

They Are Attended With a Change of Nature.

by Jonathan Edwards

Gracious affections are distinguished from others by their transformative power, arising from a spiritual understanding of divine things, and are a key aspect of conversion, which is a change of nature, a universal transformation that turns the heart and nature from sin to holiness.

Scripture: Romans 12:1

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "True Conversion"

Description

Jonathan Edwards preaches about the distinguishing feature of gracious affections, which is the transformation of nature that occurs when the soul experiences spiritual understanding and divine discoveries. This transformation is not just a change in feelings but a change in the very essence of the soul, brought about by the divine power of the Spirit of the Lord. True conversion involves a significant and lasting change in a person, turning them from sin to holiness, resulting in a new nature that is evident through a holy character and a departure from former sinful habits.

Transcript

VII. Another thing, wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others, is, that they are attended with a change of nature.

All Gracious affections do arise from a spiritual understanding, in which the soul has the excellency and glory of divine things discovered to it, as was shown before. But all spiritual discoveries are transforming; and not only make an alteration of the present exercise, sensation, and frame of the soul, but such power and efficacy have they, that they make an alteration in the very nature of the soul: 2 Cor. 3:18, "But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to Glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Such power as this is properly divine power, and is peculiar to the Spirit of the Lord: other power may make an alteration in men's present frames and feelings: but it is the power of a Creator only that can change the nature, or give a new nature. And no discoveries or illuminations but those that are divine and supernatural, will have this supernatural effect. But this effect all those discoveries have, that are truly divine. The soul is deeply affected by these discoveries, and so affected as to be transformed.

Thus it is with those affections that the soul is the subject of in its conversion. The Scripture representations of conversion do strongly imply and signify a change of nature: such as "being born again; becoming new creatures; rising from the dead; being renewed in the spirit of the mind; dying to sin, and

living to righteousness; putting off the old man, and putting on the new man; a being ingrafted into a new stock; a having a divine seed implanted in the heart; a being made partakers of the divine nature," &c.

Therefore if there be no great and remarkable abiding change in persons that think they have experienced a work of conversion, vain are all their imaginations and pretenses, however they have been affected.[63] Conversion is a great and universal change of the man, turning him from sin to God. A man may be restrained from sin before he is converted; but when he is converted, he is not only restrained from sin, his very heart and nature is turned from it unto holiness: so that thenceforward he becomes a holy person, and an enemy to sin. If, therefore, after a person's high affections at his supposed first conversion, it comes to that in a little time, that there is no very sensible, or remarkable alteration in him, as to those bad qualities, and evil habits, which before were visible in him, and he is ordinarily under the prevalence of the same kind of dispositions that he used to be, and the same thing seems to belong to his character; he appears as selfish, carnal, as stupid, and perverse, as unchristian and unsavory as ever; it is greater evidence against him, than the brightest story of experiences that ever was told, is for him. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, neither high profession, nor low profession, neither a fair story, nor a broken one, avails any thing; but a new creature.

If there be a very great alteration visible in a person for a while; if it be not abiding, but he afterwards returns, in a stated manner, to be much as he used to be; it appears to be no change of nature; for nature is an abiding thing. A swine that is of a filthy nature may be washed, but the swinish nature remains; and a dove that is of a cleanly nature may be defiled, but its cleanly nature remains.[64]

Indeed allowances must be made for the natural temper; conversion does not entirely root out the natural temper; those sins which a man by his natural constitution was most inclined to before his conversions he may be most apt to fall into still. But yet conversion will make a great alteration even with respect to these sins. Though grace, while imperfect, does not root out an evil natural temper, yet it is of great power and efficacy with respect to it, to correct it. The change that is wrought in conversion, is a universal change; grace changes a man with respect to whatever is sinful in him; the old man is put off, and the new man put on, he is sanctified throughout; and the man becomes a new creature, old things are passed away, and all things are become new; all sin is mortified, constitution sins, as well as others. If a man before his conversion; was by his natural constitution especially inclined to lasciviousness, or drunkenness, or maliciousness; converting grace will make a great alteration in him, with respect to these evil dispositions; so that however he may be still most in danger of these sins, yet they shall no longer have dominion over him; nor will they any more be properly his character. Yea, true repentance does in some respects, especially turn a man against his own iniquity, that wherein he has been most guilty, and has chiefly dishonored God. He that forsakes other sins, but saves his leading sin, the iniquity he is chiefly inclined to, is like Saul, when sent against God's enemies the Amalekites, with a strict charge to save none of them alive, but utterly to destroy them, small and great; who utterly destroyed inferior people, but saved the king, the chief of them all, alive.

Some foolishly make it an argument in favor of their discoveries and affections, that when they are gone, they are left wholly without any life or sense, or anything beyond what they had before. They think it an evidence that what they experienced was wholly of God, and not of themselves, because (say they) when God is departed, all is gone; they can see and feel nothing, and are no better than they used to be.

It is very true, that all grace and goodness in the hearts of the saints is entirely from God; and they are universally and immediately dependent on him for it. But yet these persons are mistaken, as to the manner

of God's communicating himself and his Holy Spirit, in imparting saving grace to the soul. He gives his Spirit to be united to the faculties of the soul, and to dwell there after the manner of a principle of nature; so that the soul, in being endued with grace, is endued with a new nature: but nature is an abiding thing. All the exercises of grace are entirely from Christ: but those exercises are not from Christ, as something that is alive, moves and stirs, something that is without life, and remains without life; but as having life communicated to it; so as, through Christ's power, to have inherent in itself a vital nature. In the soul where Christ savingly is, there he lives. He does not only live without it, so as violently to actuate it, but he lives in it, so that that also is alive. Grace in the soul is as much from Christ, as the light in a glass, held out in the sunbeams, is from the sun. But this represents the manner of the communication of grace to the soul, but in part; because the glass remains as it was, the nature of it not being at all changed, it is as much without any lightness in its nature as ever. But the soul of a saint receives light from the Sun of righteousness, in such a manner, that its nature is changed, and it becomes properly a luminous thing; not only does the sun shine in the saints, but they also become little suns, partaking of the nature of the fountain of their light. In this respect, the manner of their derivation of light, is like that of the lamps in the tabernacle, rather than that of a reflecting glass; which, though they were lit up by fire from heaven, yet thereby became themselves burning shining things. The saints do not only drink of the water of life, that flows from the original fountain; out this water becomes a fountain of water in them, springing up there, and flowing out of them, John 4:14, and chap. 7:38, 39. Grace is compared to a seed implanted, that not only is in the ground, but has hold of it, has root there, and grows there, and is an abiding principle of life and nature there.

As it is with spiritual discoveries and affections given at first conversion, so it is in all illuminations and affections of that kind, that persons are the subjects of afterwards; they are all transforming. There is a like divine power and energy in them, as in the first discoveries; and they still reach the bottom of the heart, and affect and alter the very nature of the soul, in proportion to the degree in which they are given. And a transformation of nature is continued and carried on by them, to the end of life, until it is brought to perfection in glory. Hence the progress of the work of grace in the hearts of the saints, is represented in Scripture, as a continued conversion and renovation of nature. So the apostle exhorts those that were at Rome, "beloved of God, called to be saints," and that were subjects of God's redeeming mercies, "to be transformed by the renewing of their mind:" Rom. 12:1, 2, "I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice; and be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind;" compared with chap. 1:7. So the apostle, writing to the "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus," that were at Ephesus (Eph. 1:1), and those who were once dead in trespasses and sins, but were now quickened and raised up, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ, and created in Christ Jesus unto good works, that were once far off, but were now made nigh by the blood of Christ, and that were no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and that were built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit; I say, the apostle writing to these, tells them, "that he ceased not to pray for them, that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know, or experience, what was the exceeding greatness of God's power towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places," Eph. 1:16, to the end. In this the apostle has respect to the glorious power and work of God in converting and renewing the soul; as is most plain by the sequel. So the apostle exhorts the same persons "to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of their minds; and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," Eph. 4:22, 23, 24.

There is a sort of high affections that some have from time to time, that leave them without any manner of appearance of an abiding effect. They go off suddenly; so that from the very height of their emotion, and seeming rapture, they pass at once to be quite dead, and void of all sense and activity. It surely is not wont to be thus with high gracious affections;[65] they leave a sweet savor and a relish of divine things on the heart, and a stronger bent of soul towards God and holiness. As Moses' face not only shone while he was in the mount, extraordinarily conversing with God, but it continued to shine after he came down from the mount. When men have been conversing with Christ in an extraordinary manner, there is a sensible effect of it remaining upon them; there is something remarkable in their disposition and frame, which if we take knowledge of, and trace to its cause, we shall find it is because they have been with Jesus, Acts 4:13.

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