

July 4, 2010 – 1 of 12 in Signs of Life

Five Devilish Distractions

from Seeking Signs of Life

Matthew 7:1-2, 15-20

INTRODUCTION

In 1746 Jonathan Edwards wrote a book called *Religious Affections*. The reason he wrote it is because twice in the previous decade there had been a great move of God throughout the colonies but especially in his own church in Northampton, Massachusetts. The whole event is known to history as the Great Awakening. But this revival had its critics. There were a lot of people who suspected that it was nothing but a bunch of hype and hysteria.

Their objections are still with us today. If we don't slay these dragons first, then most of you probably won't be able to hear anything said throughout this series because you'll be too distracted by one of these preconceived notions that are really unbiblical superstitions.

- DISTRACTION 1: BARNA-GAIN CHRISTIANS
- DISTRACTION 2: WITCH-HUNT PHOBIA
- DISTRACTION 3: INTROSPECTION-MANIA
- DISTRACTION 4: GNOSTIC ANTI-EMOTIONALISM
- DISTRACTION 5: JUSTIFICATION BY SIGNS

The Big Idea is that the devil doesn't want you thinking about signs of life because godly affections and pursuits are contagious among God's people.

DOCTRINE

I. DISTRACTION 1: BARNA-GAIN CHRISTIANS

A) Change the Meaning of a Word...

1. **Evangelical** (euangellion) – good news = Reformed / Gospel of Grace
2. **By the 20th Century** – the term stands for a consensus to “do culture”

B) Then Take a Poll...

1. George Barna’s assumptions:

“Born again Christians’ were defined in these surveys as people who said they have made a ‘personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today’ and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.”

www.barna.org

2. This is from a study entitled “Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians,” so what’s Barna doing (scientifically)?
 - a. He’s seeking for an explanation, but refusing the Bible’s explanation: his assumptions will only accept one explanation—that it’s an anomaly.

[1 Jn. 2:29] “you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”

[1 Jn. 3:9] “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning...”

C) And Don’t Question Anyone’s Sincerity!

1. Since the definition of “born again” is “someone who says they are born again,”
2. Well then seeking signs for this new life is nothing short of heresy!

***In case you didn’t notice, the upshot of this is that the American Media now defines what it means to be “born again,” so irresistibly in our consciousness, that theirs is the definition we have accepted over the Bible’s. It is an assumed, natural starting point. So think of the stark difference:

BARNA: Researched Profession > Label > Data = “Counter-Examples”

II. DISTRACTION 2: WITCH-HUNT PHOBIA

A) One of the Most Abused Verses in Scripture [Matthew 7:1-2]

1. Read the whole thing—including down in verses 15-20!
2. So one reason we are to remove the log from our own eye first is to get to the business of caring for each other's eyes! (v. 5)

B) Consumers Have No Categories for Permanence

1. All of life as a commercial transaction between the almighty, autonomous consumer and the subservient market-place.
2. What would a sovereign consumer say if the Wal-Mart greeter began to go through your bags all the way to your car...?

C) The Only Category We Do Have for Judging is a Witch-Hunt

1. Maybe it's all the anti-Puritan propaganda in popular art, going all the way back to the Scarlett Letter.
2. In this emotional frenzy, no one can hear other categories (reasons) in Scripture for stirring up godly affections FOR (not against) each other!

[Heb. 10:24-25] "And let us consider how to **stir up one another** to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

III. DISTRACTION 3: INTROSPECTION-MANIA

A) Objection: Won't This Just Make Us Self-Absorbed / Obsessed?

1. Looking at ourselves all the time is exactly what we don't want!
2. Beyond that, the thing that we're looking at is personal and experiential:
 - a. Therefore this will lead to a subjective faith.

B) Answer: It might—but there is a Godly and Ungodly Introspection

1. Does the counterfeit disprove the genuine article?

[Rom. 3:4] "Let God be true though every man were a liar!"
2. Remember, there are true and false versions of all of these things—so with introspection (we'll do a whole week on this):
 - a. The key to remember, again, is that signs point to things—not to themselves: true biblical introspection will always be Godward in its concerns:

Edwards 12 Signs of Genuine Spiritual Affections:

1) a spiritual sense, 2) not of us, or the sense, but of God, 3) especially the beauty of holiness, 4) rightly perceived, 5) with gospel conviction, 6) and gospel humiliation, 7) with a changed nature, 8) namely, that of Christ's, 9) softening the heart away from sin, 10) and towards the sum and symmetry of Christ's excellencies, 11) each affection cultivating the longing for more, 12) and what is more is the holiness of life: in all of life and to the end of life.

IV. DISTRACTION 4: GNOSTIC ANTI-EMOTIONALISM

A) Replacing One Pagan Doctrine with Another

1. The main Greek idea of the soul was that it had two "parts"
 - a. **Mind** (understanding) and **Will** (inclination)
 - b. **Appetites** (passions/affections) belonged to the bodily or animal constitution

- c. In the modern world, we might add Darwinian evolution to this pagan idea: i.e. that the affections are base instincts once meant for survival (but retained) in the species.
- d. When Enthusiasm reared its ugly head, the church resurrected the pagan psychology.

2. But in the biblical psychology, the HEART is meant to be One

- a. Affections are the soul's being affected by rational persuasion: they are more than mere emotions, though they are not less. Emotions may be chemically driven, but so is you're walking to church or disciplining your child.

[Ps. 86:11] "Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; **unite my heart** to fear your name."

[Deut. 6:4-5] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is **one**. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." **PowerPoint on Biblical division of the soul**

- b. The idea that the original essence of a created thing is evil is Gnosticism.

B) "Fact...Faith...Feeling" – Which is Easier?

[Mk. 2:9-11] "Which is easier, **to say** to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or **to say**, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic—'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.'"

"True religion consists largely in the affections...The religion which God requires and will accept does not consist of weak, dull, and lifeless wishes which scarcely raise us above indifference."
JONATHAN EDWARDS,

Religious Affections

- a. A man who was just blind and now can see doesn't have indifferent eyes: he looks everywhere. A man who grows new legs doesn't have indifferent legs: he runs.

[Acts 3:8-9] "And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God."

C) God Commands the Emotions

[Ps. 37:4] "Delight yourself in the LORD..."

[Rom. 12:11] "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit..."

[Phi. 4:4] “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

“Some actually orchestrate worship in such a way that the affections of the heart are reigned in and, in some cases, even suppressed. People often fear the external manifestation of internal zeal and love and desire and joy.” SAM STORMS, Signs of the Spirit, 53

V. DISTRACTION 5: JUSTIFICATION BY SIGNS

A) You’ve heard of sola fide—this is sola signa

1. Reply: In the doctrine of salvation we always draw a distinction between the “root” and the “fruit”.
2. Positive signs may prove life or they may not: but no signs means no life...
 - a. So the value of this series is (first and foremost) gospel-ground-clearing.

[Lk. 18:24–27] “Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ But he said, ‘What is impossible with men is possible with God.’”

“He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart.” JONATHAN EDWARDS

[2 Tim. 3:1, 4–5] “In the last days there will come...lovers of pleasure rather than **lovers** of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

B) Despairing by Comparing

1. I want **that** for me! Depends what we mean by “that.”
 - a. Do we want that portion of Christ that manifests itself in the affection: or do we covet the individual’s expression itself?

[1 Cor. 12:4, 11] “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

One of the most striking evidences of sinful human nature lies in the universal propensity for downward drift. In other words, it takes thought, resolve, energy, and effort to bring about reform. In the grace of God, sometimes human beings display such virtues. But where such virtues are absent, the drift is invariably toward compromise,

comfort, indiscipline, sliding disobedience and decay that advances, sometimes at a crawl and sometimes at a gallop, across generations. People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, and obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.

For the Love of God

D. A. CARSON,

APPLICATION

Some tips on Signs of the Spirit (by Sam Storms) in our Small Group Studies:

1. This series is NOT intended to follow along that book; rather that book is intended to supplement this study: so you will have to “cross-pollinate” your brains on Sunday morning and your brains that are in Storms’ book. So these sermons are not structured to study Edwards’ 12 Signs per se. We will glean from that, but we are looking at the same thing through the lens of the impossible commands of Christ to dead men. So each sermon will have titles like “Exist and Live!” or “Hunger and Delight!” or “Kill and Die!” or “Trust and Obey!” which are a series of commands to perform what you’re old nature could not—such that if this is not what you hear and feel, it will be a sure sign that you’re not born again.
2. For the groups not doing Signs of the Spirit, make a point to study the Echo Chamber questions extra carefully for small group.
3. For anyone that does want to get deeper into this important subject, you can’t go wrong by reading Edwards’ class on the Religious Affections. There are probably audio versions of that book online.