

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The thesis is answering one question from the perspective of Jonathan Edwards that Christianity is facing today: why is there always a disconnection between knowing and doing for Christians? In other words, why correct doctrines in mind cannot always transfer into a holy life? Edwards has shown us this forcefully and evidently, that religious affection is the missing link between knowing and doing.

For Edwards, affections are primarily seats in the soul, and it is active, rational, deep, long-lasting, unite the soul as a whole, and consistently produce actions. While emotion emphasizes the union of soul and body, it is passive, irrational, superficial, fleeting, (often) disconnected from the mind and will, and fails to produce lasting actions. Notably, Edwards' concept of affections is discussed in the framework of the unity of the human soul: the two faculties of the soul, understanding, and will are not acting distinctly and separately, but as a unitary account." In other words, affection is the exercise of two faculties (understanding and will), the whole heart and soul.

Evidence shows that Edwards is not a follower of John Locke. He utilized Locke's empirical epistemology as a vehicle to serve his theological purposes. That describes what the Saints experienced in their regeneration and conversion—focusing on two themes, "the new spiritual sense" and "the sense of heart." Although Edwards draws on many of Locke's ideas in his "Concerning human understanding," Edwards' thinking of religious affections differs in many ways from Locke's empirical epistemology. The two notable departures of Edwards' thought from Locke's are the rejection of Locke's denial of innate ideas and the rejection of Locke's disagreement of affection in religion.

As Christians, we don't seem to have such religious affections that connect what we know and what we do. Edwards answers that we are not affected by these things of

religion because of sin. He uniquely proposed that “sin does very much consist in hardness of heart, which means a heart void of Holy affections.” The reason is that man lost God's spiritual and natural image (moral or natural principles) that Adam originally had in the Garden of Eden by the fall. Without control of God's moral principles, man's natural principles (self-love) became the sole master of the human soul. Adam's faculties were created in a perfectly harmonious, but now both the intellect and will succumb to sin. The result is that human reason and will are completely corrupted. Volitionally, the man from their original tendency toward God's holiness to the current tendency toward sin. The result is enmity against God. Intellectually, sin simply prevents their proper exercise in understanding the things of the divine. Consequently, sinful man can only understand speculative knowledge but fails to understand spiritual knowledge (which requires the obedience of the will to God).

However, what we lost in the fall is restored in Christ. After salvation, the reason and the will were both fallen by sin and restored by redemption simultaneously. According to Edwards, the divine and supernatural light restored sinners' sensible ability of the divine things, intellectual and accompanied by the restoration of the fallen will. At the same time, the new spiritual sense given to the saints in regeneration corrects the will of sinners by removing their prejudices of a depraved appetite and making the fallen reason to be “the right reason,” which is the ability to understand spiritual knowledge correctly. The spiritual knowledge consists primarily of the sense of divine beauty, which further eliminates the influence of their enmity against God. For Edwards idea of “sense” is the simultaneous exercise of both the faculties of reason and will.

Plantinga's interpretation of Edwards's thought on the relationship between reason and will ignore the basic premise of Edwards's unity of human faculties with affections at its core. He reads Edwards as a more or less straightforward intellectualist. In fact, it is meaningless to discuss which comes first, reason or will?

Because the suggestion that one of these faculties can override the others is precisely the hierarchical faculty psychology that Edwards was strongly opposed to in his day. There is no priority in the structure of reason and will. Given Edwards' insistence on the principle of "the unity of human soul," even for reborn Christians, it is a misunderstanding of Edwards to raise such a question. Because all the time, Edwards strongly emphasizes a balance and unity of both intellect and will.

As Christians, even though we have been regenerated, a reality that must be faced is the religious affections of true believers in this world are in a mixed state. We are still taking part in carnal affections to some extent in this world. Because grace is not sufficient to completely remove our sins. Edwards explains that the natural affections that are intermingled with the true spiritual affections boil down to self-love. It means that there is still a battle between the affections from the Holy Spirit and the affections from the flesh in the hearts of the saints, which is a battle for sovereignty between loving God and self-love. Yet this spiritual battle is not without hope because everything is under the sovereignty of God. Edwards thus develops an original idea of habit or disposition, which is not a quality possessed by a man but is the nature of man. Disposition is not will but greater than the will. It is the basic principle of functioning all faculties of the soul (reason and will) and the foundation of all actions. Thus, it is the root of affections, especially a natural habit or foundation for action. Human beings have such a disposition that could produce actions because God's essence is a constantly exercised inclination to repeat his already perfect actuality through further exercises. At the same time, disposition also has a relational character because there is perfect harmony and eternal relationship between the three persons of the inner life of the Triune God. Therefore, the regenerate or true Christians chosen by God are to be united with His own nature and participate in His holy disposition. As a result, they are communicated by God's dispositional nature as a disposition of true virtue. In addition, this union is the work of the three persons of the Trinity God, the Father who gave the Holy Spirit to unite the elects with the nature of the Son, Christ, who is the holy disposition that truly pleases God. Therefore, participation in

God's divine disposition enables the saints to have long-lasting spiritual affections and ultimately necessitates Christian moral practice. God increases, repeats, or multiplies his infinite fullness of good for His glory. Perhaps this goal is eventually achieved in God's chosen believers who genuinely share in the beauty of God's holiness and make true virtuous behavior a necessary consequence.

In assessing the “dispositional ontology” of Sang Hyun Lee’s interpretation of Edwards, he does not give enough attention to the basic grammar of orthodox Trinitarian theology as Edwards did. However, at least two points are acceptable (in Lee’s dispositional ontology), the dynamic view of God's existence in knowing and loving and the inherent relationality of the divine being. They are in line with Edwards’ theology and the orthodox Reformed tradition.

Then, how do transform knowledge into actions? All grace comes from the sovereignty of God. God not only invites us to participate in his holy disposition but also gives his people means of grace to exercise this disposition to make it a stable habit in the soul. For Edwards, there are four major religious responsibilities established by God to inspire and cultivate the spiritual affections of Christians: prayer, singing praises to God, the sacraments, and preaching. For prayer, as members of the body of Christ, pray for the prosperity and progress of the whole community, or the whole body of Christ can rightly move our hearts and prepare us to receive God's great promises of abundance that will be fulfilled in the last days. For music and singing praise that reflects the moral beauty and harmonies of the inner-Trinitarian life of God has the ability to lead listeners to taste the spiritual beauty of God, thereby arousing the spiritual affections of the saints, especially love and joy. For sacraments, the glorious picture and spiritual reality of "union with Christ" presented by the sacraments can inspire and promote love and joy in the hearts of the saints. For preaching, the principal task of the preacher or the purpose of the sermon was to make truth become real in the perception of hearers. The key to the sanctification of affections through preaching is to lead the hearers to "taste" the spiritual beauty of

God so that the audience's spiritual affections can be stimulated and promoted. At the same time, contemplation on Christ's holiness can lead to awareness of sin, which can also stimulate the spiritual affections of the listeners. Finally, for the question of how to transform theological knowledge into a dynamic holy life? For Edwards, it is fair to conclude that all God's people need to do is practice these disciplines according to their nature that God appointed. God will naturally use these means of grace to make his regenerated children have Christlike disposition and long-lasting spiritual affections as a dynamic living force of a life-long holy life.