

Edwards Notes

Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I, Pg 69

'In the latter part of May, 1735, this great work of the Spirit of God began obviously to decline, and the instances of conversion to be less numerous, both at Northampton and in the neighbouring villages. One principal cause of this declension, is undoubtedly to be found in the fact, that in all these places, both among ministers and private christians, the physical excitement had been greater than the human constitution can, for a long period, endure. Nothing, it should be remembered, exhausts the strength and the animal spirits, like feeling. One hour of intense joy, or of intense sorrow, will more entirely prostrate the frame, than weeks of close study. In revivals of religion, as they have hitherto appeared, the nerves of the whole man—of body, mind, and heart,—are kept continually on the stretch, from month to month; until at length they are relaxed, and become non-elastic; and then all feeling and energy, of every kind, is gone. Another reason is undoubtedly to be found in the fact, that those, who had so long witnessed this remarkable work of God, without renouncing their sins, had at length become hardened and hopeless in their impenitence. Mr. Edwards also attributes it, in part, to two striking events of Providence, at Northampton, and to two remarkable instances of enthusiastic delusion, in two of the neighbouring villages.

He mentions also a third cause, and one far more powerful, and more extensive in its influence, than either of the two last. This was an ecclesiastical controversy, growing out of the settlement of a minister at Springfield, in which he himself was ultimately compelled, though with great reluctance, to take a part; which agitated, not only the county of Hampshire, but the more remote churches of the province. Of this, a bare mention would alone be necessary, did we not find his connexion with it referred to, at a subsequent and most interesting period of his life.'

Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I, Pg 70.

'This series of events occurred during the revival of religion in the churches of that county, and was thought, by too powerfully engrossing the attention, both of ministers and people, in various places, to have hastened its conclusion. And there can be no doubt that this opinion was correct. A revival of religion is nothing but the immediate result of an uncommon attention, on the part of a church and

congregation, to the truth of God;—particularly to the great truths, which disclose the worth of the soul, and the only way in which it can be saved. Whenever, and wherever, the members of a church pay the due attention to these truths, by giving them their proper influence on their hearts, religion revives immediately in their affections and their conduct; and when the impenitent pay such attention, the kingdom of heaven immediately “suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” The only effectual way to put a stop to such a work of grace, is, therefore, to divert the attention of Christians and sinners from those truths which bear immediately on the work of salvation.

In the latter part of the summer, Mr. and Mrs. Edwards were called to mourn the death of another of his sisters, named Lucy, the youngest but one of his father’s children; who was born in 1715, and died August 21, 1736 17 , at the age of 21. After her they named their fifth child, who was born August 31, of the same year.

It was a peculiarly favourable dispensation of Providence, that, amid the multiplied cares and labours of this period, the health of Mr. Edwards was graciously preserved. A revival of religion to a minister, like the period of harvest to the husbandman, is the most busy and the most exhausting of all seasons; and during the progress of that, which he had just witnessed, not only was the whole time of Mr. Edwards fully occupied, but all the powers of his mind were laboriously employed, and all the feelings of his heart kept, from month to month, in high and powerful excitement. In addition to his ordinary duties as a teacher and pastor, his public lectures were now multiplied, private lectures were weekly appointed in different parts of the town, and his study was almost daily thronged by multitudes, looking to him as their spiritual guide. From the adjacent villages, also, great numbers resorted to him, for the same purpose, having the highest confidence in his wisdom and experience; and numerous ministers from various parts of the country, came to his house, to witness the triumphs of divine grace, and to gain, from his counsels and his measures, more just conceptions of the best manner of discharging the highest and most sacred duties of their office.”

Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I, Pg 79

‘This work was the first of a series of publications from Mr. Edwards, intended to explain the nature and effects of saving conversion, and the nature of a genuine work of the Holy Spirit in a community. As a religious narrative, it is one of the most interesting I have hitherto met with; having all that exactness of description and

vividness of colouring, which attend the account of an eyewitness, when drawn up, not from recollection, but in the very passing of the scenes which he describes. It proved a most useful and seasonable publication. For a long period, revivals of religion had been chiefly unknown, both in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe. The church at large had generally ceased to expect events of this nature, regarding them as confined to apostolic times, and to the ultimate triumphs of Christianity; and appear to have entertained very imperfect views of their causes, their nature, and the manner in which they ought to be regarded. In no previous publication had these important subjects been adequately explained. The particular event, which Mr. Edwards had the privilege of recording, viewed as a remarkable work of Divine grace, has, to this day, scarcely a parallel in the modern annals of the church. His own views of these subjects were alike removed from the apathy of unbelief, and the wildness of enthusiasm; they were derived, not merely from his familiarity with the facts, but from just conceptions of the intellectual and moral faculties of man, and from a thorough knowledge of the word of God. And while the “Narrative of Surprising Conversions” served to inspire the church at large with a new and higher kind of faith, and hope, and zeal, it also proved a safe directory of their views and their conduct. In a short time it was extensively circulated, both in England and Scotland; and in the latter country, as we shall soon have occasion to remark, its diffusion was speedily followed by salutary and important consequences.’

Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I, Pgs. 81-2

To it were prefixed five discourses, on the following subjects: I. Justification by Faith alone. Rom. iv. 5.

II. Pressing into the Kingdom of God. Luke xvi. 16.

III. Ruth’s Resolution. Ruth i.16.

IV. The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners. Rom. iii. 19.

V. The Excellency of Jesus Christ. Rev. v. 5, 6.

The first four of these discourses were delivered during the revival of religion, and were published at the earnest desire of those to whom they were preached. In fixing on the particular discourses, necessary to make up the volume, he was guided by the choice of the people. “What has determined them in this choice,” he observes, “is the experience of special benefit to their souls from these discourses. Their desire to

have them in their hands, from the press, has long manifested, and often expressed to me; their earnestness in it is evident from this, that though it be a year to them of the greatest charge that ever has been, by reason of the expense of building a new meeting-house, yet they chose rather to be at this additional expense now, though it be very considerable, than to have it delayed another year.” In publishing the discourse on “Justification,” he was also influenced by the urgent request of several ministers, who were present when a part of it was delivered, and whose opinion and advice he thought deserving of great respect. This discourse, though when first written of a much less size than as it is printed, was preached at two successive public lectures, in the latter part of 1734. It was a time, when the minds of the people, in all that section of country, were very much agitated by a controversy on that very subject; when some were brought to doubt of that way of acceptance with God, which they had been taught from their infancy was the only way; and when many were engaged in looking more thoroughly into the grounds of those doctrines in which they had been educated; that this discourse seemed to be remarkably blessed, not only in establishing the judgments of men in this truth, but in engaging their hearts in a more earnest pursuit of justification, by faith in the righteousness of Christ. “At that time,” says the author, “while I was greatly reproached for defending this doctrine in the pulpit, and just upon my suffering a very open abuse for it, God’s work wonderfully broke forth among us, and souls began to flock to Christ, as the Saviour in whose righteousness alone they hoped to be justified. So that this was the doctrine, on which this work, in its beginning, was founded, as it evidently was in the whole progress of it.” He regarded these facts as a remarkable testimony of God’s approbation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.’