

Quotes on Self-deceit

by

Jonathan Edwards

What will it signify to pretend to be Christians, and at the same time to live in the neglect of those rules of Christianity which are mainly insisted on in it?

Whilst you continue an unbeliever, *the more you hear* of this way of salvation, your condition will become the more miserable. The longer you sit under the preaching of the gospel, the more doleful does your case grow. Your guilt continually increases. For your refusals of the gospel, and your rejections of this way of salvation, are so much the oftener repeated. Every time you hear the gospel preached, you are guilty of a renewed rejection of it, the guilt of which therefore you will have lying upon you. And the more you hear of the suitableness and glory of this way, the greater is your guilt who still continue to reject it.

The lusts of men's hearts—prejudicing them in favour of sinful practices, to which those lusts tend, and in which they delight—stir up *carnal reason*, and put men, with all the subtlety of which they are capable, to invent pleas and arguments to justify such practices. When men are very strongly inclined and tempted to any wicked practice, and conscience troubles them about it, they will rack their brains to find out arguments to stop the mouth of conscience, and to make themselves believe that they may lawfully proceed in that practice.

Many that are abominable to God, and the children of his wrath, think highly of themselves, as his precious saints and dear children. Yea, there is reason to think that often some that are most bold in their confidence of their safe and happy state, and think themselves not only true saints, but the most eminent saints in the congregation, are in a peculiar manner a smoke in God's nostrils.

Are there any that now hear me, who think themselves to be Christians, who do yet, either in their imaginations and thoughts, or in any secret practice, allow and indulge the lust of

uncleanness, and live in such a way? If it be so, they had great need to bethink themselves whether or no they are not of that generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not cleansed from their filthiness. If they imagine that they are pure in heart, and live in such wickedness, their confidence is vain presumption. Inquire whether holy exercises and holy employments are the delight of your soul, and what you take pleasure in above all other things in which you can be engaged. Are the enjoyments that you choose, and take the greatest delight in, spiritual and heavenly enjoyments?

They (*wicked men*) are forward in religious conversation, in giving an account of their experience in a show of zeal, merely to be seen of men, their God is themselves, their own honour, and the esteem of men. It is themselves whom they love and honour in everything, and not God. They often make that show in their external behaviour that is inconsistent with their hearts. Many who are destitute of the least spark of love to God, and are at utter enmity with him, will make a great show of respect to him in many things in their behaviour. The greater part of the world are sinners: Christ's flock is, and ever hath been, but a little flock. And the sinners of the world are of two sorts: those who are visibly of Satan's kingdom, who are without the pale of the visible church; and those who do not profess the true religion, nor attend the external ordinances of it. Beside these there are the sinners in Zion. Both are the objects of the displeasure and wrath of God; but his wrath is more especially manifested in Scripture against the latter. Sinners in Zion will have by far the lowest place in hell. They are exalted nearest to heaven in this world, and they will be lowest in hell in another. The same is meant by *hypocrites*. Sinners in Zion are all hypocrites; for they make a profession of the true religion; they attend God's ordinances, and make a show of being the worshippers of God; but all is hypocrisy.

The fire of God's wrath is kindled by none so much as by the polluters of holy things. They are represented as those who are especially guilty before God... They do in a very dreadful manner take God's name in vain, who attend on his ordinances, and yet live in known sin; for, as we have shown, they manifest the greatest irreverence for him, and contempt of divine things.

Those members of the visible Christian church who are become visibly wicked, ought not to be tolerated in the church, but should be excommunicated.

You have, contrary to God's counsel, made use of your own enjoyments to the hurt of your soul, and therefore if God should turn them to the hurt and ruin of your soul, he would but deal with you as you have dealt with yourself. God has earnestly counselled you times without number to use your temporal enjoyments for your spiritual good, but you have refused to hearken to him, you have foolishly perverted them to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, you have voluntarily used what God has given you for your spiritual hurt, to increase your guilt and wound your own soul; and therefore if God's curse should attend them, so that they should all turn to the ruin of your soul, you would but be dealt with as you have dealt with yourself. How just would it be in God to cut you off, and put an end to your life!

There will hereafter be a very great difference between sinners in Zion and other sinners; a great difference between the most pointed hypocrite of them all, and the drunkards, the adulterers, the Sodomites, the thieves, and murderers among the heathen, who sin against only the light of nature. The fearfulness which will surprise them, although it will be very dreadful, yet will be in no measure so amazing and horrible, as that which will seize the sinners in Zion. That fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, which they will suffer, will be mild and moderate in comparison with that which the sinners in Zion will suffer. The wrath of God is in his word manifested against the wicked heathens; but it is ten times as much manifested against those sinners who make the profession and enjoy the privileges of the people of God; and yet remain enemies to God.

By attending ordinances, and yet living in allowed wickedness, they show great *irreverence* and contempt of those holy ordinances. When persons who have been committing known wickedness, and yet live in it, and have no other design than to go on still in the same, when they come from their wickedness, as it were the same day, as it is expressed in the text, and attend the sacred solemn worship and ordinances of God, and then go from the house of God directly to the like allowed wickedness—they hereby express a most irreverent spirit with respect to holy things, and in a horrid manner cast contempt upon God's sacred

institutions, and on those holy things which we are concerned with in them. They show that they have no reverence of that God who hath hallowed these ordinances....They show a horribly irreverent spirit towards that God into whose presence they come...They show a contempt of that adoration of God, of that faith and love, and that humiliation, submission, and praise, which ordinances were instituted to express. What an irreverent spirit doth it show that they are so careless after what manner they come before God! that they take no care to cleanse and purify themselves, in order that they may be fit to come before God! yea, that they take no care to avoid making themselves more and more unclean and filthy!

Inquire whether you do not live in some way of secretly *gratifying some sensual lust*. There are many ways and degrees, wherein a carnal lust may be indulged; but every way is provoking to a holy God. Consider whether, although you restrain yourselves from more gross indulgences, you do not, in some way or other, and in some degree or other, secretly from time to time gratify your lusts, and allow yourselves to taste the sweets of unlawful delight. Persons may greatly provoke God, by only allowedly gratifying their lusts in their thoughts and imaginations. They may also greatly provoke God by excess and intemperance in gratifying their animal appetites in those things which are in themselves lawful. Inquire, therefore, whether you do not live in some sinful way or other, in secretly gratifying a sinful appetite.

He who lives in wilful wickedness, and doth not enjoy the ordinances of God, is not guilty of so great presumption, as he who attends these ordinances, and yet allows himself in wickedness. The latter acts as though he came into the presence of God on purpose to affront him. He comes from time to time to hear the will of God, and all the while designs disobedience, and goes away and acts directly contrary to it. A servant would affront his master by wilfully disobeying his commands in any wise. But he would affront him much more, if he should on every occasion come to him to inquire his will, as though he were ready to do whatever his master would have him do, and then should immediately go away and do the contrary.

To those who live in secret wickedness. Let such consider, that for all these things God will bring them into judgment. Secrecy is your temptation. Promising yourselves this, you

practise many things, you indulge many lusts, under the covert of darkness, and in secret corners, which you would be ashamed to do, in the light of the sun, and before the world. But this temptation is entirely groundless. All your secret abominations are even now perfectly known to God, and will also hereafter be made known both to angels and men.. Before human judges are brought only those things which are known; but before this judge shall be brought the most “hidden things of darkness, and even the counsels of the heart,” 1 Cor. iv. 5. All your secret uncleanness, all your secret fraud and injustice, all your lascivious desires, wishes, and designs, all your inward covetousness, which is idolatry, all your malicious, envious, and revengeful thoughts and purposes, whether brought forth into practice or not, shall then be made manifest, and you shall be judged according to them. Of these things, however secret, there will be need of no other evidence than the testimony of God and of your own consciences.

I would exhort those who have entertained an hope of their being true converts, and yet since their supposed conversion have left off the duty of secret prayer, and do ordinarily allow themselves in the omission of it, to throw away their hope. If you have left off calling upon God, it is time for you to leave off hoping and flattering yourselves with an imagination that you are the children of God. Probably it will be a very difficult thing for you to do this. It is hard for a man to let go an hope of heaven, on which he hath once allowed himself to lay hold, and which he hath retained for a considerable time. True conversion is a rare thing; but that men are brought off from a false hope of conversion, after they are once settled and established in it, and have continued in it for some time, is much more rare.

It is the manner of hypocrites, after a while, in a great measure to leave off the practice of this duty (*secret prayer*). We are often taught, that the seeming goodness and piety of hypocrites is not of a lasting and persevering nature. It is so with respect to their practice of the duty of prayer in particular, and especially of secret prayer. They can omit this duty, and their omission of it not be taken notice of by others, who know what profession they have made. So that a regard to their own reputation doth not oblige them still to practice it.

The honour of the infinite God, the great King of heaven and earth, is a thing of as great importance, (and surely may justly be so esteemed by God,) as the happiness of you, a poor

little worm. But yet you have slighted that honour of God, and valued it no more than the dirt under your feet. You have been told that such and such things were contrary to the will of a holy God, and against his honour; but you cared not for that. God called upon you, and exhorted you to be more tender of his honour; but you went on without regarding him. Thus have you slighted God! And yet, is it hard that God should slight you? Are you more honourable than God, that he must be obliged to make much of you, how light soever you make of him and his glory?

The outward show of wicked men disagrees with their hearts. They very often make an appearance that is exceedingly different and contrary to what they really are inwardly. They have the clothing of sheep, but the nature of wolves... They make a show as though they believed the truth of the gospel, and believed that God was an infinitely great and an infinitely excellent being; they make a show of great respect to God, a show of reverence and love, when indeed they have no such thing in their hearts, but the contrary. The outward show they make, which is at war with their hearts, consists either in their words, or in their behaviour. The show they make in words is inconsistent with their hearts. Many of them profess to believe that God is an infinitely excellent being, when indeed they think that the meanest of their carnal enjoyments is more excellent than he... They do abominably dissemble in the profession they make of the favour of God, and of love to him, and willingness to obey him, and desire to glorify him. They have not a jot of these things in their hearts, but are all the while wholly under the influence of vile carnal principles in all that they do, and are only aiming at selfish ends and serving their lusts in all.

A true saint is sanctified throughout, in soul, body, and spirit; he has put off the old man with his deeds, and has put on the new man; he is all over a new creature. He has not only a new hand and head, but he is a new man, all the members are new. But hypocrites are monsters; they have a saint's tongue, and a devil's heart. The members do not well consist together. They are inconsistent with themselves as they go about to serve two masters, God and Mammon, which Christ has taught us to be a great inconsistency.

There are many disciples like Judas, who was at one time a disciple, and a traitor at another. It is commonly so that when false professors come to be tried by any remarkable

allurements of the world, or by special difficulties which they meet with in the way of duty, that their practice at such times is quite inconsistent with their practice at other times. While times are smooth, and the way plain, and the external practice of religion seems to be consistent with their worldly interests, they are very religious; but when times are changed, and they cannot be religious without seeing them crossed, they appear quite another sort of men.

Some wicked men may profess that they have seen their own utter insufficiency and helplessness, their own vileness and wickedness, and have been brought to God's footstool self-emptied and self-abased, as wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. But yet how ill does their walk and life agree with such a profession! In this none appear fuller of themselves than they; none seem to manifest more of a spirit of self-sufficiency, and of dependence on their own righteousness, or more high conceit of their own goodness.

Consider therefore, ye who allow yourselves in known wickedness, and live in it, who yet come to the house of God, and to his ordinances from time to time, without any serious design of forsaking your sins, but, on the contrary, with an intention of continuing in them, and who frequently go from the house of God to your wicked practices; consider how guilty you have made yourselves in the sight of God, and how dreadfully God is provoked by you. It is a wonder of God's patience, that he doth not break forth upon you, and strike you dead in a moment...It is a wonder that God suffers you to live upon earth, that he hath not, with a thunderbolt of his wrath, struck you down to the bottomless pit long ago. You that are allowedly and voluntarily living in sin, who have gone on hitherto in sin, are still going on, and do not design any other than to go on yet; it is a wonder that the Almighty's thunder lies still, and suffers you to sit in his house, or to live upon earth. It is a wonder that the earth will bear you, and that hell doth not swallow you up. It is a wonder that fire doth not come down from heaven, or come up from hell, and devour you; that hell-flames do not enlarge themselves to reach you, and that the bottomless pit hath not swallowed you up. However, that you are as yet borne with is no argument that your damnation slumbers. The anger of God is not like the passions of men that it should be in haste. There is a day of vengeance and recompense appointed for the vessels of wrath; and when the day shall have come, and the iniquity shall be full, none shall deliver out of God's hand. Then will he

recompense, even recompense into your bosoms. There is hardly any kind of wickedness that men commit, but they will plead thus in excuse for it. They will plead thus about their cheating and injustice, about their hatred of their neighbours, about their evil speaking, about their revengeful spirit, about their excessive drinking, about their lying, their neglect of secret prayer, their lasciviousness, their unclean dalliances; yea they will plead excuses for very gross acts of uncleanness, as fornication, adultery, and what not. They have their vain excuses and carnal reasonings in favour of all their evil actions. They will say, What harm, what evil is there in such and such an action? And if there be a plain rule against it, yet they will plead that their circumstances are peculiar, and that they are excepted from the general rule; that their temptation is so great, that they are excusable; or something will they find to plead. If it be something upon which their lusts are much set, and about which they feel remorse of conscience, they will never leave studying and contriving with all the art and subtlety of which they are masters, till they shall have found out some reason, some excuse, with which they shall be able in some measure to quiet their consciences. And whether after all they shall have made it out to blind conscience or not, yet they will plead that their argument is good, and it is no sin; or if it be a sin, it is only a sin of ignorance.

Inquire whether at those times, when you have most hope and comfort, above all others, you are most disposed to be careful to avoid sin, and to strive to live holy. Sometimes the hope of hypocrites is very confident; and therefore the degree of confidence which attends a hope is no certain evidence of its truth and genuineness. But we should examine what effect this strong confidence has upon us. Do we find, when our hope is strongest and our comfort greatest, that then our hearts are most set against sin, and that then we feel the greatest desires to live holy, and have most of a disposition to keep a strict watch, and maintain an earnest warfare against sin, and are most desirous in everything to do our duty? Or do we find, on the contrary, when our hope is strong, and we are most satisfied that our condition is safe, that then we are least careful to avoid sin, and are least disposed to take pains to curb our lusts, and resist temptation, or lay ourselves in the way of duty? If it be thus, it is a very bad sign, and a black mark on our hopes and comforts. A true hope has a tendency to prompt him who has it to purify himself, and watch and strive more earnestly against all impurity. 1 John iii. 3. "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." They are

condemned who, because they think they are righteous, and so that they shall certainly have eternal life, will trust in that hope to give themselves the greater liberty in sin.

And you have not only slighted God in time past, but you slight him still. You indeed now make a pretence and show of honouring him in your prayers, and attendance on other external duties, and by sober countenance, and seeming devoutness in your words and behaviour; but it is all mere dissembling.

It is the manner of hypocrites, after a while, to return to sinful practices, which will tend to keep them from praying. While they were under convictions, they reformed their lives, and walked very exactly. This reformation continues for a little time perhaps after their supposed conversion, while they are much affected with hope and false comfort. But as these things die away, their old lusts revive, and they by degrees return like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. They return to their sensual practices, to their worldly practices, to their proud and contentious practices, as before. And no wonder this makes them forsake their closets. Sinning and praying agree not well together.

The hope which the hypocrite hath of his good estate takes off the force that the command of God before had upon his conscience; so that now he dares neglect so plain a duty...As long as the hypocrite was in his own apprehension in continual danger of hell, he durst not disobey these commands. But since he is, as he thinks, safe from hell, he is grown bold he dares to live in the neglect of the plainest command in the Bible.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had

religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God, it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction.

It is very evident that sinners flatter themselves that they shall escape punishment... otherwise they would be in dreadful and continual distress. Otherwise, as long as they are in sin, they could never live and go about so cheerfully as they now do: Their lives would be filled with sorrow and mourning, and they would be in continual uneasiness and distress; as much as those that are exercised with some violent pain of body. But it is evident that it is not in fact so; it is apparent that men are careless and secure; that they are not much concerned about future punishment, and that they cheerfully pursue their business and recreations. Therefore they undoubtedly flatter themselves, that they shall not be eternally miserable in hell, as they are threatened in the word of God It is evident that they flatter themselves with hopes that they shall escape punishment, as otherwise they would certainly be restrained at least from many of those sins in which they now live: They would not proceed in wilful courses of sin.

Saints may be guilty of other sins, and very often are, without throwing any just stumbling-block in the way of public charity, or of the charity of their Christian brethren. The common failures of humanity, and the daily short-comings of the best of men, do not ordinarily obstruct the charity of their brethren; but when they fall into any gross sin, this effect follows; for we naturally argue, that he who hath committed some gross sin hath doubtless much more practised less and more secret sins; and so we doubt concerning the soundness and sincerity of his heart. Therefore all those who commit any gross sin, as they obstruct the charity of their brethren, are proper subjects of discipline: and unless they confess their sin, and manifest their repentance, are proper subjects of excommunication.