

“God Glorified in the Conversion of the Sinner”
(John 6:63)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we finished Edwards’ arguments from Scripture that natural man, as he comes into the world, apart from God’s intervention, has nothing of the Spirit.
 - a. From what Jesus said to Nicodemus, only those who have the new birth have the Spirit (John 3:6).
 - b. From what Paul said to the Romans, only those who belong to Christ have the Spirit (Rom. 8:9).
 - c. Peter tells us that only true believers are partakers of the divine nature, which is the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:4).
 - d. Paul tells us that unbelievers see nothing desirable or excellent in the things of the Lord, because those things are spiritually appraised, only the Spirit can create this spiritual appreciation (1 Cor. 2:14).
 - e. Paul tells the church at Corinth that those who only appear to be religious and don’t have genuine love in their hearts, do not have the Spirit and are not true believers (1 Cor. 13:1-3).
 - f. John tells us that unbelievers don’t have any communion with Christ in His gifts and graces – they only would if they had the Spirit (John 1:16).
 - g. That unbelievers don’t have the Spirit is shown by the fact that Scripture represents them as evil – which they wouldn’t be if they had the Spirit (1 John 3:9).
 - h. And the fact that Scripture represents conversion as a work of creation shows that believers have something in their hearts that wasn’t there before – that new animating principle is the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17). Unbelievers are not new creations, but a part of the old fallen creation.
2. The point he is making, remember, is that believers have something entirely different in their hearts than unbelievers – it’s not that they merely have something more of the same kind – they have the Spirit that unbelievers don’t have.

B. Preview.

1. From these considerations, Edwards draws two conclusions:
 - a. His first conclusion is since unbelievers have nothing of the Spirit, who is absolutely necessary to create spiritual life, it is impossible for unconverted men to save themselves – apart from the Spirit’s work, they are totally depraved and unable to convert themselves.
 - b. The second is that when God does convert, and only He can, that conversion must take place in a moment – this has to be the case, since if one has the

Spirit, he has spiritual life, if he doesn't have the Spirit he has nothing of this life. There is nothing in between.

2. This is what we'll consider this evening:
 - a. First, that it is impossible for unconverted men to save themselves.
 - b. Second, that when God converts, He does so instantly.
 - c. God has so made things that He receives all the glory.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, it is impossible for unconverted men to save themselves: Since unbelievers have nothing of the Spirit, Edwards concludes that it is impossible for men to convert themselves either by their own strength or through their own works.
 1. Man can only improve what he already has: he can't gain something new.
 - a. "All that men can do by their own strength and industry is only gradually to increase and improve and newly model and direct qualities, principles, and perfections of nature that they have already. And that is evident, because a man in the exercise and improvement of the strength and principles of his own nature has nothing but the qualities, powers, and perfections that are already in his nature to work with, and nothing but them to work upon; and therefore it is impossible that by this only, anything further should be brought to pass, than only a new modification of what is already in the nature of the soul."
 - b. To put it simply, by jumping higher and higher, man will not eventually fly.
 - (i) Improving what you have is not the same as acquiring a new faculty you didn't possess before.
 - (ii) "It is impossible (as Dr. Clarke observes) 'that any effect should have any perfection that was not in the cause: for if it had, then that perfection would be caused by nothing.'"
 - (iii) This, by the way, is an excellent argument for the impossibility that life could have been caused accidentally or given new abilities by evolution.
 - (iv) If the cause (in evolution's case, the earth, the ground) doesn't have the quality of life or the attributes we see in living creatures, then life and its attributes were brought about by nothing.
 2. Man cannot give himself saving grace.
 - a. "Therefore it follows that saving grace in the heart, cannot be produced in man by mere exercise of what perfections he has in him already, though never so much assisted by moral suasion, and never so much assisted in the exercise of his natural principles, unless there be something more than all this, *viz.* an immediate infusion or operation of the Divine Being upon the soul. Grace must be the immediate work of God, and properly a production of his Almighty power on the soul."
 - b. To put it simply, if man has nothing of the Spirit of God, he is totally depraved and unable to do anything towards his conversion, any more than a dead man can raise his own body to life. If anyone is to be saved, he must be

saved through the call of God that brings the regenerating work of the Spirit of God, that alone is able to raise the dead to life.

- c. If you don't have this Spirit, only God can grant Him to you. You must seek Him for this mercy.
- d. If you know others who don't have God's Spirit, even though they've heard the Gospel, then pray that God would grant His Spirit.
- e. Only He can do this; so that He alone would receive the glory for it. This is, after all, the reason He made us and all things: for His glory.

B. Edwards' second conclusion is that conversion must be instantaneous: it must take place in a moment.

1. There are some things regarding Christianity that do take time:

- a. It takes time to learn about Christ.
- b. It takes time to become convicted of sin and to take steps to reform the life by cutting off sins.

2. "Yet that work of grace upon the soul whereby a person is brought out of a state of total corruption and depravity into a state of grace, to an interest in Christ, and to be actually a child of God, is in a moment."

- a. This has to be the case, he says, because the grace God gives is of a different nature and kind from everything he had before.
- b. One moment, the unbeliever has no grace – no spiritual life – and the next moment, once God gives His Spirit, he does.
- c. The Lord shows us this in Scripture by representing conversion by many things which happen in an instant:
 - (i) Conversion is represented as creation (a new creation):
 - (a) In creation, God speaks and it comes to pass: one moment there was nothing, then in an instant, there is something.
 - (b) Something new is made: non-being and being are two different things; once the call is issued, being is created.
 - (c) In the creation of Adam, one moment there's dirt, and the next living flesh and blood.

(ii) The same is true of resurrection:

- (a) When Christ called Lazarus out of the grave, He didn't restore his life gradually, but in a moment. He commanded, "Lazarus, come forth," and with this call life was imparted.
- (b) In our meditation, Christ spoke of an hour coming, which then was, when the dead would hear His voice and those who heard would live (John 5:25). He was referring to a spiritual resurrection – those physically alive, but spiritually dead, becoming spiritually alive at once. As soon as the call is given, the dead hear and are raised to life.
- (c) There is nothing between being dead and being alive. One who is dead has *no* life, and one who has the very least degree of life is *alive*.
- (d) When a man is raised from the dead, he doesn't simply have more of something he had before, but has something entirely new.

- (e) Conversion is the same. When God speaks, the dead are instantly made alive. Life goes with the call, and as soon as they are called, they live.
- (iii) Consider another word used for conversion: “calling”: God commands, and it comes to pass.
- (a) “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified” (Rom. 8:28-30).
- (b) “Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter *said* to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:37-39).
- (c) “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).
- (d) This call is not a wooing or enticement to believe, but a command issued to be obeyed at once. Christ speaks with His mighty voice, the heart is immediately changed, and those who were dead are made alive.
- (e) When Christ called the disciples – which was a calling to apostleship – though they were engaged in other things, they immediately obeyed.
- (1) “Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (Matt. 4:18-22).
- (2) “As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’ And he got up and followed Him” (Matt. 9:9).
- (3) Edwards notes that this might not have been the time of their conversion, but it was a representation of the way in which He would call men to be His disciples and spiritually to follow Him in all ages.

- (4) He puts something immediately and instantly in their hearts that they didn't have before that makes them want to follow Him.
 - (5) We call this effectual calling.
- (iv) Many of the miracles of Jesus, as pictures of spiritual conversion, show us the same thing.
- (a) When He reached out His hand and touched the leper, the leper was immediately cleansed (Mat. 8:3; Mark 1:42; Luke 5:13). Our spiritual leprosy and uncleanness is instantly taken away by Christ at conversion.
 - (b) When He touched the eyes of the blind, they immediately regained sight and followed Him (Mat. 20:30; Mark 10:52; Luke 18:43). Our spiritual blindness is instantly taken away by Christ.
 - (c) His instantly healing the sick represented His ability to heal all our spiritual diseases at our conversion.
 - (1) When Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever, Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up and immediately the fever left (Mark 1:31).
 - (2) When the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment, the blood immediately stopped (Luke 8:44.)
 - (3) When Jesus laid His hands on the woman who was bent over double for eighteen years, immediately she stood upright (Luke 13:11-13).
 - (4) And when He commanded the man at the pool of Bethesda who could not walk for thirty-eight years to take up his bed and walk, he immediately got up, picked up his bed, and walked (John 5:8-9).
 - (5) The same happened when He cast demons – immediately they would come out, representing the dispossessing the devil of our souls.
- (v) When God calls and converts a man, He makes him a new creature.
- (a) He infuses a new principle that changes a person instantly.
 - (b) Conversion is not gradual, but happens in a moment.
 - (c) Once God calls, it will come to pass. When He does, it comes to pass in a moment.
 - (d) And so God is to receive all the glory for our conversion, and we receive none.
 - (e) Let's remember to give Him that glory. Amen.