

“Spiritual Hunger”
(Matthew 5:6)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw how genuine grace – or holy love – produces a balanced Christian life in every way.
 - a. You will not only love man, but also God; and not only God, but also man; you will be concerned for the wellbeing of all men and not just some.
 - b. You will be concerned not only for the physical needs of others, but also their spiritual needs – for their bodies and souls.
 - c. You will be concerned not only for the sins of others, but for your own sins, which you will take more seriously than others.
 - d. And you will love the Lord both in public and private – desiring to seek the Lord even more earnestly in private when no one is watching.
 - e. You will experience a balance between all holy affections because Christ is being formed in you, and Christ is perfect.

2. Before you panic because you see some imbalance of these graces in your life – as well as many hypocritical affections – don’t forget that imperfection is something you will struggle with your whole life.
 - a. What we see in Jesus is perfect; what we see in ourselves won’t be.
 - b. And yet the grace of God will always be moving you towards a more perfect balance that you can see and know.
 - c. The Lord wants you to know that this is what He is doing, so that you will work together with Him in this transformation.
 - d. As Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure” (2:12-13).

B. Preview.

1. Edwards moves on from the Christ-like characteristics this grace produces now to another tendency of true grace: the stronger it is, the more you will desire it.
 - a. This isn’t true of false grace.
 - (i) No matter what you desire in the world, you can always get enough or too much of it to the point where you are not only satisfied with what you have, but also sick of it.
 - (ii) This doesn’t mean we’ll always have enough to satisfy us or to make us sick, only that it is possible with all these things.
 - (iii) This is also true of false grace, since it is something the world offers.

 - b. But holy love is different:
 - (i) It is satisfying – it meets our deepest need for communion with God.

(ii) No matter how much you have, you will always want more; and the more you have, the more you will want.

2. This evening, we'll consider the difference between true and false grace in the desire it produces. We'll see:
 - a. First, that true grace produces a desire for more.
 - b. But second, that those with counterfeit grace are satisfied with what they have.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, the stronger God's grace is in your soul, the stronger you'll desire it.
 1. The more you have, the more you'll want.
 - a. The more you love God, the more you will want to love Him and the more you'll see just how weak your love really is compared to what it ought to be.
 - b. The more you hate sin, the more you'll want to hate it and the fact that you have so much love remaining for sin in your soul.
 - c. The more you mourn for sin, the more you'll want to mourn for it; the more your heart is broken over your sin, the more you'll want it to be broken.
 - d. The more you hunger and thirst for God, the more you will want to hunger and thirst and long for God.
 2. Gracious affection/holy love is like a fire: the higher it's turned up, the hotter and stronger it burns.
 - a. This means the holier you are, the more you will hunger after holiness.
 - (i) When you first tasted God's grace at your spiritual birth, you wanted more: Peter writes, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord" (1 Pet. 2:2-3).
 - (ii) That's because you received only a foretaste/pledge of this grace at birth and not the full inheritance you will receive later.
 - (a) "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" (2 Cor. 1:21-22).
 - (b) "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13-14).
 - (c) The seal of the Spirit is the down payment we have of the glory we can expect to receive in heaven.
 - (iii) Since the holiest of saints on the earth are still only children compared to what they will be in the future, the greatest holiness that any of us achieve on earth will not satisfy us, but only make us hungry for more.
 - (a) When you read a book, you aren't fully satisfied until you finish it; until that happens, you keep picking it up.
 - (b) When you're on a trip, you don't stop until you reach your destination.

- (c) The same is true of our spiritual journey. Paul writes, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you” (Phil. 3:13-15).
- b. The more holy love you have, the more you will desire holiness; and the more you desire holiness, the more you will see how imperfect your holiness is and strive for more.
3. At this point, Edwards deals with the objection of the false believer who says that even a little spiritual blessing should be enough: If the things of the Spirit are really satisfying, why should you want any more? Why isn't a little enough?
- a. The answer is because grace is so good.
- (i) Grace doesn't choke or gag your spiritual appetite.
- (ii) It's *very* enjoyable: when children taste candy they like, they want more.
- (iii) It's so enjoyable, you want it more than anything else: when children taste one kind of candy that's better than another, they just want that new kind – the old doesn't satisfy anymore.
- (iv) But grace, unlike candy, is something you can't get enough of – you could feasibly get sick and tired of just about everything in this world, but this can't happen with holy love.
- b. The more you have the more you'll want. Edwards writes, “The more one experiences and knows this excellent, unparalleled, exquisite, and satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly will he hunger and thirst for more, until he comes to perfection. And therefore this is the nature of spiritual affections, that the greater they be, the greater the appetite and longing is, after grace and holiness.”
- B. The same is not true of false grace: the stronger it is in the unbeliever, the more it will satisfy him and the less he will desire it.
1. Those who have them are satisfied when they believe they have received grace.
- a. When they're afraid of God's judgment (of hell) they want truth, they want Christ, they want to love God, but once they think they've found these things, the desire is gone.
- b. They believe their sins are forgiven, that they will go to heaven: they have their fire insurance; the danger is gone and so is the hunger.
- c. The more confident they are that they're safe, the more their desire subsides.
- d. Edwards writes, “The man now is far from appearing to himself a poor empty creature; on the contrary, he is rich, and increased with goods, and hardly conceives of any thing more excellent, than what he has already attained.”
- e. This is why many who seek after the Lord stop short of finding: they become satisfied that they have already found.
- f. Shepard writes, “It is usual to see a false heart most diligent in seeking the Lord, when he has been worst, and most careless when it is best. Hence many at first

conversion, sought the Lord earnestly: afterwards affections and endeavours die; that now they are good as the word can make them.—An hypocrite’s last end is to satisfy himself: hence he has enough. A saint’s is to satisfy Christ: hence he never has enough” (*Parable*, 1:157).

- g. He further writes, “When the Lord hath given some light and affection, and some comfort and some reformation, now a man grows full here. Saints do for God; and carnal hearts do something too; but a little fills them, and quiets them, and so damns them. And hence men at the first work upon them, are very diligent in the use of means; but after that, they be brought to neglect prayer, sleep out sermons, and to be careless, sapless, lifeless” (*Ibid.*, 210).
 - h. And, “It is an argument of want of grace, when a man saith to himself, as the glutton said to his soul, ‘Take thy rest, for thou hast goods laid up for many years.’ So thou hast repentance and grace, and peace enough for many years: and hence the soul takes its rest, grows sluggish and negligent. Oh, if you die in this case, this night thy soul will be taken away to hell” (*Ibid.*, 227).
2. The holy love that moves the saint to seek the Lord is much more powerful than the fear of hell: It will move him to seek the Lord and to keep on seeking.
 - a. This is how the saints are characterized in Scripture:
 - (i) “This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face – *even Jacob*” (Psalm 24:6).
 - (ii) “May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; may those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God of Israel” (Psalm 69:6).
 - (iii) “Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let those who love Your salvation say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified!’” (Psalm 40:16).
 - (iv) The Bible represents Christians as those who seek, strive and labor to know and serve the Lord mainly *after* their conversion, rather than before. Conversion is where it really begins.
 - b. Edwards writes, “And almost all that is said in the New Testament, of men’s watching, giving earnest heed to themselves, running the race that is set before them, striving and agonizing, wrestling not with flesh and blood, but principalities and powers, fighting, putting on the whole armour of God, and standing, having done all to stand, pressing forward, reaching forth, continuing instant in prayer, crying to God day and night; I say, almost all that is said in the New Testament of these things, is spoken of and directed to the saints. Where these things are applied to sinners’ seeking conversion once, they are spoken of the saints’ prosecution of the great business of their high calling ten times. But many in these days have got into a strange anti-scriptural way, of having all their striving and wrestling over *before* they are converted; and so having an easy time of it afterwards, to sit down and enjoy their sloth and indolence; as those that now have a supply of their wants, and are become rich and full. But when the Lord *fills the hungry with good things, these rich* are like to be *sent away empty*, Luke i. 53.”

- c. Let me close with this final quote from Edwards, “But doubtless there are some hypocrites, that have only false affections, who will think they are able to stand this trial; and will readily say, that they desire not to rest satisfied with past attainments, but to be pressing forward; they desire more, they long after God and Christ, desire more holiness, and seek it. But the truth is, their desires are not properly the desires of appetite after holiness, for its own sake, or for its moral excellency and holy sweetness; but only for by-ends. They long after clearer discoveries, that they may be better satisfied about the state of their souls; or because in great discoveries self is gratified, in being made so much of by God, and so exalted above others; they long to *taste* the love of God, (as they call it,) rather than to have *more* love to God. Or, it may be, they have a kind of forced, fancied, or made longings; because they think they must long for more grace, otherwise it will be a dark sign upon them. But such things as these are far different from the natural, and as it were necessary, appetite and thirsting of the new man after God and holiness. There is an inward burning desire that a saint has after holiness, as natural to the new creature, as vital heat is to the body. There is a holy breathing and panting after the Spirit of God to increase holiness, as natural to a holy nature, as breathing is to a living body. And holiness or sanctification is more directly the object of it, than any manifestation of God’s love and favour. This is the meat and drink that is the object of the spiritual appetite; John iv. 34. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work.” Where we read in Scripture of the desires, longings, and thirstings of the saints, righteousness and God’s laws are much more frequently mentioned, as the object of them, than any thing else. The saints *desire the sincere milk of the word*, not so much to testify God’s love to them, as *that they may grow thereby* in holiness. I have shown before, that holiness is that good which is the immediate object of a spiritual taste. But undoubtedly the same sweetness that is the chief object of a spiritual taste, is also the chief object of a spiritual appetite. Grace is the godly man’s treasure; Isa. xxxiii. 6. “The fear of the Lord is his treasure.” Godliness is the gain of which he is covetous, 1 Tim. vi. 6. Hypocrites long for discoveries, more for the present comfort of the discovery, and the high manifestation of God’s love in it, than for any sanctifying influence of it. *But neither a longing after great discoveries, or after great tastes of the love of God, nor longing to be in heaven, nor longing to die, are in any measure so distinguishing marks of true saints, as longing after a more holy heart, and living a more holy life.*”
- (i) This mark of saving grace is not that you sense that God loves you, but that you both love Him and desire to love Him more.
 - (ii) Is this what you are longing for – a holier heart, a holier life, more love to God? It is true of you that the more you love Him, the more you want to love Him, and the more you love Him, the more you hate sin – not perfectly, because of your indwelling sin, but really? This is a good indicator then that you really are born again of His Spirit.
 - (iii) If you don’t then pray and ask God to put that love in your heart that you would truly trust in Jesus – out of love – and be saved. Amen.