

THE  
SPIRIT  
OF  
REVIVAL

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DISCOVERING THE WISDOM  
OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

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R. C. SPROUL

AND

ARCHIE PARRISH

With the Complete, Modernized Text of

*The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*

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## FOREWORD

by Archie Parrish

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### *Revival and Reformation: Today's Greatest Need*

When you read R. C. Sproul's Introduction you will see that he makes it abundantly clear that the greatest need in today's world is the revival and reformation of the Christian Church!

I became convinced of this a few years ago and began looking for help on the subject. The last time God moved in global revival was between 1904 and 1910. Since I knew no one who was an eyewitness to that movement, I searched for books dealing with the subject.

I found the literature on revival to be voluminous! Richard Owen Roberts has published an annotated bibliography on revival containing 5,983 titles. In the preface to that volume Roberts comments, "When it comes to literature on the biblical principles of revival . . . there is a paucity of good material."<sup>1</sup> But of Edwards's *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, he says, "This is one of the most important volumes on revival ever published and should be carefully read by every person deeply interested in revival."<sup>2</sup>

Theologian R. C. Sproul, my longtime friend, for years had been telling me how important the writings of Jonathan Edwards were. Roberts's comment moved me to seriously study *The Distinguishing Marks*. As I read, I was challenged by its truth. I was also concerned about the difficulty of deciphering the text.

Edwards lived about 250 years ago. Some of the words he used do not have the same meaning today. His sentences are compound and complex, sometimes extending almost a full page. I had to think long and hard on each page to understand what Edwards was saying. But when I finished the work, I found myself in agreement with Roberts. *Distinguishing Marks* is “must” reading for anyone interested in revival.

This includes laypeople with little or no formal training in theology and people who do not have the time to wade through Edwards’s complex sentences and archaic terms. A study of both Scripture and history shows that God usually brings revival through “nobodies from nowhere,” humble people who lived in little-known places who in their own time were not considered celebrities. The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian believers, “Simply consider your own calling, brothers; not many of you were wise, humanly speaking, not many mighty, not many noble. But God has chosen the world’s foolish things to put to shame the learned; and God has chosen the weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen the world’s insignificant and despised people and nobodies in order to bring to nothing those who amount to something, so that nobody may boast in the presence of the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:26-29, *Berkeley*).

Many of the anointed leaders of revival have been young men under thirty years of age. Though Edwards was in his thirties, George Whitefield, a coworker with Edwards, was twenty-two, and Evan Roberts, the primary leader of the Welsh revival, was twenty-four.

For my own benefit, I decided to simplify *Distinguishing*

*Marks*. I replaced many of the archaic words. I shortened most of the sentences. I changed all of the Scripture references to the *New International Version*. Edwards did not give references for many Scripture allusions; so I added these and also placed many of the texts in the footnotes so they were easily consulted. Then I pulled together an outline for the whole book and made it the bulk of the Table of Contents. While I was doing all this, I was also meeting each week for Bible study with a group of seventeen men. When they discovered what I had done, they asked if the whole group could work through *Distinguishing Marks*. I prepared a guide to facilitate study and discussion in small groups. Then I gave the new work a title to express my prayer and expectation: *Do It Again, Lord—Personal and Church Preparation for the Coming Great Awakening*. That work was the forerunner of this book, *The Spirit of Revival*.

R. C. Sproul for many years has been my theological mentor. Knowing his love for Edwards, I asked him to look over what I had done to this writing of Edwards. He encouraged me to share this with as many people as possible. Word spread to others about the discussion group, and requests began coming in from across the country. So I prepared a Leader's Guide. This Leader's Guide provided the detailed process for establishing and maintaining Key Covenant Teams in the local church. At this printing more than 500 pastors have recruited four to twelve men and spent five weeks reading and discussing this material. The Discussion Guide is printed in the back of this book, and the Leader's Guide is available from Serve International, 4646 North Shallowford Road, Suite 200, Atlanta, Georgia 30338, telephone: 770-642-2449, fax: 770-642-4195.

Edwards wrote *Distinguishing Marks* out of extensive first-hand experience. The Awakening began in 1732. In 1737 he wrote *The Faithful Narrative of the Surpassing Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*. The Awakening reached its peak in 1740, and traces of it continued until 1770. Edwards wrote *Distinguishing Marks* in 1741. Thus, he had time to ponder and analyze what was happening.

For this publication, R. C. Sproul has provided a “Historical Introduction,” an overview of Edwards’s *Distinguishing Marks*.

The purpose of this edited work is to provide truth that will enable today’s Christians to understand how to distinguish the work of the Holy Spirit as explained by the apostle John in 1 John 4. By understanding and acting on this truth, believers will grow in personal holiness and will be prepared for the coming revival.

As you study *The Spirit of Revival*, pray that God will once again pour out His Spirit in mighty power, revive His people, and reform His church. May God once again use the truth contained in Edwards’s original work to enable His people to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in their individual lives and in His Church. May He give us another Great Awakening—soon!

*Archie Parrish*  
*Atlanta, 1999*

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FOOTNOTES TO THIS SECTION

1. Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival Literature, an Annotated Bibliography with Biographical and Historical Notices* (Wheaton, Ill.: Roberts Publishers, 1987), p. x.
2. Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, Ill.: Roberts Publishers, 1982), p. 150.

# INTRODUCTION

by R. C. Sproul

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## *Revival and Reformation*

*Post tenebras lux* . . . “After darkness, light.” So read the motto of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The titanic theological struggle of that era was a fight to bring the Gospel into the full light of day after years of being consigned to obscurity to the point of eclipse beneath the umbra of the sacerdotal supplanting of it by Rome.

With the rescue of the Gospel from darkness and distortion, a revival was evoked that transcended any revival of faith witnessed either by previous or subsequent periods of Christian history. The Reformation was not merely a Great Awakening; it was the Greatest Awakening to the true Gospel since the Apostolic Age. It was an awakening that demonstrated the power of God unto salvation.

It is noteworthy that this period in history is commonly referred to as the Reformation and not the Revival. What is the difference between *revival* and *reformation*? As the etymologies of the words suggest, *revival* describes a renewal of spiritual life, while *reformation* describes a renewal of the forms and structures of society and culture. It is not possible to have true reformation without first having true revival. The renewal of spiritual life under the power of the Holy Spirit is a *necessary* condition for reformation but not a *sufficient* condition for it. Therefore,

though it is not possible to have reformation without revival, it is possible to have revival without reformation. Why is that the case? There are at least two reasons. The first is that revival brings with it the conversion of souls to Christ, who are at the moment of conversion spiritual babes. Infants have little impact on the shaping of cultural institutions. It is when vast numbers of converted people approach maturity in their faith and sanctification that the structures of the world are seriously challenged and changed. If vast numbers of people are converted but remain infantile in their spiritual growth, little impact is made by them on society as a whole. Their faith tends to remain privatized and contained within the confines of the arena of mere religion.

The second reason concerns the scope and intensity of the revival. If the revival is limited in scope and intensity, its impact tends to be restricted to a small geographical area and also tends to be short-lived. Yet it may have rivulets of abiding influence into future generations. Such a rivulet is the work of Jonathan Edwards presented and discussed in this book. The Great Awakening that occurred in New England in the mid-eighteenth century has left an indelible mark on America, though that mark has faded dramatically over time. No one would today confuse New England with a mecca of vibrant gospel faith. Nor is there any danger of the works of Jonathan Edwards pushing any contemporary authors off the *New York Times's* list of best sellers.

Nevertheless, the influence of Edwards as well as that of the magisterial reformers Luther and Calvin continue to this day. Their words are still in print, and there is a cadre of Christians who devour their writings. The things of which those men of God wrote maintain a vital relevance down to our own day.

William Cooper's original preface to Edwards's *The Distinguishing Marks* describes the state of the church prior to the Great Awakening. It could just as well serve as a commentary for our own times.

### *The Cultural Context*

We live on the far side of a watershed in American history. Our nation has gone through two mighty revolutions since Edwards wrote his treatise. The first revolution was that which yielded the foundation of the United States into an independent republic. Edwards labored before the Revolutionary War that won the independence of the American colonies from the British crown.

In the eighteenth century the western world witnessed two major revolutions—the American Revolution and the French Revolution. The two have often been compared and contrasted by historians. The chief difference between the two may be seen in the root causes of the conflicts.

In the case of the French Revolution, the objective of the revolutionaries was to bring a radical change to French culture including the political institutions, customs, mores, and ethos of the old order. In a sense it was a revolt against the status quo and deeply entrenched traditions. The conflict was one of profound bloodshed accompanied by a reign of terror.

By way of contrast, the American Revolution was not fought to overthrow or destroy the old order but to preserve it. The colonists resisted changes enacted by Parliament that threatened the established American way of life.

Sometimes we tend to forget that America did not begin as

a nation at the end of the eighteenth century. The settlers began the task of colonization of America in the early years of the seventeenth century with the Jamestown settlement in 1607 and the Massachusetts settlement in 1620. We tend to forget that between 1607 and the inauguration of George Washington, more than 175 years of time elapsed, only slightly less time than has transpired between George Washington and William Jefferson Clinton. We tend to telescope our history to the extent that we see Miles Standish and Thomas Jefferson as virtual contemporaries.

The point is, the time that elapsed between the beginning of colonial America and the Revolutionary War was ample time to establish an American way of life with its own traditions, customs, mores, and cultural ethos. Those elements were not suddenly and dramatically overthrown by the American Revolution. Indeed, as is the case with all cultural customs, they were exposed to gradual changes and adaptations—but without radical overthrow until the Second American Revolution.

When I speak of the Second American Revolution I am thinking of the cultural revolution that took place in the decade of the sixties and early seventies. This revolution was far more drastic in its consequences for American life than was the first Revolution. It ushered in a new order that has left our culture gripped in an ongoing cultural war that has a nation divided and fragmented over issues of sexual morality, the relation between church and state, the collapse of the family unit, the emergence of a drug culture, and a radical change in the customs of polite speech. A culture that once embraced normative ethics has given way to an ethos of relativism. The impact on education, law, the press, and

virtually every societal institution has been enormous. Clearly we are living in a new order, which some, including myself, view as a new disorder.

It is this cultural context we must keep in view when we speak of spiritual revival and/or reformation. It is this present order, including the state of the church, that we must understand when we seek to find relevance or application for Edwards's work to our own time.

During the same time that the cultural revolution was in high gear, significant events were unfolding within the church. During the decade of the sixties we saw the explosion of the charismatic movement that spread far beyond the confines of Pentecostal churches and penetrated mainline denominations. Subsequently it has become a major force within contemporary evangelicalism. In the years since the sixties we've also seen a large decline in the membership of liberal churches and a corresponding rise in membership in conservative and evangelical churches. Polls indicate a marked increase in the adherents of evangelicalism since 1960.

During the same period we have witnessed a rising involvement of people in occult practices and the advent of New Age philosophy and religion. A new fascination with supernaturalism has slowed the tide of the creeping naturalism so entrenched in the secular culture.

### *The Relevance of Edwards's Distinguishing Marks*

What do these trends signify? Are we in the midst of a major revival? Or are we seeing spurious marks of revival? Here is where

the revisiting of Edwards's *Distinguishing Marks* can be most helpful. For us to discern the presence of an authentic revival, we need to know what such a revival would look like.

When signs of revival appear on the landscape of history, one of the first questions that is raised is that of authenticity. Is the revival genuine, or is it a mere outburst of superficial emotion? Do we find empty enthusiasm backed by nothing of substance, or does the enthusiasm itself signal a major work of God? In every recorded revival in church history, the signs that follow it are mixed. The gold is always mixed with dross. Every revival has its counterfeits; distortions tend to raise questions about the real. This problem certainly attended the eighteenth-century Great Awakening in New England, in which Jonathan Edwards was a key figure. His *Distinguishing Marks* provides a careful analysis of that revival, noting its substance as well as its excesses. But the Puritan divine's study of the matter has more relevance than its application to that singular awakening. It provides a map to follow for all such periods of revival and for that reason is of abiding value for us today.

### *A Preview of Edwards's Distinguishing Marks*

Edwards bases his assessment of revival, in the first instance, on an application of the exhortation of 1 John 4:1: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

This text functioned as the normative benchmark for Edwards. Ironically, the biblical mandate here is a call to *unbe-*

*lief*. Certainly this call to unbelief does not summon us to the faithlessness of the ungodly; it is not a repudiation of true biblical faith. Rather, it is a red alert against the beguiling force of credulity, a readiness to believe on the basis of insufficient evidence. As Augustine had done centuries before, Edwards noted a difference between faith and credulity. Credulity is faith without substance, an easy-believism that lacks critical judgment and consequently discernment.

Any claim to spiritual power is to be tested to see if the claim is validated by the work of God. This rests on the axiom that not all spirits are holy. The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Truth whose operation is validated by the truth of Scripture that He Himself inspired and illuminates.

The testing of the spirits is made necessary by the presence of false prophets, who are both alluring and numerous. The Israelites' greatest threat in Old Testament times was never the warring nations that surrounded them and often invaded their borders from the outside. It was always the threat of the false prophets within their own gates. The false prophets of Israel had their own "revivals." Their congregations tended to be much larger than the true prophets' because their message and their religion had strong popular appeal. They preached a message that tickled the ears of those who had "itchy ears" but did not have ears to hear the Word of God.

The "worship" offered by false prophets was the worship of idolatry in which the creature was exalted above the Creator. Such worship was popular with the people but repugnant to God. We see a glimpse of this in Exodus 32:

*And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." But he said: "It is not the noise of the shout of victory, nor the noise of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing I hear." So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing.*

—vv. 17-19, NKJV

The noise that Joshua heard was not the noise of battle. It was the noise of joyful religious celebration. The event in view was one of the best-attended religious gatherings recorded in the Old Testament. It was the noise of jubilant worship coupled with unbridled religious zeal. But the object of the worship and the focal point of the zeal was not God but a golden calf. This was not reformation but deformation; it was not the experience of revival or new spiritual life but the expression of spiritual death. Moses reported this to God, saying, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold!" (v. 31, NKJV). The response of God to this event, which was "a great sin" rather than a great awakening, was that "the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made" (v. 35).

Edwards warns that the influence, operations, and gifts of the Holy Spirit are aped and mimicked by Satan. That is why it is necessary to provide marks that can help us distinguish between the true Spirit of God and false spirits. Without such distinguishing marks the church is vulnerable to delusions and their dire consequences.

### *Negative Marks*

Edwards begins by following the *via negationis* or “the way of negation.” That is, before he proceeds to affirm positively what are the true marks of revival, he first spends time in Section I observing what are *not* (or at least not necessarily) signs of the work of the Spirit of God. Then he quickly moves in Section II to the *positive signs* that are evidences of a true work of the Spirit of God. His presentation of the positive signs flows from his exposition of the text of 1 John 4.

Edwards gives attention to one of the most controversial aspects that attended the awakening in New England, the matter of the *bodily effects* wrought by the Spirit of God upon those under His influence. Here Edwards is careful to note that a true work of God cannot be judged by the bodily or emotional reactions of those who receive this work.

The Bible does not provide a uniform formula for the proper physical or emotional reactions to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The presence of tears, convulsions, jerking, laughter, etc. are no measure of the Spirit’s presence. When we canvass the Scripture to see how the saints reacted to the outpouring of the Spirit, we see no prescribed form of bodily behavior. Habakkuk had a quivering lip and a trembling belly. Others fell to the ground as though dead. Some wept, some sang, some were reduced to stunned silence. In light of the diversity of human personalities and indeed the very nature of man, the presence or absence of these responses is no true test of the authenticity of the Spirit’s work. However, I hasten to add that though a wide variety of emotional responses may be detected in Scripture by those who encounter the living

God, there is at least one emotion that may safely be excluded from the list—namely, boredom. It is hardly possible for a creature made in the image of God to be awakened or revived by the Spirit of God and be bored in the process.

The presence of “*much noise about the Christian faith*” is viewed by Edwards as no argument against true revival. When the Spirit of God moves, not only are waters stirred up, but people are as well. Such stirring is a common indication of the controversy that attends the bold proclamation of the Gospel. Just as the apostolic preaching of the first century stirred up mighty opposition against it, so in any generation the resistance to the Gospel will be made manifest. The kingdom of Christ is in direct conflict with the kingdom of Satan and the kingdoms of this world. The Christian faith is a disturbance of the peace. But the peace it disturbs is a carnal peace, a peace that is wrongfully “at ease in Zion” (Amos 6:1, NKJV). Though Christ is the Prince of Peace and gives His peace as a legacy to His people (“My peace I give you,” John 14:27), it must not be forgotten that Christ did not come to bring a carnal peace; rather, His coming provokes a crisis in the midst of the world.

The more at peace the Church is with the world, the more worldly the Church becomes. It may be said that in one sense the worst thing that ever happened to the Church was the Edict of Constantine in the fourth century, by which Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire. For the first time in history the Church had something to lose. It was now acceptable, and its new status inclined it to compromise in order to preserve public acceptability. This is the curse of mainline

churches that quench the Spirit in order to protect their own social acceptability.

The *stirring up of imaginations and emotions* is also no argument against authentic awakening. We need look no further than to human nature to account for zealous excesses of behavior, especially among infant Christians. Under the powerful influence of the Spirit people can easily become carried away with zeal and emotion. Edwards says:

They may have soul-ravishing views of the beauty and love of Christ. And they might have their normal strength overpowered. Therefore, it is not at all strange that with so many affected in this manner, there should be some people of a particular makeup who would have their imaginations thus affected.

We think of Jeremiah, who under the influence of the Spirit of God cried out, “O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived. You overpowered me and prevailed.”<sup>1</sup> Here the prophet exhibits an extraordinary grasp of the obvious. Never was an inspired redundancy so evident. If one is deceived by God, it is plain that he is deceived. When the Almighty overwhelms a person, it takes no acute deduction of logic to realize that they are indeed overwhelmed.

Arguments proved often from *example* rather than from careful reasonings during a strong visitation of the Spirit of God are likewise no arguments against such visitations. Great impressions of religious affection are often expressed in actions rather than words. Edwards remarks: “In some cases, the language of action is much more clear and convincing than words.”

This is consistent with the injunction of James that we must show our faith by our works. The impact of example or modeling was clear in the Apostolic Age as well as during the Reformation. The Scripture calls attention to the example set by the Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11.

Edwards then notes that those exposed to the operation of the Spirit may be *guilty of rash acts and unconventional conduct*. The Spirit tends to overthrow human conventions. Edwards declares, "The end for which God pours out His Spirit is to make men holy, and not to make them politicians." This is consistent with the biblical call to not conform to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Even rash acts that are contrary to the Word of God do not disprove the presence of revival. In the New Testament, the Corinthian congregation, where abuses attended the awaking of the people of God, is a case in point. The Spirit who works sanctification in the believer does not do it all at once. There is dross with the gold, tares with the wheat.

The new convert may easily be *puffed up and exhibit an overconfidence with his or her boldness*. Though such zeal may be mixed with corruption, at least it is not the lukewarmness that Edwards calls vile. The zeal of the new convert can lead to an immature spirit of censure and/or to legalistic practices, which though contrary to the Word of God are common in the midst of a true work of God.

The true work of God may be *intermixed with errors in judgment and delusions of Satan*. The true miracles of God are often countered by the false or counterfeit miracles of Satan, such as were seen in the days of Moses when he encountered the magi-

cians of Pharaoh's court. As Edwards indicates, "The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil remain for a while together in the same heart."

The errors or practices that attend true revival may be *gross and scandalous*, but such things may be expected in any time of reformation. Heresies abounded in the early church. The practice of Nicholas the deacon produced the heretical sect bearing his name, the Nicolaitans. From the Gnostics of the early church to the extremists of the Reformation, the pattern is similar. Edwards said of the extremists of the sixteenth century, "It was as if the reformation had been the sun to give heat and warmth to those worms and serpents to crawl out of the ground."

That *ministers may terrorize people by insisting on the reality of hell and the dreadful judgment of the holy law of God* is also no argument against the work of the Spirit. Edwards is known for his own "scare theology" and has been branded as a sadist for his fire-and-brimstone preaching. But a true sadist, if he believed in hell, would take delight in persuading people there is no hell. That Edwards truly believed in the biblical doctrine of hell is without question. He was concerned that because people lacked a sense of dread of hell, they did not take due care to avoid it. It is as reasonable for preachers to warn against hell as it would be for a sentinel to warn of an approaching army or a weatherman an approaching tornado. Indeed, for a minister to warn of impending disaster in a cold manner, with no emotion or sense of urgency, would be a contradiction. Edwards strongly advocated the preaching of the Gospel but insisted that it was also necessary to preach the law. Without a knowledge of the law, the good news of the Gospel is perceived as no real news. The bad

news of the law is what reveals the good news of the Gospel. Edwards says, “Some say it is unreasonable to frighten people into heaven. But I think it is reasonable to try to frighten people away from hell.”

### *Positive Marks*

Next Edwards turns to the positive marks or biblical signs of true revival. The first positive mark is seen in *the elevated level of people’s esteem for Jesus*. Edwards follows the Reformation’s emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of the work of Christ in our redemption. It is the chief ministry of God the Holy Spirit to bring people to God the Son and apply His work to them. In a true outpouring of the Holy Spirit people are never led to a unitarianism of the Third Person of the Trinity. A preoccupation with the Holy Spirit without a view of Christ is not the desire of the Holy Spirit Himself. Edwards remarks:

The person to whom the Spirit gives testimony and for whom He raises their esteem must be Jesus—the one who appeared in the flesh. No other Christ can stand in his place. No mystical, fantasy Christ! No light within—as the spirit of Quakers extols—can diminish esteem of and dependence upon an outward Christ. The Spirit who gives testimony for this historical Jesus and leads to Him can be no other than the Spirit of God.

In his epistle John is keenly concerned to distinguish between Christ and antichrist. The concept of antichrist is often misunderstood in our day. We tend to perceive the image of antichrist

simply in terms of those who vehemently oppose Christ. We use the Greek prefix *anti* almost exclusively to mean “against.” But the “anti” of antichrist can also be translated to mean “in place of.” To be sure, anyone who is a substitute for Christ is at the same time one who stands *against* Christ.

Here we see something of the subtlety of the spirit of antichrist. It can be disguised as an angel of light, garbed in the clothing of piety. Almost daily we hear the dictum “No creed but Christ” or “I don’t need to know any doctrine. All I need to know is Christ.” These words can formulate the creed of antichrist. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Book that informs us of the identity of the real, historical Jesus. Scripture works hard to set forth the real Christ. The creeds are merely attempts to preserve this biblical portrait and to protect it from distortions. When a person says, “All I need to know is Jesus—doctrine isn’t important,” we should immediately ask in reply, “Who is Jesus?” The moment a person begins to answer that question, the person is inescapably involved with doctrine.

To the Christian, doctrine is unavoidable. Ours is never a choice between doctrine and no doctrine, but between sound doctrine and false doctrine. This is nowhere more urgent than when we are talking about the Christ, who is the object of our faith. It is not only liberal scholarship that has turned away from the historical Jesus by viewing the quest for Him as a fool’s errand and giving us in His place an existential Jesus, a Marxist Jesus, or a mere teacher of ethical values. “Evangelical” religion can also replace the biblical Christ with a Savior who is not also Lord or a caricature that bears the image of the vested interests of particular institutions, religious organizations, or religious subcultures.

True revival under the impetus of the Holy Spirit cuts through the fantasies and drives us to the biblical and historical Christ—and never to a substitute. Any substitute Jesus, no matter how dripping in piety, is never Christ but is always antichrist.

The second mark Edwards describes is that the Holy Spirit operates *against the interests of Satan's kingdom*. In simple terms this means that the Spirit works against sin. No revival has ever eliminated sin, but all true revivals check and curb sin. The Spirit convicts us of sin and leads us into sanctification. In this convicting operation the consciences of people are awakened from dogmatic slumber. Satan desires that the consciences of people be seared. When the conscience is awakened, the interests of people turn away from lusts and are inclined afresh to the things of God.

Some polls have indicated that in major ethical areas of concern, there is little if any discernible difference in the behavior patterns of professing Christians in America and those of the secular culture with respect to such matters as divorce, abortion, pre- and extramarital sexual relationships, etc. If these polls are accurate, they would indicate that we are far removed from revival.

The third mark is that the Holy Spirit causes *greater regard for the Holy Scriptures*. Edwards argues that a spirit of delusion will not incline people to seek direction at the mouth of God.

Perhaps there has never been a time in the history of the church when the Bible has been subjected to greater attack and criticism than it has in the past 200 years. The higher criticism that reached such wide proportions in the nineteenth century has left its mark on the contemporary Christian community. Near the turn of this century the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper remarked that biblical criticism had degenerated into biblical vandalism.

Virtually every Protestant creed has affirmed confidence in the divine origin and authority of Scripture. This was the direct fruit of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. Yet this uniform conviction of historic Protestantism has been all but abandoned in the so-called mainline churches of American Protestantism. Indeed, many of the splinter groups that have divided from mainline denominations have done so precisely over the issue of biblical authority.

However, though we see strong affirmations of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible in evangelical churches, there are many evidences of defection from the historic view of Scripture even there. The controversy chronicled by Harold Lindsell in his book *The Battle for the Bible* is still being waged within evangelicalism.

Perhaps what is even more alarming is that even within churches and organizations that still profess a high view of Scripture, there is an alarming ignorance of the content of Scripture. For many, being “led by the Spirit” means being led by some inner light or impulse rather than by the Spirit’s testimony to the written Word of God. Edwards says, “And accordingly we see it common in enthusiasts who oppose Christ that they depreciate this written rule and set up the light within their souls or some other rule above it.”

Edwards gives as his fourth mark “*the words used in addressing the opposite spirits.*” Appealing still to 1 John 4, he speaks of the sixth verse: “The Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.” We recall that before Pontius Pilate Christ declared: “For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”<sup>2</sup> In light of these words of Jesus, it is clear

that His cause is the cause of truth. One cannot be enrolled in the cause of Christ and despise truth. The devil works for the cause of the lie, and as the father of lies he works on behalf of falsehood and error. No true revival can lead Christians to a cavalier attitude toward the truth of God. Luther insisted that whenever the Gospel was clearly proclaimed, controversy would surely follow. The only way to avoid controversy is to avoid the Gospel.

Francis Schaeffer frequently spoke of the necessity of antithesis in the Christian life. That is, for every truth there is a corresponding falsehood. A Christian is known not only by what he believes or affirms, but also by what he rejects and denies. This posture of antithesis is on a collision course with modern theories of relativism. A revived Christian Church will be marked not only by what it affirms but also by its courage to deny truth's antithesis.

The fifth mark is that the Spirit produces *a spirit of love to God and to man*. In this mark we encounter vintage Jonathan Edwards. His entire ministry was captured by a concern for true religious affections. As cerebral as Edwards was, in the final analysis his relationship to Christ was expressed as an affair of the heart. He never tired of speaking of the "excellency" of Christ as the chief object of the believer's delight. It is the Spirit of God who awakens within our souls a true love for God. Speaking of this work of the Holy Spirit Edwards writes: "He makes the attributes of God as revealed in the Gospel and manifested in Christ delightful objects of contemplation. He makes the soul long after God and Christ—after their presence and communion, acquaintance with them and conformity to them; and to live to please and honor them is the spirit that quells contentions among men. He gives a spirit of peace and goodwill."

Here Edwards sees the fulfillment of the reality announced by angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem. This is not the mutual bonds of affections by which heretics and cultists are drawn to mutual admiration among themselves, like honor among thieves, but rather the love that is born in the souls of wretched sinners who know their own wretchedness and cleave to the grace of God whose fellowship they enjoy.

### *Applications*

After discussing these five positive signs, Edwards turns his attention to the application section of his treatise, following the normal structure of his sermons. In Section III he notes the *practical inferences* he draws from his study.

The first inference is that *the recent extraordinary influences were from the Spirit of God*. These influences are judged both by rules and by facts. He points to the facts that correspond to the rules of Scripture—namely, that the positive signs of true awakening he set forth earlier in his treatise are indeed widely evident. They are public and also not confined to remote areas. He cites his own eyewitness experience of the phenomena. He cites his personal awareness of multitudes who have been awakened. “Some have been in great distress from a foreboding of their sin and misery. Others have been overcome with a sweet sense of the greatness, wonderfulness, and excellency of divine things.” He points both to the sober signs of awakening as well as delusions and irregularities that attended them and calls for the *promotion of the recent working of the Spirit of God*. Regarding the aforementioned irregularities and delusions, he says, “If they wait to see

a work of God without difficulties and stumbling blocks, it will be like a fool waiting at the riverside to have the water all run by. A work of God without stumbling blocks is never to be expected.”

To focus on the difficulties that attend genuine revival is to miss the manifold blessings that are poured out by it. It would have meant, for Edwards, missing the visitation of God to New England.

Finally, Edwards turns his attention not to the critics of the Great Awakening, but to its friends. He calls the friends of the work to *self-diligence*. He provides an exhortation to them to avoid the errors and misconduct that characteristically accompany revival. He warns of those who will oppose them and counsels them to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. He especially warns against the danger of pride, saying:

Pride is the worst viper in the heart. It is the first sin that ever entered into the universe. It lies lowest of all in the foundation of the whole building of sin. Of all lusts, it is the most secret, deceitful, and unsearchable in its ways of working. It is ready to mix with everything. Nothing is so hateful to God, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, or of so dangerous consequence. There is no one sin that does so much to let the devil into the hearts of the saints and expose them to his delusions.

He cites the errors of those who suppose that in their imaginations and impressions they have received direct messages from heaven.

Claims to special divine revelations are not so much a sign of super-spirituality as they are of evangelical or pietistic megalomania.

mania. The days of prophets and apostles, genuine agents of revelation, are past. Such claims today are spurious and exceedingly dangerous. To cloak one's desires, hunches, or opinions in such claims is to make use of a godless form of persuasion. What does one say to the person who claims, "The Lord told me to do this"? To use such devices is to place oneself above criticism by bathing one's opinions in divine sanction.

The extraordinary gifts of the Apostolic Age are not required today. It is the ordinary influence of the grace of God that should capture our attention. Edwards says:

The greatest privilege of the prophets and apostles was not their being inspired and working miracles, but their eminent holiness. . . . The extraordinary gifts are worthless without the ordinary sanctifying influences.

Edwards declared that he neither expected nor desired the restoration of the miraculous gifts in the church. He said:

For my part, I had rather enjoy the sweet influences of the Spirit. I had rather show Christ's spiritual divine beauty, infinite grace, and dying love. I had rather draw forth the holy exercises of faith, divine love, sweet complacency, and humble joy in God. I had rather experience all this for one quarter of an hour than to have prophetic visions and revelations the whole year.

Edwards gives great caution to those who are preoccupied with the extraordinary. The danger is that such a quest becomes a substitute for diligent learning of the things of God. Such learning requires discipline and labor. To function as teachers, preach-

ers, and Christian leaders we must advance to maturity as Christians. In this enterprise there is no substitute for diligent instruction. The judgment of discernment, both for what comprises sound doctrine and sound behavior, comes from being diligent students of the Word of God. Edwards had little use for the ripping of the Spirit away from the Word. Again, the testimony of the saints and the axiom with which Edwards began his treatise is that of subjecting experience to the Scripture. In the Scripture we meet the wisdom of God, which is able to judge all things. He writes:

The longer I live, the less I wonder that God keeps it as his right to try the hearts of the children of men. Also I wonder less that God directs that this business should be let alone till harvest. I adore the wisdom of God! In His goodness to me and my fellow creatures, He has not committed this great business into our hands.

This practical warning is directed against those who make harsh and precipitous judgments against other Christians. We do not have the capacity to judge the souls of men. That is the prerogative of God. Though not eschewing the proper procedures for necessary church discipline or the need to speak out against error, Edwards is careful to guard the boundaries established by God. Our discernment is always limited. Even those who oppose a true work of God must be dealt with without raging anger. We are to exercise such rebuke with gentleness and prudence.

The work of the Holy Spirit is always a work among sinners. What is true for others is likewise true for ourselves. Though He

leads us to holiness, it is a leading out of corruption. That corruption remains, at least in part, until our glorification at His hands. To demand from others what the Spirit Himself patiently endures is to exalt ourselves above God.

The practice of godliness is a practice that is to be informed by Scripture and tempered by the work of the Holy Spirit within us. If we have been awakened, that awakening should bring with it an acute awareness that in many respects we are still aslumber.

The church in our day can profit mightily from a close scrutiny of the insight provided for us by Edwards's careful evaluation of the distinguishing marks of a true revival. He gives us a road map to follow lest we twist and turn into the detours of destruction.

My hope is that the republishing of this work by the Puritan divine will effect a rekindling of zeal for authentic revival and reformation in our day.

*R. C. Sproul*

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FOOTNOTES TO THIS SECTION

1. Jeremiah 20:7a.
2. John 18:37 (NKJV).