

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem background

Two great misunderstandings of the church

There is no doubt that true believers sometimes fall into weakness and sin, especially in the face of the significant challenges brought about by the secular trend. For example, modern young people are often involved in sinful actions such as violence, drug addiction, alcohol abuse, pornography, and Internet addiction. Most of the time, when we do something wrong, it's not that we don't know it's wrong and do it; it's that we know it's a sin, but we still decide to do it. Scott Aniol points out a common misconception among evangelical churches today that through theological education, teaching Christians to “rightly understand God, the nature of Christianity, and their responsibilities as followers of Christ” can solve the problem of Christians’ sinful actions. Yet emphasizing the correct doctrine does not seem to improve Christian living. Because “educating the mind, it seems, is not enough to change the will...There is a great missing link between the mind and the will that we must recover if Christians are going to connect what they know to be true with how they live”.¹

And Aniol further pointed out that there is another dangerous misunderstanding in our day that is “the essence of religion is simply obedience to God’s commands.”² Many Christians do have this misconception that it seems that as long as he fulfills his religious responsibilities as required by the Bible and the church, he is a godly Christian. But in fact, that is not the case. There is nothing wrong with fulfilling religious responsibilities, and the real question is, why are we fulfilling these responsibilities? We should ask ourselves, why should we study the Bible? Why

¹ Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2009), 42.

² Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 44.

Attend Sunday Worship every week? Why pray? Why listen to sermons? Why sings praise? Why tithing? Why serves the church? Why preaches the Gospel? Why Live a Holy Life?

The hypocrisy of Christianity

Another more serious problem in the church today is hypocrisy. Don Thorsen critically pointed out that “regrettably, some of the worst hypocrites exist in churches.”³ And this is “one of the most common reasons given by people for avoiding church attendance.”⁴ He also defined that “hypocrisy has to do with claiming the moral high ground, when in fact one transgresses the same moral.”⁵ To the non-Christian world, Christians do not seem very consistent in what they say relative to what they do. However, it can be said that one of the main reasons Christians fail to be the witnesses of Christ to the world is the failure of church leaders⁶: what preachers teach in the pulpit is true, but what they do is false. It is the leader's hypocrisy that creates a large number of hypocritical followers. Many well-known theologians and ordinary seminar students are nothing more than “theoreticians,” and even some famous “pastors” are nothing more than actors on the church stage. A person can be knowledgeable in theological knowledge and be godly in appearance. Still, he lives a two-faced life, showing “piety” in church and ministry but no reverence for God in private life. The hallmark of a hypocrite is that what he says is far from what he does, especially when it comes to morality. Yet, this dichotomy is not only characteristic of unregenerate sinners, but even true believers still have such struggle or tendency. Why can belief be just ideas in mind without affecting one’s life practice? Why can belief be just ideas in mind without affecting one’s life practice? How can a person get his doctorate of Theology but only increase his theological knowledge and debating skills without increasing his love of God (and his people), much less the will to obey God and the passion for evangelism? If

³ Don Thorsen, *What's True about Christianity?: An Introduction to Christian Faith and Practice* (Claremont, CA: Claremont Press, 2020), 171.

⁴ Thorsen, *What's True about Christianity*, 173.

⁵ Thorsen, *What's True about Christianity*, 172.

⁶ Thorsen, *What's True about Christianity*, 175-176.

theological knowledge cannot change one's heart, what is the role and value of such knowledge? If Christians cannot convert theological understanding into holy living, they will only become actors of hypocrisy and make the whole of Christianity despised by the world. This is not acceptable Christianity! It is not glorifying God with our whole life.

Why religious affections?

Religious affections play a vital role in all three cases. The misunderstanding of correct teaching can solve all life corruption. Most of the time, when we do something wrong, it's not that we don't know it's wrong and do it. It's that we know it's a sin, but we still decide to do it. The root problem behind wrong living is not wrong thinking; education of the mind does not directly influence the will to do what is right. Aniol confirmed that religious affections are the missing link between the mind (what we know) and the will (what we do).⁷ The misunderstanding of fulfilling religious responsibilities is what the Christian faith is all about, and the severe problem of the hypocrisy of God's Servants is also the case. In all cases that exhausted to fulfill one's religious duties, religious affections are the missing motivation.

On the other hand, in all the phenomena of being willing to fulfill religious responsibilities, religious affections have also become a watershed between loving God and loving oneself. Even though from the appearance, many people seem to be equally active in religious affairs. But if they are not doing it out of love for God, they are doing it for themselves. It seems that there are only two poles in the life of a Christian, either to love God or to love oneself, with no other intermediary possibility. If there is something wrong in our religious affections, everything we do is wrong. That's why Edwards sees religious affections as the hallmark of true religion.⁸

⁷ Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 46-47.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E Smith, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 95.

The polarization of what we know and what we do generate by the imbalance of reason and the will (affections) is a severe problem in today's churches. However, reformed churches often ignore the balance of understanding and actions and urgently need to adjust to this imbalance. However, many churches are almost unaware of this danger, nor do they feel it has an urgent need for balance. For the reborn and saved Christians, the revelation of the Bible is "the way of life," theology and doctrines are the ways to participate in this life of vitality. However, in reality, there seems to be a huge gap that cannot be bridged between knowing and doing the knowledge of the truth in mind and genuinely godly life. The most severe result of this gap is that church leaders cannot lead the congregations they shepherd to be the bright testimony of Jesus Christ to the world so that Christianity is more and more despised by the world and loses its role and functions as "the light and salt," which simply does not glorify God. It is fair to say that religious affections, as the missing point in the Christian lives and the message of the church pulpit, cause such kinds of problems. Today's churches often ignore the balance of knowing and doing, which urgently needs to be corrected from such imbalance. However, it is said that the church is almost unaware of this, nor does it feel that it has an urgent need for balance.

Why Jonathan Edwards?

First, Edwards is a great theologian and a godly Christian in history. He was a great man born in 1703 and died at fifty-four in 1758. A fellow preacher, Gilbert Tennent, announcing Edwards' death in a Philadelphia newspaper on March 28, 1758, described him as a great divine; divinity was his favorite study and the ministry his most delightful employment'.⁹ John Wesley praised him as "That good and sensible man...that great man."¹⁰ And one of his most important partners during the First Great Awakening movement, George Whitefield, wrote in his journal that "Mr.

⁹ Cited in Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), xix.

¹⁰ John Wesley, *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses*, 3rd ed., vol. 10 (Albany, New York: The Ages Digital Library, 1996), 552,561.

Edwards is a solid, excellent Christian ... I think I have not seen his fellow in all New England.”¹¹ Not only did his contemporary fellow revivalist admire him, but even modern theologians also paid a compliment to him. “No man is more relevant to the present condition of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards. ... He was a mighty theologian and a great evangelist at the same time.”¹² “In trying to understand the religious affections, we can obviously do no better than to consult Jonathan Edwards, one of the great masters of the interior life and a peerless student of the religious affections.”¹³

Second, his *Religious Affections* has a holistic view of the Gospel. The whole discourse was based on the Bible and reformed theology. The most prominent feature is that the author describes the reformed whole gospel view from the perspective of religious experiences: the arrangement of the 12 signs in the book reflects Edwards' knowledge of godliness, and the process of discourse fully expresses the Gospel's doctrine of saving faith. His systematic and comprehensive expression of the Gospel emphasized the vital content of God's grace, sovereignty, freedom, sinful nature of man, the fundamental reason for believing in the Lord, performance, and results after conversion. It demonstrated a rich, realistic, correct, and extremely expensive truth of the Gospel.¹⁴ Therefore, his writings still have unique value today because today's Christians lack spiritual practice in their inner life and emotions. Edwards tells us how the life of a faithful Christian depends on spiritual practice to cultivate the correctness of will and emotions to live holy in this world, and the key to distinguishing between true and false beliefs is spiritual affections because: “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”¹⁵

¹¹ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2000), 311.

¹² Cited in Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), xvii.

¹³ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 294.

¹⁴ Edwards, *Works*, 2.392-396.

¹⁵ Edwards, *Works*, 2.95.

Third, religious affections are the key to the unity of knowledge and action. Edwards' religious affections are a key to connecting the reason and the will and bridging knowledge and behavior. Edwards advocates the standard reformed and Puritan notion of the convergence of the distinct yet inseparable powers or capacities or capabilities of the human soul. It is a specific unified person that thinks, wills, and feels. There are not three persons-in-miniature vying for control internally in the mind of a man or woman.¹⁶ He focuses on correct thinking, suitable affections, and proper behavior. He highly emphasized the importance of holy practice in his *Religious Affections*: in the work of regeneration, God infused grace to make “a mighty and manifold change wrought in the human soul.” And all these changes are “calculated and framed” to meet the very end of regeneration, that is, Christian practice.¹⁷

1.2 Statement of the research problem

Under the constant threat of false teaching from the “world,” Christians face a severe reason-emotion-will imbalance today, which sets a big obstacle for the unity of knowing and doing. This thesis attempts to critically evaluate Jonathan Edwards' thought on religious affection by analyzing the assessment of modern theologians in the background of the reformed tradition. To clarify which part of his thought is biblical and which part is not. Discuss what does Jonathan Edwards' contribution to the transformation of knowledge (correct doctrines) to action (a holy life) for Christian life.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question of this thesis is how to transform theological knowledge into life-long holy practices. The relating sub-questions are what is Edwards' concept of religious affections? Is it an idea from the Bible or man (mainly John Locke)? Why is there a disconnection between what we know and what we do? How can we have

¹⁶ Jeffrey C. Waddington, *The Unified Operations of the Human Soul: Jonathan Edwards's Theological Anthropology and Apologetic* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2015), 278.

¹⁷ Edwards, *Works*, 2.398.

or do we already have such affections that unify human faculties as a whole? What is the fundamental motivation for religious affections to produce actions? And finally, how do transform knowledge into actions? What is the fundamental motivation for religious affections to produce actions? And finally, how do transform knowledge into actions?

1.4 Thesis Statement

For regenerated Christians, Jonathan Edwards' idea of religious affections answers the question of "how to transform theological knowledge in mind into a Holy life in actions." In other words, the answer for "how to progressively unify one's knowing and doing."

1.5 Implications of Research

As a guidance for sanctification. Edwards is known as a revival theologian. He puts great emphasis on removing the false and preserving the truth of faith. He believes that this is one of the essential elements of continuing revival. Whenever the faith is revived significantly, the church is likely to face a fatal blow from Satan unless we learn how to distinguish between true and false beliefs; distinguish the emotions and experiences after rebirth and salvation are different from those fake ones that have a glamorous appearance. If we do not differentiate between them, the consequences are often too terrible to describe.¹⁸ However, I think the revival of the church starts from a revival that focuses on the individual level and starts from the revival of religious affections. Christians can conduct self-examination based on Edwards' research results on spiritual affection, identify the authenticity of their own, discover and eliminate false elements, practice true godly affections, and use this as the benchmark of sanctification, striving to run and grow towards it throughout the life.

¹⁸ Edwards, *Works*, 2.119-121.

Second, as a reflection on the Reformed Evangelical Movement. From my own observations, religious affections are also the missing link in this movement. As the leader of the reformed evangelical movement, pastor Stephen Tong has implemented the principle of “reforming the whole person”¹⁹ he put forward for many years, which has laid the foundation for preaching the Word of God. However, the teaching of religious affections and the guidance for sanctifying affections in the movement are still scarce. As a result, weakness in education and cultivating religious affections leads to some inappropriate phenomena.

Pastor Tong has constantly stressed in various occasions and sermons that we should be striving to do God's will and should be zealous in evangelism, calling on listeners, especially those in the Reformed Gospel movement, to learn and inherit his fighting spirit, which is to “squeeze” yourself for the Lord.²⁰ And he himself did set a successful example for others in the movement. As a leader of a movement, it is reasonable and necessary for Pastor Tang to set an example and lead others, but in the ardent desire to serve God, the influence or role of the example is very limited or it is very superficial. It might be said that this model of emphasizing “example” is, in some ways, a threat to the Reformed Evangelical movement because it has the temptation to transfer the love of God to the love of man (Pastor Tong). That's why some people in the movement care more about Pastor Tang himself and not so much about what Pastor Tang wants them to focus on, that is God who made him and the kingdom and work of God that he is striving for.

As a consequence, what can be seen in the reformed evangelism movement is that many people are overwhelmed by the heavy burden of ministries, and some even see this exhausting life as a kind of torture. As a result, some people have a lot of

¹⁹ It was noted by Pastor Tong in sermons said the following: “Faith is the returning of reason to God's word, emotions to God's love, and will to God's will.”

²⁰ Also in Pastor Tong's sermons, he said: “If you seek only rational knowledge and degrees, and do not seek to do God's will, that preaches the Gospel with power to convert people to God. Then you have nothing to do with the Reformed Evangelical Movement.” “The servant of God needs to be ‘crazy’ for the Lord, but this craziness is based on truth and wise counsel. A servant of God must be willing to go ‘crazy’ and then prepare yourself to be used by God.”

complaints about what they are doing and even leave the movement in the end. And those who haven't left for the time being also seem to be struggling with such pain in a powerless life. If the Holy Spirit, as Pastor Tong received, did not motivate him to actively “squeeze” himself, passive “squeezing” would only be torture or persecution. But how can a person be single-minded like this to God?²¹

Another phenomenon or side effect of this movement that we should be aware of is that successful theological seminars do not very successful in bringing people into prayer chapels. We seem to be raising Christians who love only theology, not God. This is not limited to Reformed Evangelical churches but is a problem for Reformed Churches worldwide. It's an unnecessary dichotomy.²²

What is the driving force in the heart of Pastor Tong, as well as the great saints throughout history, in their self-sacrifice for the Lord? Of course, whether a person can have such strong will and motivation for a forcefully advancing depends entirely on the sovereignty of God. Specifically, the power of the Holy Spirit. All the problems above can be attributed to whether a person receives sufficient grace from God or whether his heart is filled with the Holy Spirit. However, this answer is too simple and superficial for me. We must know what exactly happens in this process? What did the Holy Spirit do in their heart to affect loving God and loving others? And is there anything we can do regarding our duty and responsibility to reverse our cold love for God?

Edwards answers all these questions from the perspective of his concept of religious affections. Therefore, I believe spiritual affection is the missing link between what we

²¹ Richard Pratt spoke in the World Reformer Fellowship 2019: “At least (indeed, he is not perfect), the pastor of this church has an undivided heart to God.” I think that's the highest praise to a servant of God can ever give by other people.

²² Pastor Billy Kristanto once reminded in an NREC sermon that “there is something wrong in the church today. Sometimes we see a phenomenon where the church seminar is packed, but the prayer meeting is empty. In contrast, other churches are the opposite. It appears that these people like to pray but not study, and vice versa. Thousands may participate in the NREC, but how about if we were to hold an online prayer meeting?” Then he quotes a revivalist named Ravenhill, “If you want to know how popular the church is, come to its Sunday morning service...but if you want to know how popular God is in that church, come to its prayer meeting.”

do and what we know, of course, in the business of the Christian faith. In addition to praying for God's grace, from the perspective of human responsibility, we must attach great importance to Jonathan Edwards' emphasis on religious affections as a reflection on the evolution of the Reformed Gospel movement, a review of our role as pastors in the ministry, and a reflection on how we live as children of God to please Him truly. This is also especially important in the age of facing significant challenges from the Charismatics Movement and various deviations so-called “spiritual movement.” Discrimination and cultivation of religious affections to be the "light of the world" with the integration of knowledge and action should be the top priority in the church's pastoral practice. The message of the church pulpit is the key to building up the spiritual affections of the believers. As pastors, church leaders, and biblical information providers, how to apply Edwards’ spiritual affections in actual worship and pastoral care, preach the message carefully and prevent the congregation from falling into false affections—by obeying the truth, teaching them to become spiritually healthy Christians, leading and guiding the congregation to cultivate spiritual emotions, and avoiding and defending the invasion of false religious affections.

1.6 Research Method

The first part of the thesis adopts theory-oriented research, including the analysis and description of the nature of Edwards' religious affections and a comparative analysis of the empirical epistemology of John Locke. He is believed to have heavily influenced Edwards' development of his concept of religious affections. The comparison aims to clarify whether the idea of religious affections was Edwards' original thinking or following Locke’s thoughts to identify which part of Edwards' thought ought to be discussed further.

The second part will also be conducted with theory-oriented research by analyzing and diagnosing the problems of “why we don’t have such religious affections that Edwards introduced” by identifying the relationship between affections, sin, and

salvation in Edwards' theology. And then, there will be a comparative analysis of Jonathan Edwards and Alvin Plantinga's thoughts on the relationships between reason and the will. For further understanding of how Edwards' religious affections work.

There will also be theory-oriented research in the first half of the third part by assessing Sang Hyun Lee's reconstruction of Edwards' idea of dispositional ontology. To clarify what is acceptable and what should be rejected in Lee's interpretation of Edwards. According to Edwards, the second half will be conducted with practice-oriented research by answering the primary concern of this thesis: how to transfer knowledge into actions.

1.7 Limitation

1) The research objectives mainly focus on Edwards' *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), and all his other writings relating to this concept will be discussed when necessary. Other writings of Edwards scholars shall be discussed regarding the themes and topics discussed herein.

2) This thesis will rely on Jonathan Edwards' available writing, a firsthand resource. This study will be carried out by using literary works containing textbooks and e-books accessed from the internet and the database established by Yale University on Jonathan Edwards: <http://edwards.yale.edu/>.

3) This thesis limits the discussion as analytic and practical in pastoral scope. This thesis is not intended to apply the argument against modern revivals, such as the charismatic movement or the Toronto blessing.

4) To produce a new perspective of Edward's writing against numerous current thinkers and writers on this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis.

5) No historical background analysis and biblical exegesis involved. Edwards' thought will be judged from non-biblical-theological criteria.

1.8 Research System

The first chapter will be the introduction.

The second chapter analyzes the nature of Edwards' religious affections by comparing John Locke's thoughts in his *Concerning Human Understanding* to identify which ideas Edwards borrowed from him and which he deviates from Locke's.

The third chapter will explain the reason for the inability to have religious affections from Edwards' doctrine of man and sin and discuss with Alvin Plantinga to understand how the reason and the will work in Edwards' concept of affections.

The fourth chapter will discuss Edwards' idea of disposition by critically evaluating the dispositional ontology of Sang Hyun Lee. And introduce Edwards' suggestions for inspiring religious affections to solve the main problem of "how to transform theological knowledge into a holy life."

The fifth chapter is the summary and conclusion.