations and exercises, Matt. 26:41, 1 Cor. 15:43, and 50. The text we are upon speaks of "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." And who that considers what man's nature is, and what the nature of the affections is, can reasonably doubt but that such unutterable and glorious joys, may be too great and mighty for weak dust and ashes, so as to be considerably overbearing to it? It is evident by the Scripture that true divine discoveries, or ideas of God's glory, when given in a great degree have a tendency, by affecting the mind, to overbear the body; because the Scripture teaches us often, that if these ideas or views should be given to such a degree as they are given in heaven, the weak frame of the body could not subsist under it, and that no man can, in that manner, see God and live. The knowledge which the saints have of God's beauty and glory in this world, and those holy affections that arise from it, are of the same nature and kind with what the saints are the subjects of in heaven, differing only in degree and circumstances: what God gives them here, is a foretaste of heavenly happiness, and an earnest of their future inheritance. And who shall limit God in his giving this earnest, or say he shall give so much of the inheritance, such a part of the future reward as an earnest of the whole, and no more? And seeing God has taught us in his word, that the whole reward is such, that it would at once destroy the body, is it not too bold a thing for us, so to set bounds to the sovereign God, as to say that in giving the earnest of this reward in this world, he shall never give so much of it, as in the least to diminish the strength of the body, when God has nowhere thus limited himself?

The Psalmist, speaking of the vehement religious affections he had, speaks of an effect in his flesh or body, besides what was in his soul, expressly distinguishing one from the other, once and again: Psal. 84:2, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Here is a plain distinction between the heart and the flesh, as being each affected. So Psal. 63:1, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Here also is an evident designed distinction between the soul and the flesh.

The prophet Habakkuk speaks of his bodies being overborne by a sense of the majesty of God, Hab. 3:16: "When I heard, my belly trembled: my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness enter into my bones, and I

trembled in myself." So the Psalmist speaks expressly of his flesh trembling, Psal. 119:120: My flesh trembleth for fear of thee."

That such ideas of God's glory as are sometimes given in this world, have a tendency to overbear the body, is evident, because the Scripture gives us an account, that this has sometimes actually been the effect of those external manifestations God has made of himself to some of the saints which were made to that end, viz., to give them an idea of God's majesty and glory. Such instances we have in the prophet Daniel, and the apostle John. Daniel, giving an account of an external representation of the glory of Christ, says, Dan. 10:8, "And there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength." And the apostle John, giving an account of the manifestation made to him, says, Rev. 1:17, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." It is in vain to say here, these were only external manifestations or symbols of the glory of Christ, which these saints beheld: for though it be true, that they were outward representations of Christ's glory, which they beheld with their bodily eyes; yet the end and use of these external symbols or representations was to give to these prophets an idea of the thing represented, and that was the true divine glory and majesty of Christ, which is his spiritual glory; they were made use of only as significations of this spiritual glory, and thus undoubtedly they received them, and improved them, and were affected by them. According to the end for which God intended these outward signs, they received by them a great and lively apprehension of the real glory and majesty of God's nature, which they were signs of; and thus were greatly affected, their souls swallowed up, and their bodies overborne. And I think they are very bold and daring, who will say God cannot, or shall not give the like clear and affecting ideas and apprehensions of the same real glory and majesty of his nature, to any of his saints, without the intervention of any such external shadows of it.

Before I leave this head, I would farther observe, that it is plain the Scripture often makes use of bodily effects, to express the strength of holy and spiritual affections; such as trembling,[5] groaning,[6] being sick,[7] crying out,[8] panting,[9] and fainting.[10] Now if it be supposed, that these are only figurative expressions, to represent the degree of affection: yet I hope all will allow, that they are fit and suitable figures to represent the high degree of those spiritual affections, which the Spirit of God makes use of them to represent; which I do not see how they would be, if those spiritual affections, let them be in never so high a degree, have no tendency to any such things; but that on the contrary, they are the proper effects and sad tokens of false affections, and the delusion of the devil. I cannot think, God would commonly make use of things which are very alien from spiritual affections, and are shrewd marks of the hand of Satan, and smell strong of the bottomless pit, as beautiful figures, to represent the high degree of holy and heavenly affections.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jonathan-edwards/that-they-have-great-effects-on-the-body-is-no-sign/>

# *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)**