

## A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH JONATHAN EDWARDS

The author, John Piper, sets out to share with his generation the mindset of one of America's greatest thinkers. For Piper this journey is a personal experience mixed with a heartfelt desire to reach as many people as possible with the urgent message that Edwards presented over 200 years ago.

### *An American Tragedy*

It is certainly clear that Edwards was a giant among evangelicals in this country, but the impact of his writings and messages have had a small role in the history of evangelical Protestants.<sup>1</sup> Edwards presented a clear God centered philosophy that was at odds with many of his day and even more so today. Noll argues that since Edwards's day 250 years ago,

Evangelicals have not thought about life from the ground up as Christians, because their entire culture has ceased to do so. Edwards's piety continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to this God-entranced worldview or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards's perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

Piper argues that the state of American theology is the reason for reviving Edwards's work, *The End for Which God Created the World*. Others agree with Piper, that there is a need to revisit Edwards's writings. Mark Noll strongly agrees with Piper on the need for a new

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, "God at the Center: Jonathan Edwards on True Virtue," *Christian Century*, September 8-15, 1993, p. 857.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Noll, "Jonathan Edwards's Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought," *Reformed Journal*, February, 1983, p.26.

attitude among evangelicals, as well as David Brand. In Brand's book, *Profile of the Last Puritan*, he states that Edwards's book *The End for Which God Created the World* is "a work which I have come to regard as unsurpassed in terms of its theological grandeur."<sup>3</sup>

It seems clear to many that the present state of the church is one that lacks a clear vision of the breath-taking vision of divine glory that Edwards was focused upon. The difficulties that stand in the way of seeing God's glory are many. To see God's glory requires a huge amount of effort on our part, but the end is worth whatever effort is required.

The world has changed drastically since Edwards's day, yet there are still many things that remain the same. The reading of Edwards's books was hard in his day and even harder today, but the energy is well worth the results. Most people are looking for quick results today, they are not willing to be patient and wait for God to work in His time. As a result many times the details get lost in the rush to finish. We have become lazy and unwilling to exercise our minds in any degree of research and discovery. As a result our culture has drifted into what has been labeled as pragmatic, doctrinally vague, audience-driven, culturally uncritical Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Harry Blamires in 1963 made this statement: "There is no Christian Mind....The Christian Mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness unmatched in Christian History."<sup>5</sup>

The movement away from absolute morals has undermined our culture and destroyed the faith of many. The abandonment of truth and moral absolutes has changed the evangelical

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<sup>3</sup> David Brand, *Profile of the Last Puritan: Jonathan Edwards, Self-Love, and the Dawn of the Beatific* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), p.x.

<sup>4</sup> Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downer Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (London: SPCK, 1963), pp. vii, 3.

mindset. We have moved away from truth into the realm of feelings and relationships and styles in order to avoid doctrinal disputes. Serious disagreements are covered over, while vague language and pragmatic concerns preserve hollow unity at the expense of theological substance and Biblical clarity and power.<sup>6</sup>

The concern can be seen as far away as Sri Lanka, where Ajith Fernando, who leads Youth for Christ, points out the decline in spiritual growth. Ajith states, “A major shift...has taken place in western evangelism where truth has been replaced by pragmatism as the major influencer of thought and life. This path is suicidal.”<sup>7</sup> It appears that many leaders voice the concern, but are so caught up in pragmatic ministry that to break away seems insurmountable.

### ***So Much of Man, So Little of God***

Jonathan Edwards saw this coming long before it became the problem it is now. He understood that the focus must be on God and that a God-centeredness was the only way to prevent the very thing we now struggle with. Man has become the center of all things, ignoring the real center of all things, God.

Jonathan Edwards was a man very different from most men, his way of thinking and feeling is at total odds with modern thought. Actually Edward’s sense of the desperate condition of mankind without God is so heavy that it is hard to comprehend.

### ***Benjamin Franklin was not the Answer***

Perhaps the desperate condition of the present church will focus attention on what Edwards had to say. His message is relevant and urgent like never before. While time has a way of

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, (Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Ill, 1998), P. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, Il: Crossway Books, 1995), p. 117.

correcting error, perhaps the message of Edwards will be seen in a different light than it was during his life. Benjamin Franklin was a contemporary who gained fame and notoriety for his cute sayings and lifestyle. But time has perhaps shown that Edwards was the real wise man, while Franklin was simply an inventor of gadgets. Randall Steward argues that Franklin started us on the road which has led to a ‘gadgeteers’ paradise. But now that it is becoming startling clear that gadgets can’t save us, and may all too readily destroy us...the more Dr. Franklin’s lightning rod begins to look, from one viewpoint, like a pathetic symbol of human pride and inadequacy, while Edwards’s soul-probing seems more searching to this generation of readers perhaps than they have ever seemed before, it is possible that Edwards will yet emerge, is already emerging, as the more useful, the more truly helpful, of the two.<sup>8</sup> Franklin’s pragmatism is theologically, morally, and spiritually bankrupt.

***Edwards vs. “Enlightened Human Intelligence”***

Some famous Americans made fun of Edwards’s serious approach to life. Oliver Wendell Holmes thought Edwards’s convictions were “not only false, not only absurd, but... *disorganizing forces* in the midst of the thinking apparatus. Edwards’s system seems, in the light of today, to the last degree barbaric, mechanical, materialistic, and pessimistic. If he had lived a hundred years later, and breathed the air of freedom, he could not have written with such old-world barbarism... The truth is that [his] whole system of beliefs...is gently fading out of enlightened human intelligence, and we are hardly in a condition to realize what a tyranny it once exerted over many of the strongest minds.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Randall Steward, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p.34.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Mark Noll, “God at the Center,” p. 856.

Edwards's vision is still alive. It is being recovered and examined once again with interest and expectation. The reason Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote him off, and the reason others have not, is that our century has proven Holmes's approach has been the factory of the greatest global evils ever perpetrated in human history.<sup>10</sup> Since most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been such a difficult period, we may be open to hear what Edwards had to say.

### ***C.S. Lewis on the Necessity of Old Books***

C.S. Lewis makes some good points for the revisiting of Edwards's *End for Which God Created the World*. Lewis basically grew up the same time as the 20<sup>th</sup> century developed. After sixty years Lewis decided that he was not impressed with the century or himself. I think if he had lived until the end of the century he would have been even more upset. There was a real sense in which Lewis understood that he was impacted by the events surrounding him. As a result he understood the need to read other writers from other periods in order to get a balanced perspective of events. All of us are blinded to some extent to the things around us; the only way to overcome some of this is to read the old books.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Mortimer Adler on the Necessity of Hard Books***

Mortimer Adler makes another point for the study of Edwards. He would argue that the easy material does very little to improve our thinking, it is the hard reading that stretches our minds. Books that make demands on you are very necessary for growth. Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 856.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, "On The Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp.200-202.

<sup>12</sup> Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 339.

As believers in Christ we should be very concerned about our ability to read the Word of God effectively and correctly. Edwards forces his readers to really labor over the material and work at understanding the real issues.

The mind can atrophy, like the muscles, if it is not used...And this is a terrible penalty, for there is evidence that atrophy of the mind is a mortal disease. There seems to be no other explanation for the fact that so many busy people die so soon after retirement...<sup>13</sup>

Edwards is the strongest were we seem to be the weakest. He knows God on a very personal level. He sees and savors the supremacy of God in all things. Our society is dying because of a lack of vision in this area. Therefore, the publication of *The End for Which God Created the World* is a matter of great public significance.<sup>14</sup>

## SECTION TWO

Edwards says that his desire is for the glory of God to be magnified in the universe, and second, that Christ's ransomed people from all times and all nations would rejoice in God above all things. John Piper has been taken captive by the same desire and purpose.

Therefore, his goal is to share the vision of Edwards by reprinting his work to this current generation.

### ***God's Glory Manifest in the Happiness of the Saints***

Edwards is able to show that the rejoicing of all people in God, and the magnifying of God's glory are one end, not two. He demonstrates that the chief and ultimate end of the Supreme Being, in the works of creation and providence, was the manifestation of his own glory in the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.345.

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, (Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 31)

highest happiness of his creatures.<sup>15</sup> John Piper has been driven by this truth in his preaching as he has consistently presented the two subjects as one. Piper sees the created aim of God as the display of His own glory, and that this aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of his people in that glory.

### ***How Does Edwards Say It?***

Edwards says that God's glory and our happiness are clearly connected and he does this in several ways. God in seeking his glory seeks the good of his creatures, because the emanation of his glory....implies the....happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself, because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused...he seeks their glory and happiness.<sup>16</sup>

The conclusion is God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls is one thing. Piper lists fifteen implications of this truth.

### ***Two Great Passions Not at Odds***

**Implication #1.** God's passion for his own glory and his passion for my joy in him are not at odds. Which means that his zeal to be glorified and his zeal to save sinners are one?

### ***God is Committed to the Joy of the Saints***

**Implication #2.** God is committed to my eternal and ever-increasing joy in him as he is to his own glory.

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15 Sereno Dweight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p.clxiii.

16 Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, p. 114.

2 Chron 16:9

<sup>9</sup> For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. KJV

Ps 23:6

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. KJV

### *The Essence of God's Love for You*

**Implication #3.** The love of God for sinners is not his making much of them, but his graciously freeing and empowering them to enjoy making much of him.

As Edwards says, "God is their good." Therefore if God would do us good, he must direct us to his worth, not ours. This truth destroys the present day notion that what we need is self-centered love. God-centered grace destroys the gospel of self-esteem. Today, people typically feel loved if you make a fuss over them and help them feel worthwhile. The bottom line in their happiness is that they are made much of.

Edwards states clearly that “True saints have their minds, in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delight with...the things of God.”

### ***What Is the Essence of True Virtue?***

**Implication #4.** If the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then all true virtue among human beings must aim at bringing people to rejoice in the glory of God.

No act is really virtuous or truly loving that does not come from and aim at joy in the glory of God.<sup>17</sup>

If God’s glory is the only all-satisfying reality in the universe, then to try to do good for people, without aiming to show them the glory of God and ignite in them a delight in God, would be like treating fever with cold packs when you have penicillin.<sup>18</sup> The final reason for this is that man is not the center of true virtue, God is. So one must conclude that “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:13).

### ***Sin Is Sacrilege and Suicide***

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<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, (Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Ill, 1998), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.36.

**Implication #5.** It follows that sin is the suicidal exchange of the glory of God for the broken cisterns of created things. Paul said, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). While sinning is a “falling short” (husterountai) means “lack.” The thought here is that you could have had it as a treasure, but you don’t, because you chose something different. Paul says this in Romans 1:23 where we are told that people exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made with hands and worshiped the creature more than the creator. There lies the real problem with sin: it is accepting something far less valuable in exchange for the infinite value and beauty of God. The exchange is giving away what is of infinite value for something far inferior. What an insult this must be to God.

Jeremiah expresses this idea when he wrote, “Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate, declares the LORD. For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken ME, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cistern that can hold not water” (Jer.2:12-13). God gets insulted and we get death.

### ***Ever-increasing Joy in an Inexhaustible God***

**Implication #6.** Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God’s glory with greater and ever-greater joy in him. If God’s glory and our joy in him are one, and yet we are not infinite as he is, then our union with him in the all-satisfying experience

of his glory can never be complete, but must be increasing with intimacy and intensity forever and ever.<sup>19</sup> With this in mind we can look forward to an ever increasing pleasure in God that will never end.

Edwards's put it this way, "I suppose it will not be denied by any, that God, in glorifying the saints in heaven with eternal felicity, aims to satisfy his infinite grace or benevolence, by the bestowment of a good [which is] infinitely valuable, because eternal: and yet there never will come the moment, when it can be said, that now this infinitely valuable good has been actually bestowed."<sup>20</sup>

Jonathan goes on to say that our eternal rising into more and more of God will be a "rising higher and higher through that infinite duration, and without any diminishing and even a possible increasing; though there will never be a time when it can be said that God is finished bestowing his grace on us.

### ***When Creatures Refuse to Be Happy in God***

**Implication #7.** Hell is indescribably real, conscious, horrible and eternal-the experience in which God vindicates the worth of his glory in holy wrath on those who would not delight in what is infinitely glorious.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>20</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, p. 285.

IF one is foolish enough to spurn the glory of God, and the promise of eternal joy in God, an indignity against God has been committed so terrible as to demand eternal suffering. Because of this Edwards says, “God aims at satisfying justice in the eternal damnation of sinners; which will be satisfied by their damnation, considered no otherwise than with regard to its eternal duration. But yet there never will come that particular moment, when it can be said, that now justice is satisfied.”<sup>21</sup>

The Scriptures support this position in Matthew 25:41, 46. Jesus declared,

<sup>41</sup> “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” KJV

Matt 25:46

<sup>46</sup> “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” KJV

### ***Evangelism: Laboring to Waken a Taste for God***

**Implication #8.** If the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing, then evangelism means depicting the beauty of Christ and his saving work with a heartfelt urgency of love that labors to help people find their satisfaction in him.

The most important common ground with unbelievers is not culture but creation, not momentary felt needs but massive real needs.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *The End For Which God Created the World*, p. 285.

<sup>22</sup> David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993).

The gospel is not the idea that God caters to me, it is the reality of the glory of Christ. Paul says, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4). KJV

Our responsibility is not to present Christ to unbelievers as the answer to their needs, but to show them that they were made for the soul-satisfying glory of God in the gospel.

***Preaching: Luring out People to God***

**Implication #9.** Christian preaching should be the presentation of the expository exultation of the glories of God as shown in His word, with the desire to bring people into a proper relationship to Him. The preaching should demonstrate the short term pleasures of sin as oppose to the glorious satisfaction that comes from sacrificial obedience to God. Sin is destructive and even suicidal in the end.

When Edwards thought on the purpose of preaching he concluded that, “I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.”<sup>23</sup>

Effective preaching must present the glories of God and create a desire to delight in knowing God and the fear of failing to do so. “Because you did

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 387.

not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart....therefore you shall serve your enemies" (Deut. 28:47-48).

### ***Corporate Worship: The Heart Hunger That Honors God***

**Implication #10.** The essence of authentic, corporate worship is the collective experience of heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, or a trembling that we do not have it and a great longing for it.

The basic movement of worship on Sunday morning is not to come with our hands full to give to God, as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25), but to come with our hands empty, to receive from God.<sup>24</sup>

Nothing makes God more alive and more critical in worship than when a people are totally convinced that nothing will satisfy them, heal their broken hearts, comfort their pain, and relieve their guilt but God. Nothing keeps God at the center of worship like the Biblical conviction that the heart of worship is a real heartfelt satisfaction in him, and the understanding that the trembling pursuit of that satisfaction is why we gather together.

I believe that most people have no idea what real worship involves and how to accomplish it. Certainly Edwards understood this and it was clearly his goal to teach, preach and demonstrate to others true worship. There may be a variety of ways to worship God, there can be differences in style and methods but God must be central and His glory the final destination.

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<sup>24</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, (Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 41.

## ***World Missions: A Passion for God's Glory***

### ***In the Joy of All Peoples***

**Implication #11.** If the exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of the human souls are one thing, then world missions is a declaration of the glories of God among all the unreached peoples, with a view to gathering worshippers who magnify God through the gladness of radically obedient lives.<sup>25</sup>

The apostle Paul stated that the glory of God and the gladness of the nations were "to show God's truthfulness...in order that the Gentiles might *glorify* God for his mercy. Paul writes, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people" (Romans 15:8-10, RSV).

### ***We Get the Help, He Gets the Glory***

**Implication #12.** Prayer is calling on God for help; so it is plain that he is gloriously resourceful and we are humbly and happily in need of grace. The Giver gets the glory and we get the help, what a great relationship. Jesus told us to seek two things in our prayers: your joy and God's glory. "Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full" (John 16:24). "Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). When we delight ourselves in the Lord, the Lord is glorified in giving the desires of our heart (Ps. 37:4).

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

***Scholarship: Seeing and Savoring God in Every Branch of Learning***

**Implication #13.** The purpose of Christian education is to study reality as a demonstration of God's glory, to speak about it with clarity and conviction, and to value the beauty of God in it.

If the entire universe and everything in it exists by the design of an infinite, personal God, to make his manifold glory known and loved, then to treat any subject without reference to God's glory is not scholarship but insurrection.<sup>26</sup>

Some would argue that the study of psychology or sociology or anthropology or history is not divine but natural. However, that would seem to miss the first point that Edwards makes. If one is going to see reality in truth we must see it in relation to God, who created it and sustains it, and gives it all the properties it has, and all its relations and designs. When one sees these things in each discipline of life it is to see the "divine things." When all is said and done the divine things are the main things in life.

Edwards draws the conclusion that if we cannot see them we cannot do Christian scholarship, if we have no spiritual sense or taste for God we have no capacity to truly see things as they are. God shows his glory in the creation being studied by the scholar (Ps. 19:1; 104:31; Col.1:16-17). But, the purpose of God is not realized unless the scholar sees it and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

values it from God. When the echo of God's glory echoes in the affections of God's scholar and resounds through his speaking and writing, God's aim for Christian scholarship is achieved.<sup>27</sup>

### ***God is Glorified When Death Is Gain***

**Implication #14.** The way to magnify God in death is by meeting death as gain. Paul said his passion was that "Christ be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death." Paul goes on to say that dying is a gain for him (Phil. 1:20-21). The glory of our Lord is lifted up when our hearts treasure His presence more than we do the things of this earth. We can count death gain only when we see death as bringing us closer to the Lord, desiring Him more than the things of the world.

### ***The Great Duty: Be as Happy as You Can-in God Forever***

**Implication #15.** God's glory and the deepest joy of my soul are one and the same. C.S. Lewis said, "*It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.*"<sup>28</sup>

Obedience is doing what we are told. And we are told to delight ourselves in the Lord. Therefore pursuing joy in God is obedience. Edwards described this goal as "The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is

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Ibid., p. 45.

28 From a personal letter to Sheldon Vanauken in Vanauken's book, *A Severe Mercy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 189.

magnified and exalted.”<sup>29</sup> John Piper has his own way of stating the same thing, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.”<sup>30</sup>

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **JONATHAN EDWARDS, THE MAN AND HIS LIFE**

One of the best evidences for the gospel is a life lived in a godly and holy way. The Bible says, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7, RSV). Jonathan Edwards would clearly qualify as one we should consider and follow. His writings and life were an example then and they are even more so today. He was a great example of godliness because he was filled with the fullness of God.

Jonathan Edwards was born October 5, 1703, in Windsor, Connecticut. He was the only son among the eleven children of Timothy Edwards, the local Congregational pastor. Edwards’s father taught him Latin when he was six and then sent him to Yale at age twelve.

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<sup>29</sup> *The End for Which God Created the World*, P.72 and footnote 40.

<sup>30</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, (Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 47.

He graduated from Yale in 1720, gave the valedictory address in Latin, and then continued his studies there two more years preparing for the ministry. At the age of nineteen he was licensed to preach and took a church in New York for eight months.

### ***The Intensity and Single-mindedness of His Inner Life***

As a young man Edwards showed unusual focus and commitment. He was not sidetracked or easily moved from his goal of seeking, honoring and serving the Lord.

He is famous for his list of “Resolutions” that he wrote early in his ministry. Resolution number 44 says, “Resolved, That no other end but religion shall have any influence at all in any of my actions; and that no action shall be, in the least circumstance, any otherwise than the religious end will carry it.”<sup>31</sup>

It was this single-minded focus on religion that produced a lifetime of Godward study and writing. Religion, for Edwards, meant Christian living and thinking.

### ***Falling in Love***

In the summer of 1723, in between his first pastorate and his return to Yale, Edwards met and fell in love with Sarah Pierre Pont. She was thirteen at the time and five years later they were married, Jonathan was

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<sup>31</sup> *Memoirs, p. xxi.*

twenty-three and she was seventeen. Over the next twenty-three years God blessed them with eleven children, eight girls and three boys.

### ***Education and Settled Ministry***

Edwards went back to Yale to earn his M.A. degree and became a tutor. In September, 1726, he resigned his teaching post to accept a position with his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had been the pastor at the Congregational Church of Northampton, Massachusetts, since 1672.

The time spent there would be life changing for Edwards; he found the church in less than good shape spiritually. His grandfather had introduced a position on communion that would be unacceptable to Edwards, creating a sense of crisis.

Stoddard died on February 22, 1729 and Edwards became the pastor of the church for the next 23 years. His time was spent in prayer and bible study, which meant that he did not have much occasion to visit people in their homes. He believed he could be the most helpful by writing and preaching, socializing was not something he enjoyed or valued. His study of the scriptures was intense and constant.

### ***A Family Man***

The family was very important to Edwards. His wife was able to find the balance between her husband's drive to serve the Lord and her need for his presence. All eleven children appeared to love their father and respect him, even though his lifestyle was clearly unusual and demanding.

### ***A Leader in the Great Awakening***

Five years into his ministry as the pastor at Northampton, things were beginning to happen. Revival was on the verge of breaking out and Edwards was in the middle of it. On July 8, 1741, he preached “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in Enfield, Connecticut, which was the cause of an immediate revival of religion throughout the region.<sup>32</sup>

Edwards preached a series of sermons in 1742 and 1743, as the last wave of the revival that swept across Northampton, they were published in 1746 under the title *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*. This book was an excellent evaluation of the difference between true and false Christian experience that came out of the Great Awakening.

### ***The Lasting, Worldwide Fruit of a Young Man’s Life and Death***

Edwards was a friend of David Brainerd a missionary to the Indians. Brainerd suffered from tuberculosis and was taken in by Edwards to care for him. Edwards’s daughter, Jerusha, cared for David faithfully for nineteen weeks. Brainerd died at the early age of twenty-nine. Edwards’s daughter died shortly after David at the age of eighteen.

As a testimony to David and his daughter, Edwards published the personal journal of Brainerd. World evangelism was important to Brainerd and it was clearly seen in his writings. The book has never been out of print for the last 250 years, the impact is incalculable. The rise of the modern Protestant missionary movement took great inspiration from Edwards and Brainerd. The list of missionaries who were inspired to go as a result of

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<sup>32</sup> Memoirs, p. li.

Brainerd is impressive; William Carey, Andrew Fuller, Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke, Henry Martyn, Robert Morrison, Samuel Mills, Fredrick Schwartz, Robert M'Cheyne, David Livingstone, Andrew Murray to name a few. For 250 years Edwards has been fueling the missionary movement with his biography of David Brainerd.

### ***The Inglorious Dismissal***

Interesting that Edwards never planned to be a missionary to the Indians, but due to unexpected circumstances that is exactly where he ended up. In 1750, Edwards was sent packing from his ministry after twenty-three years. Such things are often more confusing and painful than anyone can possibly understand. Looking back there were clear signals that Edwards missed. The way he handled a disciplinary action in the church fired up many of the members. Edwards was not very sensitive to the manner in which he presented this particular problem. But, this was just one of several instances that divided the church and Edwards. God has an interesting way of moving his servants when their work is finished and so it appears that God in His providence had other plans for Edwards.

### ***The Move to Stockbridge***

Edwards left Northhampton and accepted a position with the frontier church at Stockbridge. He spent the winter there in 1751 and in June of that year decided to stay on as their pastor. The church was made up of colonists and Indian converts. This work was full of difficulty and Edwards began immediately to correct the problems. The residence, the language,

the special needs of the Indians all were pressing on Edwards during this period.

### ***The Greater Purposes of God in Pain***

God clearly was working in Edwards's life during this period in Stockbridge. He spent seven years there ministering in this difficult location. During the seven years he spent at Stockbridge Edwards wrote some of his best manuscripts. The fact that Edwards could maintain his awareness of the issues of the day in the remote area of his ministry is hard to believe. Yet, he responded to the dominant philosophical writings of his time and was able to write in response to the issues of his day.

### ***The Passion for Philosophical Engagement***

Edwards had a passion to defend the faith. Norman Fiering has said that "his goal, if it can be put in one sentence; was to give seventeenth-century Puritan pietism a respectable philosophical structure, which would make it rationally credible and more enduring than it could be without the aid of philosophy."<sup>33</sup> Put into everyday language, Edwards believed his Biblical theology was, in fact, a true rendering of reality, and therefore could stand confidently in the marketplace of philosophical ideas and give an account of itself-which in his hands it would do.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1981) p.60.

<sup>34</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill. 1998) p. 65.

The key to understanding Jonathan Edwards is that he was a man who put faithfulness to the Word of God before every other consideration.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Freedom of the Will***

His first notable work from the Stockbridge period was *Freedom of the Will*. Some consider this his greatest literary work. Edwards wrote this in a short four months while he was handling all the responsibilities of a new parish, in a remote location.

### ***The Fruit of a Lifetime of Redeeming the Time***

This book was finished in April, 1753, and was published a year later. The manuscript actually had people requesting the work before the publishers decided to print it. Evidently a copy of the manuscript arrived in Scotland and as people had opportunity to review it, they decided they would like the final hard copy. This prompted the publisher to move ahead quickly with the publication.

### ***Two More Books: What is the End and What is the Good?***

The next two books that Edwards began, *The End for Which God Created the World* and *The Nature of True Virtue*, were intended to be published together. These were started in the spring of 1755 after a serious struggle with a painful illness. The two works were published seven years after his death in 1765. While he probably intended to add some additional comments, the works were for all practical purposes complete.

### ***The Last Work***

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<sup>35</sup> *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, p. 471.

The last work for Edwards was *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*, which he finished in May, 1757. It seems that Edwards was responding to some attacks on the historic orthodox doctrine. In his writings we see an ability to get to the heart of an issue, dissect it and put it back together again. Edwards was very capable of getting to the heart of a matter and then with great detail give the biblical support or argument.

Just four months after the completion of his last work, Edwards was appointed president of Princeton College, succeeding his own son-in-law who passed away. This must have been a difficult move, considering the pain his daughter was going through at the time.

### ***His Futile Resistance to the Princeton Call***

While Edwards was surprised at the offer to head the college, he was not convinced that this was the direction God wanted him to go. There were the physical problems he was suffering and his own questioning of his qualifications for the position. Consider the fact that he had several more books he intended to author and it is easy to see why Edwards would hesitate to accept the position. The board refused be swayed by Edwards's reluctance and insisted, in fact say it was his duty to accept the position. When told of the board's decision not to consider someone else, Edwards broke down and cried openly. These were not tears of joy, but

rather tears of anguish at their refusal to be convinced by his arguments not to accept him.<sup>36</sup>

### ***The Quest for Spiritual Sight***

The life of Edwards was spent in an earnest passion for the supremacy of God. There is few if any that compare to his level of commitment. He understood clearly what was at stake, and he knew that just head knowledge was not enough or a rational knowledge of God alone could not save anyone. It can truly be said that his life was spent on serving the true end of all things, namely, the manifestation of the glory of God in a spiritual sight and enjoyment of that glory. He wrote, "A true sense of the glory of God is that which can never be obtained by speculative [reasoning]; and if men convince themselves by argument that God is holy, that never will give a sense of his amiable[i.e., pleasing, admirable] and glorious holiness. If they argue that he is very merciful, that will not give a sense of his glorious grace and mercy. It must be a more immediate, sensible discovery that must give the mind a real sense of the excellency and beauty of God."<sup>37</sup>

It does no one any good to just believe in God. For that belief to be of any saving value, we must "sense" God's holiness and mercy. We must have a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Sermon on Matthew 5:8 ("Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.") in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol.2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p.906.

true taste for it and delight in it for what it is in itself.<sup>38</sup> The devils have knowledge, but they do not have life everlasting.

### ***The Aim of Life in the Labor of Thought***

It would seem that rational study and thinking was not valuable in Edwards thinking. But, that is not the case, he says, “The more you have of a rational knowledge of divine things, the more opportunity will there be, when the Spirit shall be breathed into your heart, to see the excellency of these things, and to taste the sweetness of them.”<sup>39</sup> The goal for Edwards was not only to know God but to be able to taste and see that He is good. A spiritual tasting of God that enabled him to savor him, delight in him, and relish him.

He said in his 64<sup>th</sup> Resolution, “Resolved, When I find those ‘groanings which cannot be uttered,’ of which the apostle speaks, and those ‘breathings of soul for the longing it hath,’ of which the psalmist speaks...I will not be weary of earnestly endeavoring to vent my desires, nor of the repetitions of such earnestness.”<sup>40</sup> Edwards sought to develop a passion for God along with his knowledge of God. The great result of all study should be a heart for God and a life of holiness.

The conclusion and most important exhortation to us from the life and work of Jonathan Edwards is this: in all our life and all our study and our

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38 John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 74.

39 “Christian Knowledge,” p. 162.

40 *Memoirs*, p. xxii.

entire ministry let us seek to glorify God by being satisfied in him above all things.<sup>41</sup> God is glorified by our study of His word and also in our enjoyment of His presence.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **JONATHAN EDWARDS, A MIND IN LOVE WITH GOD**

*The Private Life of a Modern Evangelical*

Piper now attempts to give the reader a glimpse of the impact Edwards has had on him personally. Perhaps the reader will become so impressed with the results in Piper's life that there will be a copy cat effect realized.

#### ***The Doctrinal Weakening of Evangelicalism***

While many would consider the present state of evangelicalism as strong and growing, some lament that it is shallow and weak. Regardless of the mega-churches, the big name preachers, and some political accomplishments, the movement is simply a hollowing out of evangelicalism from within.<sup>42</sup>

The past was full of clear teaching on the major doctrines of the Bible; today we have a willingness to accept more entertainment and less doctrine. As a result we see more people with less knowledge and understanding.

#### ***Edwards: Beware of Pragmatic Criticisms of Pragmatism***

<sup>41</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p.15.

Do not let the problem cloud our understanding of what is really at stake. While evangelicalism may be weakening, the sorrow should not focus on that, but on the fact that along with the fading of evangelicalism is a decline in the value we place on God as a result.

### ***Glorifying God by Enjoying Him Forever***

The sad truth is the majority of born-again believers do not enjoy God. Most are captives of their own imagination, failing to see God as He really is and thereby fail to grow in the knowledge and love of His person. The most honor we can give to God is to express our complete joy in Him. Our satisfaction is connected to God's glory, as we glorify the Lord our satisfaction grows. We are very willing to settle for far less than what God would enjoy providing.

### ***Sin is the Suicidal Abandonment of Joy***

Believe it or not, seeking to satisfy our soul's needs, joy, delight and happiness, is not a sinful pursuit. Sin actually is pursuing happiness where no lasting happiness can be found.<sup>43</sup> "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13 RSV). Sin is trying to quench our unquenchable soul-thirst anywhere but with God. I cannot think of many things that would be more detestable to God than to be lukewarm in our pursuit of Him. A lukewarm attitude towards God seems to say that the person

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<sup>43</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 81.

understands the requirement to honor God, but has no heart for it. Where my heart is you will also find my passion and energy.

### ***“To Live with All My Might”***

Virtue is to pursue the enjoyment of God with all our might. Edwards understood this and made a conscious effort to obtain all that God wanted to give him. When I can actually understand what is at stake, the pursuit of God becomes a joy and a lifelong adventure.

### ***Doctrine to Be Seen and Glory to Be Savored***

Our mind speaks to our understanding and our hearts to our emotions. God is glorified both by being understood and by being delighted in. If we separate delight from our understanding, than we really do not understand the message and purpose of God. There are truths to be seen and there is glory to be enjoyed.

### ***At Stake is the Loss of God***

The watering down of our faith is going to result in the loss of God. If we continue on the path we have been following, we will lose his truth and beauty. And with the loss of truth and beauty, the loss of the ability to really see God for whom He is. The result will be an aimless wandering with no capacity to see and savor God. The effects of our wandering have begun to display themselves in several different areas of society.

### ***Sinking One Deep Shaft***

Perhaps most of us are guilty of scanning the surface of issues and never really digging deep to find the real treasures. This has been true in large measure concerning Jonathan Edwards; most simply think of him in terms of the one great

message, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*” Yet, there is much more to the man than one message. Samuel Davies (in 1759) said that Edwards “was the profoundest reasoner and the greatest divine....that American ever produced”. John Piper selected Edwards to be that one deep shaft he would explore in order to get beneath the surface and discover as many gems as possible. His search was not disappointing and the discoveries for Piper have been life changing.

### ***Encountering the Trinity***

Piper is now sharing with the readers his personal responses to Edwards’s writings on different topics of doctrine. The first clear impact was made when Piper read a paper by Edwards on the trinity. This left a permanent impression that would follow Piper all through his ministry. The Son of God is the eternal idea or image that God has of himself. And the image that he has of himself is so perfect and so complete and so full as to be the living, personal reproduction (or begetting) of God the Father. And this living, personal image or radiance or form of God is God, namely, God the Son. And therefore God the Son is coeternal with God the Father and equal in essence and glory.<sup>44</sup>

### ***The Mystery Is Greater for Knowing More***

While Edwards’s explanation of the trinity was eye opening it was by no means simplistic. Even Edwards was cautious not to over simplify the trinity. His warning was well stated and clear. He wrote, “I am far from

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44 Ibid., p. 84.

affording this as any explication of this mystery, that unfolds and renews the mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of it, for I am sensible that however by what has been said some difficulties are lessened, others that are new appear, and the number of those things that appear mysterious, wonderful and incomprehensible, is increased by it. I offer it only as a farther manifestation of what of divine truth the Word of God exhibits to the view of our minds concerning this great mystery. I think the Word of God teaches us more things concerning it to be believed by us than have been generally believed, and that it exhibits many things concerning it exceeding glorious and wonderful than have been taken notice of."<sup>45</sup>

### ***The Greatest Work: Freedom of the Will***

The next work that Piper was exposed to was *The Freedom of the Will*. This served to convince Piper that the Apostle Paul and Edwards were correct concerning freedom. Piper takes the position that Calvin was correct and Edwards solidified that conclusion. While Edwards would identify with Calvin he was quick to point out that what he believed was not due to Calvin but to his personal study of the Word of God. There is no freedom of the will as explained by the Arminian position. The will is determined by "that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest."<sup>46</sup>

### ***For Augustine It Is the Delight That Guides the Will***

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Essay on the Trinity*, pp.127-128.

<sup>46</sup> *The Freedom of the Will*, p. 141.

Edwards found himself in agreement with Augustine on the subject of the will. Augustine understood everything springs from delight. He saw this as a universal truth with all men: "Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy. There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone."<sup>47</sup> What we believe to be our delight will control our will. But the thing that upset Pelagius, Augustine's antagonist, was that it is not in our power to determine what this delight will be.

So saving grace, converting grace, for Augustine is God's giving us a sovereign joy .in God that overpowers all other joys and therefore moves our will in His direction. The will is free to move toward whatever it delights in most, but it is not within the power of our will to determine what that special joy will be.

Augustine's conclusion is eye opening and crushing to one's ego. He states: "A man's free-will, indeed, avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth; and even after his duty and his proper aim shall begin to become know to him, unless he also take delight in and feel a love for it, he neither does his duty, nor sets about it, nor lives rightly. Now, in order that such a course may engage our affections, God's love is shed abroad in our hearts' not through the free-will which arises from

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas A. Hand, *Augustine on Prayer* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1986), p. 13 (Sermon 306).

ourselves, but 'through the Holy Ghost, which is given to us' (Romans 5:5)."<sup>48</sup>

### ***An Inability That Leaves Responsibility in Place***

Jonathan Edwards wrote that all people are enslaved, as Paul says, either to sin or to righteousness (Rom.6:16-23); but slavery to sin, and inability to love and trust God (Romans 8:8), does not excuse the sinner, because this inability is moral, not physical. It is not an inability that prevents a man from believing when he would like to believe; it is a moral corruption of the heart that renders motives to believe ineffectual. The person thus enslaved to sin cannot believe without the miracle of regeneration, but is still accountable because of the evil of his heart, which stops him from being moved by reasonable motives in the gospel message.<sup>49</sup>

Edwards was a pastor and missionary all of his life. He wrote from experience and developed what is considered the greatest defense and explanation of the Augustinian-Reformed view of the will. For many this work is his greatest literary achievement. This work has had an enduring impact in theology and philosophy.

### ***Finney's Fury***

A hundred years after the death of Edwards Charles Finney took up the challenge of debating the issue of the will. Interesting that Finney did not attack Calvin or any of his contemporaries, but went after Edwards and

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<sup>48</sup> T. Kermit Scott, *Augustine: His Thought in Context*, p.208.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*, p.310.

his work *The Freedom of the Will*. Finney understood the impact Edwards had and knew that he had to deal with his book. But Finney was not successful and Edwards's work remains a benchmark to this very day.

### ***Cementing the Truth of God's Supremacy in All Things***

In 1957 Yale University Press began to publish a new critical edition of Edwards's works, which were planned to be released in 2003, the tercentennial of Edwards's birth. The first work that they chose to publish was *The Freedom of the Will*. The unshakable confidence in the sovereignty of God over the will of man was clear to Edwards.

### ***Georgia Woods and The Nature of True Virtue***

Piper's next encounter with Edwards's writings was the work on *The Nature of True Virtue*. This is a fresh look at an old subject with clarifying expression. Edwards is able to put into words what most people simply feel. Perry Miller said that "the book is not a reasoning about virtue but a beholding it. The book approaches, as nearly as any creation in our literature, a naked idea."<sup>50</sup>

It is not a stretch to assume that Edwards's goal for the reader was to have a goal to become a good man.

Edwards understood that God created the world in order that He might show his glory to his people, for them to know, praise and enjoy. Here is a how he expressed his theology at its core:

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<sup>50</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 286.

It appears that all that is ever spoken of in the Scriptures as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, *the glory of God*....In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both *exhibited* and *acknowledged*; his fullness is *received* and *returned*. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end.<sup>51</sup>

Not only is this the heart of Edwards's theology, but very possibly the heart of Scripture as well.

### ***Sunday Evening Fire***

The last work that Piper read on Edwards was his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. This resulted in a very strong conviction of lukewarmness in his affections toward God and inspired him to know and love God as he should. The book describes true religion as consisting of the affections. True religion must include a deep love for God and everything that is His.

### ***Saving the Best of Two Worlds-My Worlds***

Edwards struggled to defend the real and necessary place of the affections in religious experience. But he had an unwavering devotion to

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<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, p. 272.

objective truth and desired all emotion be grounded in a true apprehension of reality and shaped by that reality. The abuses that occurred during the Great Awakening alarmed Edwards and produced *The Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, published in 1746 (preached in 1742). This treatise was an attempt to identify the signs of real and gracious affections for God. Piper calls this work a Yes and No to revivalistic religion: yes to the place of appropriate emotions coming from perceptions of truth, but no to the frenzies, private revelations, irrational swoonings, and false assurances of godliness.<sup>52</sup>

Revival excitement and the reasonable apprehension of truth were the two ideas that Edwards tried to bring together. He helps us recover truth because he never loses sight of the unspeakable reality of God, where truth originates, and whom it exists to serve.

It seems that our attitude towards truth is a direct reflection on our attitude toward God. If, in fact God exist, then He must be the standard by which all things are judged and the source of all truth. God's attitude should become our attitude and His purpose our purpose. Anything that is not true cannot be from God and must be seen in that light. Piper says that being God-centered in life means being truth-driven in ministry. What is not true is not of God. What is false is anti-God. Indifference to the truth is indifference to the mind of God.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p. 94.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.97.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

**JONATHAN EDWARDS,**

### **ENJOYING GOD AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE**

#### ***The Public Life of a Modern Evangelical***

While Edwards did not write very much concerning the social life around him, yet he was not unconcerned with it either. He understood that the right focus would produce the proper response, if the social climate was sinful; it was the result of a wrong focus.

#### ***The Smallness of Only Being Concerned with Culture***

Edwards was deeply committed to world evangelism. He understood that culture cannot change without a God centered presence; therefore, evangelism was an essential part of the work of the ministry. To be active

in attempting to improve social practices is futile apart from a work of God in the community seeking the change. Edwards knew that the only way transforming light would come to the peoples of the world would be by missionaries being sent with a message of truth about Jesus and Satan and death.<sup>54</sup>

While Edwards would insist on sending out missionaries he would probably argue that the reason many are not so inclined is due to their personal lack of love for God and His purposes. Individuals have shown a narrow self-love resulting from the fall of Adam creating in them an indifference to others and society and the nations of God.

### ***Can Christian Hedonism Survive Edwards's Indictment of Self-love?***

Christian Hedonism implies that all true worship and virtue involves the pursuit of our ultimate satisfaction- which sounds very much like a form of self-love. The term "Enjoying God" seems to confuse the issue by implying that I should get some pleasure for myself, when Edwards says that the very heart of human depravity is our bondage to "self-love." If we take a good look at this issue we will discover the essence of Edwards's ethics and understand what a real spiritual giant he was.

### ***The Negative Use of "Self-love"-Narrow Selfishness***

The first thing we discover is that Edwards uses the term "self-love" in two different ways, one negative and one neutral.<sup>55</sup> Edwards defined self-love

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

as a man's regard to his confined private self, or love to himself with respect to his private interest.<sup>56</sup> That describes "self-love" in diagnosing our depravity. This understanding of "self-love" could be synonymous with selfishness. This is exactly what the Scripture condemns. Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 13:5, "Love seeks not its own." When it is said that charity seeks not her own, we are to understand it of her own private good, good limited to herself. Put another way, true spiritual love is not controlled by a narrow, limited, confined pursuit of one's own pleasure.

### ***The Neutral Use of Self-love-Desire for Our Happiness***

The neutral use of the term "self-love" does not involve sin, but it certainly is possible to do so. Edwards describes neutral "self-love" this way:

It is not a thing contrary to Christianity that a man should love himself; or what is the same thing, that he should love his own happiness. Christianity does not tend to destroy a man's love to his own happiness; it would therein tend to destroy the humanity.....That a man should love his own happiness, is necessary to this nature, as a faculty of the will is; and it is impossible that it should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being. The saints love their own happiness; yea,

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56 Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, in: *Ethical Writings, the Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. By Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), P.577.

those that are perfect in holiness. The saints and angels in heaven love their own happiness. Otherwise their happiness, which God has given them, would be no happiness to them; for that which anyone does not love he can enjoy no happiness in.<sup>57</sup>

This second self-love in the neutral sense is simply our built-in ability to like and dislike, or approve and disapprove, or be pleased and displeased. It is neither good nor bad until acted upon.

### ***Scripture Assumes This Kind of Self-love and Builds on It***

Edwards uses Scripture to defend his definition and position on self-love. The Bible is full of commands for us to “seek our own good” and with warnings to “beware of misery.”

This means that Scripture assumes the legitimacy of the principle of self-love in the simple meaning of desiring and being pleased by what we perceive as good for us. Self-love is to the soul what hunger is to the stomach. It is simply there with our make-up; it’s the inescapable desire to be happy.<sup>58</sup>

### ***What Then Is the Real Evil of the Human Heart?***

Comparing the two types of self-love we can see what Edwards was trying to convey to his readers. What is evil about self-love is not its desire to be happy, that is essential to our nature, whether we are saved or unsaved. What is evil about self-love is its finding happiness in such small, narrow,

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<sup>57</sup> *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 254.

<sup>58</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p.107.

limited, confined reality, namely, the self and all that makes much of self, pride, arrogance and selfishness. We are evil because we seek our satisfaction in our own private pleasures but do not seek it in the good of others.

### ***When Our Happiness Is in the Happiness of Another***

If self-love were not narrow but broad, it would not necessarily be evil. Edwards said, “ Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own confined good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the common good, in that which is the good of others as well as their own, in good to be enjoyed in others and to be enjoyed by others.”<sup>59</sup>

### ***How Extensive Must True Virtue Be?***

If I must expand my world to include the well-being of others, how broad and inclusive does self-love have to be before it stops being narrow and becomes true virtue?

The issue that makes this a very important question is the fact that there are acts of moral courage and sacrifice that are not virtuous. Edwards would point out 1 Corinthians 13:3, “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” These

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<sup>59</sup> *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 257.

are acts that seem to be noble, but are not virtuous. So what makes one act virtuous and another not?

***If We Don't Embrace God in Our Virtue, We Are Infinitely Parochial***

Edwards gives an eye opening answer to this question. He said, "If there could be an instinct or other cause [like self-love] determining a person to benevolence towards the whole world of mankind...exclusive of...love to God...[and] supreme regard to him...it cannot be of the nature of true virtue."<sup>60</sup>

He declares that self-love is limited, confined and selfish and not virtuous until it acknowledges and embraces the good of the whole universe of being, or more plainly, until it embraces God. If self-love embraces family, but not God, it is not virtuous. Apart from embracing God as our chief delight, we are literally infinitely parochial.<sup>61</sup>

***No God, No Virtue***

God then is absolutely indispensable in the definition of true virtue.

Edwards refuses to define virtue apart from God, on any level.

***Self-love Cannot Make the Good Beautifully Compelling***

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<sup>60</sup> *The Nature of True Virtue*, pp.602-603.

<sup>61</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p.108.

Self-love moves us to grab onto that which seems to make us happy, but self-love does not have the ability to make what is good and true and beautiful look attractive. Self-love alone may move one person to gain wealth, another to grab power, another to give away millions, another to become a thief and kill, or even to pray and study the Bible. But it is not self-love that decides what appears to the mind as the most attractive and valuable.

The question really boils down to what moves a person to embrace God for his gifts or for himself? Where does that decision making process begin to take shape in a person's heart and at what point does it move the person to love God for who He is and not for what He can do?

***The Miracle of New Birth Is the Root of Virtue Beneath Self-love***

Edwards's answer is the act of regeneration, the new birth, a special work of the Spirit of God in the soul of man, giving it a new capacity to see spiritual beauty and to savor the glory of God as something real and pleasurable in itself.<sup>62</sup>

“The first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration is to give the heart a Divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature.”<sup>63</sup>

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62 Ibid., p. 111.

63 Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, ed. By Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971), pp.48-49.

Self-love would never seek or desire this taste or sense of divine beauty. Edwards's concludes that self-love cannot be the bottom or the final foundation of true virtue. Something else entirely distinct from self-love must be the cause of this desire. The ability to taste something must precede our desire for what it is we seek to taste. That ability would be regeneration (or new birth); it must precede the pursuit of happiness in God.

***God Touches the Blind Eyes of Self-love and Says, "See!"***

Regeneration must be the foundation of true virtue. True virtue embraces God as its highest goal and confesses that God is the source of its origin. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." God touched the blind eyes of self-love and gave her an irresistible view of his own glory through Jesus Christ. God did not take away self-love, simply changed it into a spiritual hunger for the glory of God.<sup>64</sup>

Edwards points out that the change that is made within a man when he is converted is not the result of taking away his self-love directed at his own happiness, but only redirecting it to view and desire God. The individual then develops a taste for the supernatural that will truly meet his need and bring the satisfaction he desires. The individual now exercises his free will and chooses that which pleases God and will satisfy his own soul.

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<sup>64</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Good News Pub., Wheaton, Ill., 1998), p.112.

## ***Self-love as a Passion for the Supremacy of God in All Things***

The message for us today must be a search for and acceptance of nothing less than the supremacy of God in all things, a passion created by the new birth through the Holy Spirit.

### PART TWO

## **THE END FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD**

*by Jonathan Edwards*

This work is actually a combination of two different dissertations. Edwards approaches this work by dealing with the philosophical issues first and then presenting the biblical proof or arguments. He understood that the philosophical arguments needed to be addressed because many of his readers would not accept the biblical argument unless it made philosophical sense. Edwards was very good at recognizing and arguing from any philosophical position in order to bring the discussion back to where it really belonged, discussing the biblical implications of the issue.

### ***Terms and General Positions***

#### ***The difference between “ultimate” ends and “chief” ends***

In order to avoid any confusion over the chief end for which a person performs any work and the ultimate end, some explanation is in order. These two phrases are not always exactly of the same signification, while the chief end is always an ultimate end; the reverse is not always true. A

chief end is opposite to an inferior end; and ultimate end is opposite to a subordinate end.<sup>65</sup>

***“Subordinate” ends are the means of “ultimate” ends***

A subordinate end is what one aims at not for itself, but for its ability to help achieve the ultimate goal. When a person is sick and goes to the pharmacy for medicine, the medicine is the subordinate end; the cure is the ultimate goal. If you separate the medicine from the sickness, that is, if there is no illness, the medicine has no value.

So we can conclude that an ultimate end is that which a person seeks, in what he does, for its own sake; what he loves, values, and takes pleasure in on its own merit, and not merely as a means to a further end. There may actually be situations where there are a number of subordinate ends, linked together before the ultimate ends can be realized.

***Among “ultimate” ends, the “chief” or “highest” end is the one most valued.***

Two different ends may be both ultimate, and yet not be chief ends. For instance, a man may go on a trip that will include visiting a friend and receiving an inheritance. The inheritance may actually be a subordinate end, while visiting his friends an ultimate end, yet the subordinate end may be a higher end of his journey than the pleasure of seeing his friend; even though the visit with the friend has its own value, and so is an ultimate end.<sup>66</sup>

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65 Ibid., p. 125.

66 Ibid., p. 128.

When it is said that some subordinate ends may be more valued than some ultimate ends, it is never supposed that a subordinate end is more valued than that to which it is subordinate.<sup>67</sup> It is also important to understand that a subordinate end may be equally valued with an ultimate end if it is necessary and sufficient to the ultimate end. When there is only one ultimate end, it is chief above all other ends. Edwards would stress that what we seek for its own sake is our “last” or “ultimate” end. There is only one ultimate end when one thing only is sought on its own account. The one “original” ultimate end of all creation governs all God’s works. Edwards’s eighth point on this issue is the declared as the ultimate end of providence in general is the ultimate end of creation.<sup>68</sup>

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67 Ibid., p. 128.

68 Ibid., p. 135.

**SOME THINGS OBSERVED IN GENERAL**  
**WHICH REASON DICTATES**

***Reason by itself is a defective guide***

Unless God chooses to reveal Himself, we would never discover him from our own research and reason. Since God is the creator, it is He who knows what his intentions were for his creation.

While we have some revelation from God and it has improved the use of reason, it is not enough to determine God's last end in the creation of the world, without continuing guidance from God.

Reason can help answer objections to revelation. There are six things that Edwards says can be determined by reason based on the limit revelation provided by God.

**Dictate One**

That no notion of God's last end in the creation of the world is agreeable to reason, which would truly imply any indigence, insufficiency and

mutability in God, or any dependence of the Creator on the creature for any part of his perfection or happiness.<sup>69</sup>

The notion of God creating the world, in order to receive any thing properly from the creature, is not only contrary to the nature of God, but inconsistent with

the notion of creation; which implies a being receiving its existence, and all that belongs to it, out of nothing.

### **Dictate Two**

***God's existence precedes his action and so can't be the end of God's action***

Whatsoever is good and valuable in itself is worthy so that God should value it with an ultimate respect. It is therefore worthy to be made the last end of his operation, if it be properly capable of being attained.<sup>70</sup>

### **Dictate Three**

***What is in itself most valuable and attainable by Creation is God's ultimate end in creation***

Whatever that be which is in itself most valuable, and was so originally, prior to the creation of the world, and which is attainable by the creation, if there be any thing which was superior in value to all others, that must be worthy to be God's last end in the creation; and also worthy to be his highest end.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Ibid., p. 139.

70 Ibid., p.139.

71 Ibid., p.140.

### **Dictate Four**

***God's moral rectitude consists in his valuing the most valuable, namely, himself***

If dictate one thru three are correct it is proper to conclude that God is his own end in the creation of the world, and that he had to respect himself, as his last and highest end, in this work; because he is worthy himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best of beings. God naturally would have the highest regard for that which is itself highest and best. God is clearly the most infinitely worthy of regard. It is fitting that God show by his works what he values most, himself.

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And if God should have a supreme regard to himself, then it stands to reason that this supreme regard should be made evident in those things by which he makes himself known, or by his word and works.<sup>72</sup>

If we looked at God and compared the entire universe to him, how would He measure up? If a totally non-partisan source could be found to make this comparison what would the conclusion be? If in fact God were found to be so much greater, wiser, mightier and holier than all of creation put together than we should give him the appropriate amount of attention, praise and glory. And as the Creator is infinite, and has all possible existence, perfection, and excellence, so he must have all possible regard.

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72 Ibid., p. 142.

The conclusion would be that the whole universe, in all its proceedings, revolutions, and entire series of events, should proceed with a view of God as the supreme and last end; that every wheel, in all its rotations, should move with a constant invariable regard to him as the ultimate end of all; as perfectly and uniformly as if the whole system were animated and directed by one common soul; or as if such an arbiter possessed of perfect wisdom and rectitude, became the common soul of the universe and actuated and governed it in all its motions.<sup>73</sup>

There must be a supreme judge in the universe to maintain the order that is evident; it therefore must belong to God.

**Dictate Five**

***What God values for its own sake in creation is his ultimate end in creation.***

If God values a thing simply and absolutely on its own account, then it is the ultimate object of his value. If he seeks it in creating the world or any part of the world, it is an ultimate end of the work of creation.

**Dictate Six**

***What God attained in creating the world, he aimed at, and what he aimed at is his end.***

We can conclude what God intends, by what he actually does; because he does nothing inadvertently or without design. So what God values

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

ultimately, it must therefore be aimed at by God, as an ultimate end of creating the world.

As a result of the six dictates, Edwards makes some suppositions.

***Supposition One***

If God is sufficient for great effects, it is fitting that he affects them in creation.

***Supposition Two***

It is most fitting that beings exist to know what God can manifest of his excellency.

***Supposition Three***

It is fitting that God's glory be delighted in as well as known.

***Supposition Four***

It is fitting that a full fountain should send forth abundant streams.

On this statement Edwards has to clarify one point. There is a problem by stating that God desired to communicate to the creature that had not yet been created, thus moving God to create the world. But, this was not the motive or reason for God to create the world. We may suppose that a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world: and so, that the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

Delighting in the exercise of his sufficiency, God delights in himself and makes himself his end. God's love to himself, and his own attributes, will make him delight in that which is the use, end, and operation of these attributes.<sup>75</sup>

The creation of the creature was not and cannot be considered his end. God looks on the communication of himself and the emanation of his infinite glory to belong to the fullness and completeness of himself. As we consider how God has shared himself to us, he is actually making himself the ultimate end in creation. God will take great delight as his excellency is manifested and glorified in and by the creature.

***In sharing his holiness God makes himself his end in creation.***

Another aspect of God's greatness is the divine fullness seen in his virtue and holiness to the creature. When God communicates his holiness and the creature partakes of that holiness, which is conformity to and participation of it, God is honored.

***In giving creatures an ever-increasing likeness to God, God makes himself first cause and last end.***

The end for which God created the world must be to communicate to the world concerning him. There are many reasons to think that what God has in view, through his revelation of himself in creation, is an increasing knowledge of him, love to him, and joy in him.<sup>76</sup> So the more

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.159.

understanding the creature gains concerning God, the more it becomes one with God in love, with the heart drawing nearer as well.

There are some who would object to the idea of God making himself the last end. Their objections need to be considered for the sake of thoroughness.

### ***Objection One***

*Does not Edwards's view make God dependent on creation for his own completeness?*

Some may object to what Edwards stated as being inconsistent with God's absolute independence and immutability. If it could be argued that God needed any thing or that the very creatures he created could be profitable to him, it would make sense that God should make himself and his own interest his highest and last end in creating the world. But since God is above all need and all capacity of being made better or happier in any way, to what purpose should God make himself his end, or try to advance himself in any aspect by any of his works<sup>77</sup>?

The answer to this first objection is the result of wrong notions concerning God's happiness, based upon their understanding of his absolute self-sufficiency, independence, and immutability. Edwards answer to this point is:

*"Though it be true that God's glory and happiness are in and of himself, are infinite and cannot be added to, and unchangeable, for the whole and*

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

*every part of which he is perfectly independent of the creature; yet it does not hence follow, nor is it true, that God has no real and proper delight, pleasure, or happiness in any of his acts or communications relative to the creature or effects he produces in them, or in any thing he sees in the creature's qualifications, dispositions, actions and state.*"<sup>78</sup>

The fact is clear that God does delight in our happiness, seeing it as a work of his own goodness. If he did not take pleasure in the expression of his own beauty, it would be evidence that he does not delight in his own beauty, that he has not any happiness and enjoyment in his own beauty and perfection. But, nothing from the creature alters God's happiness, as though it were changeable either by increase or decrease.

The second answer to this first objection is rooted in the fact that God is perfectly satisfied in himself, but was gratified in creating. If there is something that God seeks as agreeable or pleasing to him, then in the accomplishing of it, he is gratified.

### **Objection Two**

*Does God do everything from a selfish spirit?*

Some people may look at this issue and conclude that God is selfish and that his highest and last end is dishonorable to him, since it appears that everything is coming from a selfish spirit.

The answer to the idea of God being selfish is seen in the fact that God's esteeming himself supremely is not contrary to his esteeming human

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

happiness, since he is that happiness. Many see selfish acts in light of what men do, but with God his selfish acts always result in good, while men usually result in things contrary to the public good.

**Objection Three**

*Is it not contemptible for God to do his works for the praise and applause of men?*

On the surface this would make God seem less than perfect and not worthy of him.

If God's glory is infinitely worthy, delighting in it and praising it is an excellent thing to do. If praising God is excellent, God would be misguided not to delight in it. God prizes holiness in the creature and holiness is essentially prizing God. We need to remember that in God, the love of him and the love of the public are not separated; they are one in the same.

**Objection Four**

*Creatures are less obliged to be thankful to God for what he does for his own sake.*

Stated another way, if God, in communicating his fullness, makes himself his end, and not the creatures, then what good he does, he does for himself, and not for them; for his sake, and not theirs.

God's glory and the creature's good cannot be viewed as if they were distinct in the objection. God's glory, and the communication of good to his creatures, is not two different things. God, in seeking the revelation of

his glory, seeks the creature's glory and happiness at the same time. The conclusion rests in the understanding that God is no less good because the good he imparts is himself. So we see that God's self-love cannot be selfishly confined because the whole of creation is an expression of himself.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

**THE SCRIPTURES REPRESENT GOD AS MAKING HIMSELF HIS OWN  
LAST END IN THE CREATION OF THE WORLD**

***Texts concerning God's making himself the ultimate end of  
creation***

The scriptures are clear and precise as to the first and last cause of creation. In Isaiah 44:6: "Thus saith the Lord, the king of Israel, and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts, I am the first, I also am the last, and besides me there is no God." Chapter 48:12: "I am the first and I am the last." Revelation 1:8: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

When God is referred to as the first and the last, the end as well as the beginning, it is implied that as he is the first, efficient cause and fountain from which all things originate; so, he is the last, final cause for which they are made; the final term to which they all tend in their ultimate issue.<sup>80</sup>

The question should be asked, to what end has God designed that he makes himself his end? It would be reasonable to assume that God's ultimate end in providence is his ultimate end in creation. In scripture we find God requiring the intelligent and moral part of the world to seek, as their ultimate and highest end the knowledge of God's glory. The end for which God created everything is His glory. We read in Isaiah 43:7, "...for I have create him for my glory." Isaiah 60 is dedicated to the nothing but

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

promises of the future exceeding happiness for God's people In verses 19-20 we read, "The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands..." All of this is given to show the happiness of God's people; and God's glory is mentioned as the sum of his design in this happiness.

Therefore, I believe that God makes it our duty to seek His glory as our ultimate goal. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we read, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." And 1 Peter 4:11, "That God in all things may be glorified."

When we look at the ministry of Jesus we see that his goal was to glorify the Father. Jesus sought God's glory as his highest and last end. In John 7:18 we read, "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him," When Christ says he did not seek his own glory, we cannot reasonably understand him, that he had no regard to his own glory, even the glory of the human nature; for the glory of that nature was part of the reward promised him and of the joy set before

him.<sup>81</sup> The ultimate end of the work of redemption is the glory of God. This clearly was the goal of Jesus and everything he did pointed to that end.

***God's Name is the highest regard of his holy creatures and of himself.***

God's name is referred to as the end of his acts of goodness towards the moral part of the world, and his works of mercy and salvation towards his people. In 1 Samuel 12:22 we read, "The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake." Psalm 23:3: "He restoreth my soul, he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake." Psalm 31:3: "For thy name's sake, lead me, and guide me." Psalm 31:3: "For thy name's sake, lead me, and guide me." Psalm 109:21: "But do thou for me, for thy name's sake." The forgiveness of sin in particular, is often spoken of as being for God's name sake. 1John 2:12: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." Jeremiah 14:7: "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake."

All of this is given as a consequence of the works of creation, in like manner as God's glory. Psalm 8:1: "O Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who has set thy glory above the heavens?" And we see at the end of the observations on the works of creation, the Psalm 9 ends with "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" Moving

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.201.

on to Psalm 148:13 we read, “Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is excellent in all the earth, his glory is above the earth and the heaven.”

We can see that God’s name and glory is His ultimate end in creation, but then we see that His praise must be included with the previous two.

Philippians 1:11: “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.” It is the praise given to God which is the end of the work of redemption. Jeremiah 33:8-9, “And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity and I will pardon all their iniquities. And it shall be to me a name of joy, praise and an honor.” The saving work of Jesus Christ is an ultimate end of creation as well.

The ultimate end of the creation of the world is simply one thing and that one thing involves many aspects, but it can be identified in the whole as “the glory of God.” And that glory includes manifestations of his fullness to the creation and the creature’s esteem and love and enjoyment of God’s fullness.<sup>82</sup> God’s external glory includes the creatures knowing, loving, and rejoicing in God.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This has been an interesting journey as Edwards forces you to focus intently on issues that may never be considered apart from this book. His in-depth knowledge and reasoning are simply beyond most men. The

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

ultimate end for which the world was created probably never crosses the mind of most people, yet this is a reasonable question. The creation by God has been minimized in many circles and denied in others. If one refuses to believe that God created the world then the question has little or no meaning.

One position that particularly stood out was the statement that God's glory and our joy are not two different issues but tied together. God's glory can be seen in our joy, as God receives the glory the creature receives the joy. As we serve Him we are in fact blessed with a sense of joy and satisfaction.

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