

“The Beauty of Holiness”
(Revelation 4)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Edwards is showing us the essence of true Christianity, of the religion that saves.
 - a. He’s told us that it has everything to do with being indwelt by the Spirit.
 - (i) Adam and Eve lost the Spirit in the Fall.
 - (ii) But Christ did what was necessary for His return.
 - (iii) His presence is what gives us spiritual life.
 - b. The evidence that we have this life is the new use the Spirit gives us of the abilities we already have.
 - (i) The Lord has endowed us with a mind, heart and will by nature.
 - (ii) When He gives us the Spirit, we don’t gain a new ability, a new faculty, but we are given the ability to use these natural faculties in a new and spiritual way.
 - (iii) We begin to see things we didn’t see before: particularly, God’s glory and beauty.
2. As I mentioned last week, this is Edwards’ explanation of irresistible grace.
 - a. Once we see this glory, this beauty, everything else follows.
 - (i) We will love Him, we will trust Him, we will turn from our sins and follow Him.
 - (ii) And we will do this because our desire will be for Him, and not merely for the things He gives us.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, Edwards begins to probe this subject more deeply.
 - a. What exactly is it that we will see in God that will make us love Him so much?
 - b. The answer is simply: it is that which makes all that He has and is lovely: His holiness.
 - c. Gracious affections are drawn out by the beauty they see in God’s moral uprightness or His holiness.
2. Let’s consider for a moment two things:
 - a. First, the difference between the natural and moral perfections of God.
 - b. Second, how it is His moral perfection that makes Him truly lovely to the believer.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let’s consider the difference between the natural and moral perfections of God.

1. All of God’s rational creatures have both moral and natural qualities.
 - a. All men have some natural good and evil: they have some strengths, natural virtues, though no one is perfect; and all are subject to some natural evil in this world – this is the result of the Fall.
 - b. They also have moral qualities:
 - (i) If they are unbelievers, they are morally evil and have no moral good.
 - (ii) If they are believers, they have some moral good, but still have moral evil.
 - c. The same is true of the angels.

- (i) They have natural good: their great understanding, their great strength, the honor of their position as ministers in God's kingdom, being called thrones, dominions, principalities and powers.
 - (ii) But their moral good is their perfect holiness, their pure and fiery love for God, the saints and one another.
 - (iii) The fallen angels possess some natural good, as the holy angels, but they have nothing of the moral good that is in the holy angels.
2. The point is that both men and angels reflect the two kinds of perfections in God. This is what we mean when we say that men and angels are made in His image.
- a. God Himself has natural and moral perfections.
 - b. His natural perfections are His infinite greatness, power, knowledge, His eternity, His omnipresence, His awful and terrible majesty.
 - c. His moral perfections are His infinite goodness, righteousness, truth, faithfulness, or in one word, His holiness.
- B. Second, let's consider that it is God's moral perfection that makes Him truly lovely to the believer.
1. Those who are holy persons – or who have the moral image of God restored in them by the grace of regeneration, by the Spirit – love the things of the Lord first of all for their holiness.
- a. They love God for His holiness; not exclusively for it, since they love Him for all of His attributes, but most of all for His holiness because it is what gives beauty to His whole being.
 - b. It's the same thing that makes all of God's intelligent creatures lovely, holiness.
 - (i) Without holiness, the angels with all their strength and knowledge would be devils.
 - (ii) If they had these attributes without holiness, they wouldn't be more lovely for them, but more hateful and terrible.
 - (iii) But when these natural attributes are joined with holiness, it makes them more glorious.
 - c. Seeing this is the case, we shouldn't be surprised to find in Scripture that holiness is singled out as what makes God beautiful to His saints.
 - (i) It's holiness that makes His wisdom glorious – that He uses it to holy and not wicked ends.
 - (ii) It makes His power and majesty lovely and not horrible.
 - (iii) The same is true with His immutability – the fact that He cannot change. What if God was wicked and could never change?
 - (iv) Holiness is what should make God lovely to you.
 - d. The point is: this is where your love for God needs to begin – with a delight in His holiness and not in any other attribute, since none of His attributes are lovely without it. Edwards writes, "They that do not see the glory of God's holiness, cannot see anything of the true glory of his mercy and grace: they see nothing of the glory of those attributes, as any excellency of God's nature, as it is in itself; though they may be affected with them, and love them, as they concern their interest: for these attributes are no part of the excellency of God's nature, as that is excellent in itself, any otherwise

than as they are included in his holiness, more largely taken; or as they are a part of his moral perfection.”

2. What is true of your love for God’s nature should also true of everything else you are to love as believers.
 - a. Why should you love God’s people?
 - (i) It’s not just because they are a part of the same body, that you will be spending eternity with them, that God commands you to love them.
 - (ii) If you are a true believer, you will love them for what you see of the divine moral nature in them – their holiness.
 - (iii) That’s why they’re called saints (sanctified or holy ones). They have the moral image of God being restored in them.
 - b. Why should you love the holy angels: because of what they have of God’s moral uprightness, His holiness (Dan. 3:13, 17; Mark 8:38).
 - c. Why should you embrace Christianity? Because it is true and because it is a holy religion.
 - d. Why should you love God’s Word? Because it’s holy. The psalmist writes, “Your word is very pure, therefore Your servant loves it” (119:140).
 - e. Why should you love Jesus? Because He is the holy and righteous One (Acts 3:14). Edwards writes, “All the spiritual beauty of his human nature, consisting in his meekness, lowliness, patience, heavenliness, love to God, love to men, condescension to the mean and vile, and compassion to the miserable, etc., all is summed up in his *holiness*. And the beauty of his divine nature, of which the beauty of his human nature is the image and reflection, does also primarily consist in his holiness.”
 - f. You should love the Gospel because in it the holy beauty of God and Jesus Christ shine. It’s doctrine is wholesome and holy. It’s way of salvation by Jesus is a holy way.
 - g. You should love the glory of heaven because it is a holy city, the place where the holy God dwells (Isa. 63:15).
 - h. As a believer you should love these things primarily because of their moral purity or holiness.
 - i. This is what Edwards was speaking of that believers see and love, that unregenerate men cannot see and do not love.
3. Consider some Scriptural examples of the desire holiness creates in holy men and angels.
 - a. The psalmist in Psalm 119 expresses his desire for God’s holy Law, “How sweet are Your words to my taste! *Yes, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!” (v. 103).
 - b. David does so in Psalm 19:10, “They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.”
 - c. To Jesus, obedience to these holy commandments were like a hidden source of nourishment (John 4:32-34).
 - d. The angels in heaven praise God primarily for His holiness, “In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory’ (Isaiah 6:1-3). “And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not

cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come’” (Rev. 4:8).

- e. The saints in heaven do the same, “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (Rev. 15:4).
 - f. The same is true of the saints on earth:
 - (i) “O sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him. The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations” (Psalm 98:1-2).
 - (ii) The LORD is great in Zion, and He is exalted above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He” (99:2-3; cf. v. 5).
 - (iii) “Then Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD, my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God’” (1 Samuel 2:1-2).
 - g. Edwards writes, “By this therefore all may try their affections, and particularly their love and joy. Various kinds of creatures show the difference of their natures, very much in the different things they relish as their proper good, one delighting in that which another abhors. Such a difference is there between true saints, and natural men: natural men have no sense of the goodness and excellency of holy things at least for their holiness; they have no taste for that kind of good; and so may be said not to know that divine good, or not to see it; it is wholly hid from them; but the saints, by the mighty power of God, have it discovered to them; they have that supernatural, most noble and divine sense given them, by which they perceive it; and it is this that captivates their hearts, and delights them above all things; it is the most amiable and sweet thing to the heart of a true saint, that is to be found in heaven or earth; that which above all others attracts and engages his soul; and that whereby above all things, he places his happiness, and which he lobs upon for solace and entertainment to his mind, in this world, and full satisfaction and blessedness in another. By this, you may examine your love to God, and to Jesus Christ, and to the Word of God, and your joy in them, and also your love to the people of God, and your desires after heaven; whether they be from a supreme delight in this sort of beauty, without being primarily moved from your imagined interest in them, or expectations from them. There are many high affections, great seeming love and rapturous joys, which have nothing of this holy relish belonging to them.”
4. And so try your heart this evening to see if you love God for His natural good or for His holiness and moral excellency.
- a. It’s possible, apart from God’s grace, to be affected by His greatness, power and majesty.
 - (i) The devils have lost the spiritual knowledge of God, but they can still see His natural glory and tremble before Him.
 - (ii) God made His people tremble on Mt. Sinai at His greatness, but many soon made a golden calf and worshipped it, and many were destroyed in the wilderness.
 - (iii) God will make sure that both angels and devils, saints and sinners will see His glory on the Day of Judgment.

- (iv) God's enemies will see it in a very clear and affecting way in hell for all eternity. They will know that He is the Lord.
 - (v) "Wicked men and devils will see, and have a great sense of everything that appertains to the glory of God, but only the beauty of his moral perfection; they will see his infinite greatness and majesty, his infinite power, and will be fully convinced of his omniscience, and his eternity and immutability; and they will see and know everything appertaining to his moral attributes themselves, but only the beauty and amiableness of them; they will see and know that he is perfectly just, and righteous, and true, and that he is a holy God, of purer eyes than to behold evil, who cannot look on iniquity; and they will see the wonderful manifestations of his infinite goodness and free grace to the saints; and there is nothing will be hid from their eyes, but only the beauty of these moral attributes, and that beauty of the other attributes, which arises from it. And so natural men in this world are capable of having a very affecting sense of everything else that appertains to God, but this only."
- b. And so examine your heart, examine your experience by these things, and make sure you love the Father and the Son for what makes them truly lovely: holiness. Amen.