

Introduction

The Reformation focused on the doctrine of justification, recovering the *ground* of the gospel. The Great Awakening focused on the doctrine of regeneration, recovering the *experience* of the gospel. The theology of the sixteenth-century Reformation found expression in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Mediated through the Puritans, that same Calvinism shed light on the eighteenth-century revivals through the writings of Jonathan Edwards. If Calvin was a city planner and the Puritans built the infrastructure, Edwards turned the lights on. In his 1976 lecture at the annual Puritan and Westminster Conference in London, D. Martin Lloyd-Jones insists, "In Edwards we come to the very zenith or acme of Puritanism....I would assert that Puritanism reached its fullest bloom in the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards."¹

The purpose of this essay is to highlight one sermon from the massive Edwards anthology which best serves to locate him as the theologian of the Revival period. In 1733, during his early years as pastor of the Northampton Church when the first stirrings of revival were evident, Edwards preached a sermon which became paradigmatic for his later revival writings, and perhaps his entire legacy. The following year, the sermon became his second published work under the title, *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine*. George M. Marsden, historian, biographer, and University of Notre Dame scholar, claims, "This sermon, A Divine and Supernatural Light, encapsulates better than any other single source the essence of his spiritual insight. In it he provided a

¹ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, "Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival," in *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors—Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences 1959-1978* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 351.

sort of constitution for any true awakening.”² The late Perry Miller (1905-1963), Pulitzer Prize winner in history and leading authority on New England Puritanism, writes concerning *A Divine and Supernatural Light*:

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole of Edwards’ system is contained in miniature within some ten or twelve pages in this work. Yet it...is a puzzle. Edwards was not the sort who undergoes a long development or whose work can be divided into “periods.” His whole insight was given him at once, preternaturally early, and he did not change: he only deepened....[H]e altered little from his adolescence at Yale to his death in Princeton. His works are statement and restatement of an essentially static conception, worked over and over, as upon a photographic plate, to bring out more detail or force from it clearer prints.³

Loyd-Jones, calling *The Divine and Supernatural Light* “one of Edwards’ greatest sermons”, agrees with Miller’s characterization when he summarizes, “In one sermon—and it is a comparatively short one—you have a synopsis of the whole of Edwards’ teaching.”⁴ However, Miller and Loyd-Jones would disagree at least on this point. For Miller, “The real Jonathan Edwards was the life of his mind.”⁵ True as that may be in part, for Loyd-Jones, “He was preeminently the theologian of Revival, the theologian of experience, or as some have put it ‘the theologian of the heart.’” *A Divine and Supernatural Light* can serve as a doorway into both the mind and heart of one who left an indelible mark on the church’s understanding of the gospel of grace.

In elucidating Edwards’ sermon, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, the following plan will be followed. First, a sketch of the author’s life will be presented. Second, the specific historical context in which sermon originated will be featured. Third, a detailed examination of the sermon’s text with its particular focus on how it relates to revival will be undertaken. Finally, the significance of the sermon will be set forth.

² George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 157.

³ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (1949; repr., Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 44-45.

⁴ Loyd-Jones, 358.

⁵ Miller, xxx.

The Author of *A Divine and Supernatural Light*

Jonathan Edwards was born in the town of East Windsor, Connecticut on October 5, 1703. His father Timothy (1669-1758) was a pastor of the local Congregational church. His mother Esther (1672-1770) was the daughter of the legendary Rev. Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) whose stature says Miller, “dominated the Connecticut Valley and contested the ecclesiastical leadership of New England with Increase and Cotton Mather.”⁶ His parents had eleven children. He was the only boy. At the age of thirteen he entered the new Collegiate College of Connecticut which would later become Yale College in New Haven. He graduated with his B.A. 1720 and his M.A. in 1723.

Although a devout youth he did not enjoy the confidence of saving faith through most of his college days. In his *Personal Narrative* (1739) he recalls his conversion in the late spring of 1721 when he pondered the words of First Timothy 1:17, “Now unto the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” He says:

As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused thro’ it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before....Never any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt (sic) up to God in Heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in Him.⁷

He remembers singing and praying “in a manner quite different” than usual, “with a new sort of affection.” He continues, “From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions (sic) and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption and the glorious way

⁶ Miller, 36.

⁷ Cited by Michael A. G. Haykin, “Jonathan Edwards and His Legacy,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1995):66.

of salvation by Him. I had an inward, sweet sense of these things, that at times came into my heart; and my soul was lead away in pleasant views of contemplations of them.”⁸

After fulfilling a brief charge at a Presbyterian Church in Manhattan he completed his Master’s thesis. Thereafter he served as a tutor at Yale until 1726 when he was invited by the Congregational Church of Northampton, Massachusetts to assist his aging grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had served the church for nearly sixty years. He was ordained on February 15, 1727. On July 28 of the same year he married Sarah Peirrepoint (1710-58) and together they had eight daughters and three sons. When his grandfather Stoddard died on February 11, 1729 Edwards succeeded him and served the Northampton church for the next twenty-one years.

Edwards’ tenure at Northampton can be characterized by the shining years of revival and the declining years of conflict. Northampton experienced two periods of revival under Edwards. The first arose from his local ministry in 1734-1735 and spread along the towns of the Connecticut River Valley. The second revival from 1740-1742 developed from the dynamic ministry of George Whitefield. Unlike the former revival in and around Northampton, this dramatic awakening was felt throughout colonial America as well as the British Isles. Known as the Transatlantic or Great Awakening it left an indelible mark on American society. According to Marsden, “Whitefield’s visit changed Edwards’ life, as it changed New England and the American colonies generally.... Awakenings were familiar in the Connecticut Valley, and Edwards played a key role in one that touch as many people there as did Whitefield. Yet there were some notable

⁸ Haykin, 66.

differences. Whitefield's tour was a truly international phenomenon. It was the first intercolonial cultural event, the beginning of a common American cultural identity."⁹

Perhaps the most enduring outcome of these revival periods are the works Edwards produced that gave theological and experimental definition and shape to the spiritual awakenings. His revival writings are not only descriptive and prescriptive, but apologetic as he responds to two extreme reactions to the revival phenomenon. The first was the growing rationalism and emerging Arminianism of those like Boston Congregational pastor Charles Chauncey (1705-1787) who denied the divine origin of revivals altogether. The second were the excessive shenanigans of itinerant James Davenport (1716-1757) who gave the Chaunceys fuel for their denials.

Six works in particular were published as a result of this period. First, *A Faithful Narrative* (1737) was produced by popular demand as the story of the 1734-1735 revival elicited great interest at home and abroad. Second, *The Distinguishing Marks* (1741), originally a lecture delivered at New Haven on September 10, 1741, proved necessary to correct many misunderstandings about what constituted genuine revival. Third, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742) answered objections and sketched a "program" for the promotion of revival. Fourth, *Religious Affections* (1746) was his *magnum opus* on revival and has become a classic in Christian literature. Fifth, with the waning of revival fervor, *A Humble Attempt* (1747) was written to foster prayer for the renewal of Christian affections. Finally, *The Life of Rev. David Brainerd* (1749) preserved the edited diary of a young fervent missionary to Native Americans who spent his final days in the Edwards' home where he died at the age of

⁹ Marsden, 209.

twenty-nine (1718-1747). This work was widely read and consequently motivated young people for generations to sacrificial service for Christ.

Sadly, the significant role and enormous contribution Edwards played in the Great Awakening did not merit for him enduring affection from his congregation. Things began to deteriorate for him as early as 1744 when by all accounts he mishandled a disciplinary episode involving a number of young men, sons of powerful Northampton citizens. Sometimes referred to as the “bad book” case, certain young men of adolescent mind were amusing over a book on midwifery and female development. When their salacious pastime was brought to Edwards’ attention he unwisely implicated more than the principle persons involved. What resulted was a scandal. Marsden notes, “Much that Edwards had built up in the past fifteen years came crashing down in one small-town squabble.”¹⁰ However, the *coup de gras* for Edwards came over the issue of the Lord’s Supper. Stoddard, his predecessor grandfather, had instituted the practice of admitting professed unbelievers to the Lord’s Table so long as they were not living in open sin, believing it to be a converting ordinance. Edwards had come to disagree with the Stoddard tradition on principle and thus wanted to remediate the practice. In 1748 he sought to explain his position on church membership in *A Humble Inquiry*. His congregation was unconvinced and overwhelmingly voted for his dismissal. His farewell sermon was preached on July 1, 1750.

The following year Edwards accepted a call from a mission community in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He was installed on August 8, 1751. His duties were to pastor a small Anglo congregation, and to teach and preach at a school for Mohican (a.k.a. Housatonic) and Mohawk Indians. Despite encumbrances from internal

¹⁰ Marsden, 292.

missionary conflicts and having to deal with the external aftermath of his own removal from Northampton, he nevertheless had enough leisure to complete two monumental works which established him as the greatest theologian of the eighteenth century.¹¹ Both were defenses of Calvinism against encroaching Arminianism. The first work, *Freedom of Will* (1754), establishes among other things that predestination and human responsibility are compatible. The second entitled, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758), was mainly a reply to the attacks on Calvinism by the English divine John Taylor of Norwich. In 1758 a new opportunity arose for Edwards. One writer notes, “After seven years of exile at Stockbridge, Jonathan Edward’s intellectual stature was finally recognized, and he was invited to become president of the college in Princeton.”¹² However, upon arrival in Princeton the town was facing a smallpox epidemic. Edwards was vaccinated on February 23, 1758 and succumbed to its effects a month later on March 22, 1758. His final words to those by his bedside were, “Trust in God, and ye need not fear.”¹³

The Historical Context of *A Divine and Supernatural Light*

The immediate context for *Divine and Supernatural Light* really begins with the death of Stoddard. Mark Valeri, editor of the *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733* of Yale University’s edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, observes, “If Edwards had imagined that he was to be the pastor of a pious society, then his expectations were dashed during the early 1730’s. He repeatedly found his people guilty of religious

¹¹ Haykin, 79.

¹² Stephen R. Holmes, “A Mind on Fire,” *Christian History* 77 (Vol. 22, no. 1):12; Benjamin B. Warfield says, “It is the seven years at Stockbridge which deserves to be called the fruitful years of Edwards’ theological work.” See Warfield’s essay, “Edwards and the New England Theology” in *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932):527. Other monumental works from this period include the two essays *The End for which God Created the World* (1765) and *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765), along with the unfinished *History of Redemption* (1772), all of which were published posthumously.

¹³ See Haykin, 80.

apathy, worldliness, selfishness, and a nearly constant habit of bickering and quarreling.”¹⁴ According to Valeri, these realities along with Edwards own spiritual struggles at the time “led him to dwell on sin as the essence of the human condition.”¹⁵

Under the ministry of Stoddard, the Northampton Church enjoyed as many of five previous “harvests” or “seasons of extraordinary success.” Edwards lists them in *A Faithful Narrative* as occurring from eighteen to fifty-seven year prior and says, “Some of these times were much more remarkable than others, and the ingathering of souls more plentiful.”¹⁶ Yet more recently there “came a far more degenerate time,” especially among the youth. Upon his grandfather’s death in 1729, Edwards recalls the moral state of affairs in the region:

It seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion. Licentiousness for some years prevailed among the youth of the town; they were many of them very much addicted to night-walking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices, wherein some, by their example exceedingly corrupted by others. It was their manner very frequently to get together, in conventions of both sexes for mirth and jollity, which they called frolics; and they would often spend the greater part of the night in them, without regard to any order in the families they belonged to: and indeed family government did too much fail in the town.¹⁷

This situation, however, began to show evidence of change in 1733. Edward’s observes, “The young people shewed (sic) more of a disposition to hearken to counsel, and by degrees left off their frolicking; they grew observably more decent in their attendance on the public worship, and there were more that manifested a religious concern than there used to be.”¹⁸ By 1734 the pace of renewal increased. Edwards describes the temporal reasons he believes brought this about. First, in April the area was rocked by the death of the young man “in the bloom of his youth...seized with a pleurisy,

¹⁴ *Works*, XVII:6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV:146.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV:146.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, IV:147.

and taken immediately” which “much affected many young people.”¹⁹ With the death of two others that year—a young married woman and an elderly person—minds were focused more keenly on eternal concerns. Second, many responded to Edwards’ initiatives to organize small groups in town for the purpose of mutual edification. This replaced the previous habit of youth gathering for “mirth” and “company-keeping.” Marsden says, “By persuading the town to organize into smaller, private religious meetings, Edwards resuscitated one of the basic components of the Puritan movement....Nothing was more distinctive about Puritanism than its encouragement of lay spirituality.”²⁰ Third, the emergence of Arminianism provided opportunity to stress the true nature of the gospel and the fears of confusion were “strongly to be overruled by the promoting of true religion.” Edwards explains, “There were then some things said publicly on that occasion concerning justification by faith alone.”²¹

However, as 1734 drew to a close the “fire fell” and for the first six months of 1735 the Connecticut River Valley experienced a “wonderful effusion”²² of God’s Spirit, the likes of which had not been seen before.²³ Edwards describes the moment:

And then it was, in the latter part of December, that the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us; and there were, very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons, who were to all appearance savingly converted, and some of them wrought upon in a very remarkable manner.²⁴

From the center at Northampton the awakening spilled over into no less than a dozen other communities. Edwards says, “This remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God, which thus extended from one end to the other of this country, was not confined to it; but

¹⁹ *Works*, IV:147.

²⁰ Marsden, 156.

²¹ *Works*, IV:148; Edwards preached two sermons on Justification in Nov. 1734. See them in: Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, Ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000).

²² *Works*, IV:191.

²³ Miller, 129.

²⁴ *Works*, IV:149.

many places in Connecticut have partook in the same mercy.”²⁵ Such blessings of gospel grace were bestowed as the Word of God “attended with his Spirit...returned not void.”²⁶ As many as three-hundred souls professed faith in Christ in Northampton alone “in the space of half a year.”²⁷ Edwards also admits that the people of his church had been prone to talk much of conversion and spiritual experiences. But now he observes, “When they come to be the subjects of them themselves, they find themselves much confounded in their notions and overthrown in many of their former conceits.”²⁸ For Edwards conversion is a “a great and glorious work of God’s power, at once changing the heart and infusing life into the dead soul; though that grace that is then implanted does more gradually display itself in some than others....The manner of God’s work on the soul is (sometimes especially) very mysterious.”²⁹

He, furthermore, describes the outcomes observed among members of his own church: “Persons after their conversion often speak of things of religion as seeming new to them; that preaching is a new thing; that it seems to them they never heard preaching before; that the Bible is a new book: they find there new chapters, new psalms, new histories, because they see them in a new light.”³⁰ Edwards biographer Ian H. Murray describes what had happened, “The characteristic of a revival is that a profound consciousness of sin and need is produced in many persons at the same time by an awareness of God. Thus in Northampton in 1735 attention to the gospel was suddenly made supremely urgent to many who had hitherto given it only minimal regard.”³¹

²⁵ *Works*, IV:154.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, IV:153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, IV:158.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, IV:174.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV:177.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV:181.

³¹ Ian H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 130.

The Revival of 1734-1735 continued in earnest until Joseph Hawley II, a well known citizen and Edwards' uncle took his own life on June 1, 1735, thus casting a pall over the town. Some have said that he was overwrought with a sense of guilt as a result of the revival preaching. Marsden claims that "the reverberations" of the suicide "sent people scattering down from the spiritual peak they had ascended."³² Edwards observes, "In the latter part of May, it began to be very sensible that the Spirit of God was gradually withdrawing from us, and after this time Satan seemed to be more let loose, and raged in a dreadful manner."³³

A Divine and Supernatural Light was delivered in Northampton in August 1733, during the season preliminary to the 1734-1735 revival. It is also noteworthy that it was *the* one sermon that Edwards made available in print the following year. Valeri claims that, "Edwards condensed much of a decade of preaching, rumination, and private writing on the nature of spiritual knowledge into a single, remarkable effort."³⁴ It certainly encapsulates the essential doctrine that lay at the root of Edwards' revival theology and preaching. Murray, also a specialist of the Revival era, argues that Edwards' Calvinistic theology of the Holy Spirit was fundamental to his preaching:

The distress which men felt under such sermons was just the response which natural men must experience when the Holy Spirit convinces them of the truth. Possibly the greatest practical lesson from the 1735 revival for the pulpit of our day is that when ministers have to deal with indifference and unconcern they will simply beat the air unless they begin where the Holy Spirit begins, 'When he comes he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment' (John 16.8).³⁵

³² Marsden, 163.

³³ *Works*, IV:206.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, XVII:405.

³⁵ Murray, 130-131.

An Examination of A Divine and Supernatural Light

In the preface to Edwards' *Distinguishing Marks*, William Cooper writes, "A number of preachers have appeared among us, to whom God has given such a large measure of his Spirit....The points on which their preaching mainly turns, are those important ones of man's guilt, corruption, and impotence; supernatural regeneration by the Spirit of God, and free justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ; and the marks of the new birth."³⁶ Cooper recognizes that the extraordinary events surrounding the Revival period have a theological ground. That ground is articulated in the sermon *A Divine and Supernatural Light* which one writer calls a "metaphor for grace and divine reality."³⁷ This section will summarize the sermon and discuss its salient points.

The text Edward's chose for his *Divine and Supernatural Light* was Matthew 16:17. Miller describes his homiletically method, "Edwards took each verse of the Bible for an object in experience, drew from it the baldest, most obvious doctrine, reasoned it out, and applied it in the standard Puritan form....He was an artist working in a tradition, and for him the tradition was sufficient."³⁸ Jesus, in responding to Peter's Messianic confession, says, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." In his introductory remarks Edwards notes two things: "That Peter is pronounced blessed on this account" and "that God, and he only, had revealed it to him."³⁹ On the one hand, Edwards recognizes that God is ultimately the author of all knowledge or skills acquired through ordinary means of "human learning." However, he insists that "this spiritual knowledge, spoken of in the

³⁶ *Works*, IV:218.

³⁷ Harold P. Simpson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 37.

³⁸ Miller, 48.

³⁹ *Works*, XVII:408.

text, is what God is the author of, and none else; he reveals it, and flesh and blood reveals it not. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge.”⁴⁰ Edwards states his doctrinal proposition: “There is such a thing, as a spiritual and divine light, immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means.” He then sets forth a three point outline intending to: “I. Show what this divine light is. II. How it is given immediately by God, and not obtained by natural means. III. Show the truth of the doctrine.”⁴¹ He then concludes with some applications.

The Meaning of Divine and Supernatural Light

For Edwards this divine light is not that same as common grace or human conscience. The one “influences only by assisting of nature” and the other is “a principle natural to men.”⁴² Neither is it a strong impression, a new revelation, or an emotional experience. Edwards is mindful that the Holy Spirit may act upon a person without actually communicating himself in regeneration. “But as he acts in his holy influences, and spiritual operations, he acts in a way of peculiar communication of himself; so that the subject is thence denominated ‘spiritual.’”⁴³ The divine and supernatural light according to Edwards is thus “a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the Word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them.”⁴⁴

Edwards speaks of the divine light as producing a “true or real sense” of God and his redeeming grace upon the mind of one spiritually enlightened. Accordingly, a Christian with this new sense does not “merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but

⁴⁰ *Works.*, XVII:409.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, XVII:410.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XVII:411.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XVII:413

he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing; but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness. There is not only a speculative judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is upon that account; or a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute."⁴⁵

Edwards, furthermore, makes an important distinction. One Edwards authority writes, "The two basic factors in Edwards' psychology were (1) the speculative or notional and (2) the intuitive. The former he also termed 'understanding,' the latter he called 'will,' 'inclination,' 'affection'—or 'the sense of the heart.'"⁴⁶ First, Edwards sees the human mind capable of understanding what is good through a knowledge that is "speculative or notional." In other words, it is in agreement with human consensus and mutual advantage. The second concerns "that which consists in the sense of the heart," or as Edwards explains, "There is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing; so that the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it."⁴⁷

Some see in the language of "sensation" the influence of Enlightenment Philosopher John Locke. Valeri observes, "With his emphasis on 'sense,' Edwards took an idiom that was not central to the standard vocabulary of the seventeenth-century Puritan dogmatics and made it a crucial point of his argument."⁴⁸ Perhaps so, but Murray is doubtful of Lockean association. He admits that Edwards came upon Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* during his early college years and is supposed to have absorbed it with more pleasure than when "the most greedy miser finds...newly

⁴⁵ *Works*, XVII:413.

⁴⁶ Simonson, 23.

⁴⁷ *Works*, XVII:413.

⁴⁸ *Works.*, XVII:41.

discovered treasure.”⁴⁹ But Murray points out that Locke was no friend of the gospel because he “intended to depose theology from her place as the queen of sciences” and his empirical theory would have rendered “a great deal of Christian doctrine” as meaningless. For Murray, “Locke made Edwards think, and that in itself gave him pleasure equal to the miser’s. But, more important, the *Essay on the Human Understanding* brought Edwards to consider a whole series of questions on the operation of the human faculties. Is a man’s intellect subordinate to and controlled by his experience? How is the mind related to the will? What degree of importance is to be attached to the ‘affections’, that is, the emotions, in the human psychology?”⁵⁰ Murray observes that early biographers of Edwards “saw no permanent influence of any importance resulting from his reading of Locke.” For Murray any attempt to find Locke in Edwards “is a claim which cannot be sustained.”⁵¹ John LaShell explores the implications of the “new sense” in *Reformation and Revival Journal* by noting the difference between the rationalist Charles Chauncy and Edwards in their respective views. For Chauncy people needed “only a heightening of the natural powers of the soul. Edwards, on the other hand, insisted that a divine light must be supernaturally imparted to the soul. Whereas Chauncy said that the sinner needs new glasses, Edwards responded that the sinner is blind and needs new faculty of sight.”⁵² Edwards clarifies this point further with a classic illustration:

Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of

⁴⁹ Samuel Hopkins cited by Ian H. Murray, “Jonathan Edwards: New Dispositions and that New Sense of Things,” *Banner of Truth Journal*, no. 130 (April 1975): 9.

⁵⁰ Murray, “New Dispositions,” 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵² John LaShell, “Jonathan Edwards and the New Sense,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 4, no. 3 (1995):88.

its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes; but a man can't have the latter, unless he has an idea of the taste of its sweetness in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense of his beauty. The former may be obtained by hearsay, but the latter only by seeing the countenance. There is a wide difference between mere speculative, rational judging anything to be excellent, and having a sense of its sweetness, and beauty. The former rests only in the head, speculation only is concerned in it; but the heart is concerned in the latter. When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension. It is implied in a person's being heartily sensible of the loveliness of a thing, that the idea of it is sweet and pleasant to his soul; which is a far different thing from having a rational opinion that is excellent."⁵³

Arising from the "new sense" of divine things is a "conviction of the truth and reality" of the Word of God. Edwards affirms the Reformed doctrine of total depravity when he says, "The mind of man is naturally full of prejudices against the truth of divine things: it is full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel."⁵⁴ But as a result of the divine and supernatural light, a person sees truth with a new apprehension which consequently "destroys the enmity, removes those prejudices, and sanctifies the reason." Not only are the hindrances removed but human reason is positively enhanced. The notional is made livelier. The mind is more attentive to and fixed on spiritual things. Gospel truths are clearer and more interrelated. Edwards notes, "As he that beholds the objects on the face of the earth, when the light of the sun is cast upon them, is under greater advantage to discern them in their true forms, and mutual relations, than he that sees them in a dim starlight or twilight."⁵⁵ He continues, "The powers of the soul are awakened, and enlivened to employ themselves in the contemplation of them....Reason itself is under far greater advantages for its proper and free exercises."⁵⁶ Valeri says that Peter's confession "derived not from speculative knowledge or a purely rational

⁵³ Works, XVII:414; John Carrick calls this "one of [Edwards] favorite illustrations" in his recent book, *The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 157.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., XVII:415.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

recognition of an objective fact; it was an affective and moral response to the presence of divine light in Peter's soul."⁵⁷ To those who are thus spiritually enlightened the biblical gospel becomes supremely beautiful, its divine origin obvious, and its truth intuitively correct. LaShell pointedly observes, "The unconverted professor of religion generally wants to talk about his experiences, but the new man in Christ wants to talk about the Savior who has captured his mind and heart."⁵⁸ Valeri is direct, "The ability to perceive spiritual realities, to put it bluntly, required regeneration."⁵⁹ According to Edwards, "Such a conviction of the truth of religion as this, arising, these ways, from a sense of the divine excellency of them, is that true spiritual conviction, that there is in saving faith. And this original of it, is that by which it is most essentially distinguished from that common assent, which unregenerate men are capable of."⁶⁰ Marsden provides this assessment:

Even individuals, then, could not rely simply on looking within to their own intense spiritual experiences, however luminous....Edwards described the 'spiritual sense' that he associated with his 'First Sign' of genuine affections. This sense, which was a restoration of a love for divine things lost in the Fall, was not a new faculty, but a 'new foundation laid in the nature of the soul' for the exercise of the existing faculties. Regeneration, in other words, changed the whole person by changing the love at the heart of the person's being. The resulting spiritual sense was wonderfully different from anything previously experienced.⁶¹

The Means of Receiving the Divine and Supernatural Light

With regard to how this divine and supernatural light affects the human heart, Edwards has three things to say. First, God makes use of natural human faculties. Here Edwards draws from eighteenth-century faculty psychology.⁶² For example, human

⁵⁷ *Works*, XVII:405.

⁵⁸ LaShell, 90.

⁵⁹ *Works*, XVII:42.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XVII:415.

⁶¹ Marsden, 286.

⁶² *Works*, XVII:405.

understanding is actively engaged when divine light is received. Edwards points out, “God in letting this light into the soul, deals with man according to his nature, or as a rational creature; and makes use of his human faculties.”⁶³ It must be acknowledged, however, that human faculties are the *subject* and not the *cause* of this supernatural light. Edwards illustrates, “As the use that we make of our eyes in beholding various objects, when the sun arises, is not the cause of the light that discovers those objects to us.”⁶⁴ Second, God makes use of outward means in granting supernatural light to the soul. The primary means according to Edwards is the gospel itself. No new truth is revealed; only a “due apprehension of the same truths that are revealed in the Word of God.” Therefore, Edwards says, “It is not given without the Word. The gospel is made use of in this affair.”⁶⁵ Third, the means which God uses have no power or natural force in and of themselves to affect regeneration in the heart. The Scriptures are used only “to convey to the mind the subject matter of this saving instruction,” and that it does naturally. According to Edwards, “The mind can’t see the excellency of any doctrine, unless that doctrine be first in the mind; but the seeing of the excellency of the doctrine may be immediately from the Spirit of God; though the conveying of the doctrine or proposition itself may be by the Word.”⁶⁶ Thus the “notions” of the gospel come via the Word. But, the power to change the “sense of the heart” is granted immediately by the Holy Spirit. Edwards therefore distinguishes between that notion of a holy and gracious Christ impressed upon the mind by the Scriptures, and the “sense of the excellency of Christ”

⁶³ *Works*, XVII:416.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, XVII:416-417.

which, by virtue of that holiness and grace, is received directly and immediately by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁷

Scriptural and Rational Proofs

Edwards insists that the truth of this divine and supernatural light can be established both scripturally and rationally. Although Jesus' response to Peter's confession *is* sufficient ground for the truth of divine light, Edwards believes the preponderance of biblical evidence further supports it. He first cites texts that distinguish between those who see and know God, and those who are blind to him (3 John 11; John 14:19; John 17:3). He says, "The saints differ from the ungodly in this, that they have a knowledge of God, and a sight of God, and of Jesus Christ."⁶⁸ Next, he lists those Scripture that speak of the supernatural light as immediately given by God (Matt. 11:25-27; 2 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:15-16; Psa. 119:18; 25:14). Quoting Matthew 11:25-27, Edwards observes, "Here this effect is ascribed alone to the arbitrary operation, and gift of God, bestowing this knowledge on whom he will, and distinguishing those with it, that have the least natural advantage or means for knowledge, even babes, when it is denied to the wise and prudent."⁶⁹ Third, he offers texts which show that a true and saving faith arises *from* supernatural light and not the other way around (John 6:40; 17:6-8, 12:44-46). He points out, "A true faith is what arises from a spiritual sight of Christ."⁷⁰ Finally, Edwards makes reference to the transfiguration of Christ (2 Pet. 1:16; Matt. 17:1-9). The Jews were condemned because they did not recognize the glory of Christ in obvious and

⁶⁷ *Works.*, XVII:417.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, XVII:417.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XVII:418.

visible signs. Yet, Peter admits Jesus divine glory on the Mount of Transfiguration when he was an eyewitness to his majesty. Edwards concludes:

But if a sight of Christ's outward glory might give a rational assurance of his divinity, why may not an apprehension of his spiritual glory do so too? Doubtless Christ's spiritual glory is in itself as distinguishing, and as plainly showing his divinity, as his outward glory; and a great deal more: for his spiritual glory is that wherein his divinity consists; and the outward glory of his transfiguration showed him to be divine, only as it was a remarkable image or representation of that spiritual glory. Doubtless therefore he that has had a clear sight of the spiritual glory of Christ, may say, 'I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but have been an eyewitness of his majesty,' upon as good grounds as the Apostle, when he had respect to the outward glory of Christ, that he had seen.⁷¹

Edwards further argues for the truth of a supernatural light from God on the grounds that it is rational. He proposes three arguments. First, for Edwards, it is rational to suppose that a supreme being exists, that he transcends this world, and is exceedingly different from it. He regards it as rational that he who exists also speaks: "There should be something in his word or speech vastly different from men's word." In fact, Edwards insists that the "stamp of wisdom, holiness, majesty, and other divine perfections" on God's Word would render the word of the wisest men "mean and base in comparison" to it. Second, if divine things exist, it is rational to suppose that they may be seen. That people do not ordinarily see such things is no argument against this truth because sin mars human vision. For Edwards, the effects of sin are a sufficient explanation for spiritual blindness. Third, Edwards insists it is rational to expect that God would give the knowledge of himself immediately and not by natural means. He asks, "Where lies the great difficulty, if we own that the being of a God, and that he created all things out of nothing, of allowing some immediate influence of God on the creation still?"⁷² Human reason is certainly engaged in a person's apprehension of divine things. Through it the

⁷¹ *Works*, XVII:419.

⁷² *Ibid.*, XVII:421.

mind possesses the doctrinal notions of divine light. But for Edwards reason is limited in this regard:

The perceiving of spiritual beauty and excellency no more belongs to reason, than it belongs to the sense of feeling to perceive colors, or to the power of seeing to perceive the sweetness of food. It is out of reason's province to perceive the beauty or loveliness of anything: such a perception don't (sic) belong to that faculty. Reason's work is to perceive truth, and not excellency....Reason may determine that a countenance is beautiful to others; it may determine that honey is sweet to others; but it will never give me a perception of its sweetness.⁷³

Improvement or Applications

In conclusion Edwards offers three "improvements" or applications of his sermon. First, he sees its doctrine as bearing on the goodness of God because it does not discriminate between the intelligent and unintelligent. It is a doctrine that maintains that people "with but an ordinary degree of knowledge, are capable, without a long and subtile (sic) train of reasoning, to see the divine excellency of the things of religion: they are capable of being taught by the Holy Spirit, as well as learned men.... The babes are as capable of knowing these things, as the wise and the prudent."⁷⁴ Second, Edwards sees value as a motive for self-examination. The truth of a divine and supernatural light should stir a person to ask "whether the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, hath shined" on their hearts, giving them "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁷⁵ Third, all are exhorted to seek this spiritual light because it is "the most excellent and divine wisdom." It surpasses "the greatest speculative understanding in divinity, without grace." It will "exalt and ennoble the soul." This divine light should be sought for the mere joy, sweetness, and pleasure it brings to the human heart. With echoes of John Owen, Edwards claims, "This spiritual

⁷³ *Works*, XVII:422-423.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XVII:423.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

light is the dawning of the light of glory in the heart.”⁷⁶ The exposition of Edwards’ *Divine Light* sermon may best be concluded in his own words as he brings together the threads and themes upon which he sought to expound:

This light is such as effectually influences the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul....This knowledge will wean from the world, and raise the inclination to heavenly things. It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion. This light, and this only, will bring the soul to a saving close with Christ. It conforms the heart to the gospel, mortifies its enmity and opposition against the scheme of salvation therein revealed: it causes the heart to embrace the joyful tidings, and entirely to adhere to, and acquiesce in the revelation of Christ as our Savior; it causes the whole soul to accord and symphonize with it, admitting it with entire credit and respect, cleaving to it with full inclination and affection. And it effectually disposes the soul to give itself to Christ.⁷⁷

He continues by showing that holiness is the ultimate outcome of divine light:

This light, and this only, has its fruit in an universal holiness of life. No merely notional or speculative understanding of the doctrines of religion, will ever bring to this. But this light, as it reaches the bottom of the heart, and changes the nature, so it will effectually dispose to an (sic) universal obedience. It shows God’s worthiness to be obeyed and served. It draws forth the heart in a sincere love to God, which is the only principle of a true, gracious and universal obedience. And it convinces of the reality of those glorious rewards that God has promised to them that obey him.⁷⁸

The Significance of A *Divine and Supernatural Light*

The significance of *Divine and Supernatural Light* is found first of all in that it establishes the link between the sixteenth-century Reformation and eighteenth-century Revivals. This sermon is a Calvinistic vision for revival in general and gospel ministry in particular. One writer observes, “In the 1733 sermon Edwards argued two essential points. One concerned the difference between natural and regenerate man; the other pertained to the divine and supernatural light.”⁷⁹ Here are the categories of original sin and divine regeneration, similarly spoken of by William Cooper as when he says, “The

⁷⁶ *Works*, XVII:424; In his *Glory of Christ* John Owen notes the *light of glory* is that which “perfectly transforms the soul into the image and likeness of Christ.” See John Owen, *Works*, I:383.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XVII:424-425.

⁷⁹ Simonson, 37.

points on which their preaching mainly turns, are those important ones of man's guilt, corruption, and impotence; supernatural regeneration by the Spirit of God, and free justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ; and the marks of the new birth."⁸⁰

Cooper further insists regarding the preachers of revival, "The doctrines they insist on, are the doctrines of the Reformation."⁸¹ The sermon explicitly takes into account the Reformed doctrines of total depravity and irresistible grace; it implicitly presumes divine election and perseverance of the saints. The colonial awakenings were born from the conviction and preaching of the Reformation doctrines of sovereign grace. Ian Murray establishes this same association in his biography on Edwards:

Herein lies Edwards' enduring strength. He was not an originator. He proposes no re-formulation of the doctrine and creed of the Protestant Churches. Rather he was ready to work from the basis of existing foundations....[H]e was content with the theology of the Westminster Confession and of the Shorter Catechism.... [For Edwards] the eighteenth century was not intended to be an age for new confessions and catechisms. These were already richly provided. What was needed was preaching, revival and missionary endeavour. It was a day for prayer and action, for seizing the opportunities offered by the new horizons of an expanding world....*Edwards has a vital role in securing continuity with the Christianity of the Reformation (emphasis mine).*⁸²

Another significant aspect of *Divine and Supernatural Light* is that it expresses the Puritan vision for renewal of the church. Michael A. G. Haykin, authority on the Revival period, points out that from the time of the Reformation to the early eighteenth-century the model for renewal of society and church was largely viewed as a joint political and ecclesial effort. This model began to fall apart with the collapse of the Interregnum in England followed by the Act of Uniformity in 1662 which effectively drove Puritan ministers from their churches creating a situation of significant spiritual decline. As a result, a new vision emerged for "spiritual awakening" as the root of

⁸⁰ *Works*, IV:218.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Ian H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, 468.

change. Haykin observes, “Increasingly, orthodox ministers on both sides of the Atlantic prayed for and preached about what they saw as the only remedy to this situation [of a spiritual decline]: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”⁸³ John Owen, arguably the greatest Puritan theologian, longed for Edwards’ day when the Spirit of God would bring new life to the church. In 1676, in his *Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel*, he anticipates a season when God would pour out his Spirit in great measure:

When God shall be pleased to give unto the people who are called by his name, in a more abundant manner, “pastors after his own heart, to feed them with knowledge and understanding;” when he shall revive and increase a holy, humble, zealous, self-denying, powerful ministry, by a more plentiful effusion of his Spirit from above; then, and not until then, may we hope to see the pristine glory and beauty of our religion restored unto its primitive state and condition.⁸⁴

It would be nearly sixty years before Owen’s longing would be realized in any large measure along the Connecticut River Valley under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards.

Finally, *Divine and Supernatural Light* is the basis for Edwards’ later Revival writings. For Perry Miller it is not an overstatement to insist, “That the whole of Edwards’ system is contained in miniature” in this sermon.⁸⁵ Furthermore, biographer George Marsden claims that it “encapsulates better than any other single source the essence of his spiritual insight. In it he provided a sort of constitution for any true awakening.”⁸⁶ Again he observes that Edwards’ “grand theological vision” for a “God-willed reality” is “articulated briefly in *A Divine and Supernatural Light*” as an “explosion of light from the sun of God’s intertrinitarian love.”⁸⁷ Edwards’ quintessential work, his *Religious Affections*, is his final reflection on Christian

⁸³ Michael A. G. Haykin, “The Transatlantic Evangelical Revival” (Lecture, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI, May 26, 2008), 2.

⁸⁴ John Owen, *Works*, VII:195.

⁸⁵ Miller, 44-45.

⁸⁶ Marsden, 157.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 443.

experience and the “new sense” believers enjoy when they are renewed by the divine and supernatural light. The echoes of his 1733 sermon find their maturity in 1746 when he writes:

God has endued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns, and view, and judges of things; which is called the understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined *to* them, or is disinclined and averse *from* them; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the *inclination*: and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the *will*: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the *heart*.⁸⁸

From *A Divine and Supernatural Light* to the *Religious Affections*, Edwards covers the gamut of revival theology, answering the objections of rationalists and enthusiasts along the way. Benjamin B. Warfield captures this aspect of Edward’s legacy as such preliminary studies as the *Divine Light* sermon led to the production of his final and great work on revival:

It was one of the incidental fruits of those revivals that, as we have seen, he gave to the world in a series of studies perhaps the most thorough examination of the phenomena of religious excitement it has yet received, and certainly, in his great treatise on the ‘Religious Affections,’ one of the most complete systems of what has been strikingly called ‘spiritual diagnostics’ it possesses.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1746; repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 24.

⁸⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, “Edwards and the New England Theology” in *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 524.

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