

DIRECTIONS FOR JUDGING OF  
PERSONS' EXPERIENCES

*by Jonathan Edwards*

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See to it...

That the operation be such upon the will or heart, not on the Imagination, nor on the speculative understanding or motions of the mind, though they draw great affections after 'em as the consequence.

That the trouble of mind be reasonable, that the mind be troubled about those things that it has reason to be troubled about; and that the trouble seems mainly to operate in such a manner, with such a kind of trouble and exercise as is reasonable: founded on reasonable, solid consideration; a solid sense and conviction of truth, as of things as they are indeed.

That it be because their state appears terrible on the account of those things, wherein its dreadfulness indeed consists; and that their concern be solid, not operating very much by pangs and sudden passions, freaks and frights, and a capriciousness of mind.

That under their seeming convictions it be sin indeed; that they are convinced of their guilt, in offending and affronting so great a God: One that so hates sin, and is so set against it, to punish it, etc.

That they be convinced both of sins of heart and life: that their pretenses of sense of sin of heart ben't without reflection on their wicked practice; and also that they are not only convinced of sin of practice, but sin of heart. And in both, that what troubles 'em be those things wherein their wretchedness has really chiefly consisted.

That they are convinced of their spiritual sins, consisting in their sinful defects, living without love to God, without accepting Christ, gratitude to Him, etc.

That the convictions they have of the insufficiency and vanity of their own doings, ben't only from some sense of wanderings of mind, and other sinful behavior mixed; but from a conviction of the sinful defects of their duties, their not being done from a right principle; and so as having no goodness at all mixed with the bad, but altogether corrupt.

That it is truly conviction of sin that convinces them of the Justice of God in their damnation, in rejecting their prayers, disregarding their sorrowful case, and all desires and endeavors after deliverance, etc., and not merely

any imagination or pang, and melting of affection through some real or supposed instance of Divine Goodness.

That they be so convinced of sin as not in the inward thought and habit of their minds to excuse themselves, and impliedly quarrel with God, because of their impotency: for instance, that they don't excuse their slight of Christ, and want of love to Him, because they can't esteem and love Him.

That they don't evidently themselves look on their convictions [as] great, and ben't taken with their own humiliation.

That which should be chiefly looked at should be evangelical. If this be sound, we have no warrant to insist upon it, that there be manifest a remarkable work, purely legal, wherein was nothing of grace. So with regard to Convictions and Humiliation; only seeing to it that the mind is indeed convinced of these things, and sees 'em [sees] that [which] many Divines insisted should be seen, under a purely legal work. And also seeing to it that the convictions there are, seem to be deep and fixed, and to have a powerful governing influence on the temper of the mind, and a very direct respect to practice.

See to it...

That they have not only pretended convictions of sin; but a proper mourning for sin. And also, that sin is burdensome to them, and that their hearts are tender and sensible with respect to it...the object of their care and dread.

That God and Divine things are admirable on account of the beauty of their moral perfection.

That there is to be discerned in their sense of the sufficiency of Christ, a sense of that Divine, supreme, and spiritual excellency of Christ, wherein this sufficiency fundamentally consists; and that the sight of this excellency is really the foundation of their satisfaction as to His sufficiency.

That their conviction of the truth of Divine things be discerned to be truly some way or other primarily built on a sense of their Divine excellency.

That their discoveries and illuminations and experiences in general, are not superficial pangs, flashes, imagination, freaks, but solid, substantial, deep, inwrought into the frame and temper of their minds, and discovered to have respect to practice.

That they long after HOLINESS, and that all their experiences increase their longing. Let 'em be inquired of concerning their disposition and willingness to bear the Cross, sell all for Christ, choosing their portion in heaven, etc. Whether their experience have a respect to PRACTICE in these ways.

That their behavior at present seems to be agreeable to such experiences. Whether it inclines 'em much to think of Practice, and more and more for past ill practice. Makes a disposition to ill practices dreadful. Makes 'em long after perfect freedom from sin, and after those things wherein Holiness consists; and by fixed and strong resolutions, attended with fear and jealousy of their own hearts.

Whether, when they tell of their experiences, it is not with such an air that you as it were feel that they expect to be admired and applauded, and [whether they] won't be disappointed if they fail of discerning in you something of that nature; and shocked and displeased if they discover the contrary.

Inquire whether their joy be truly and properly joy in God and in Christ; joy in Divine Good; or whether it ben't wholly joy in themselves, joy in their own excellencies or privileges, in their experiences; what God has done for them, or what He has promised He will do for them; and whether they ben't affected with their own discoveries and affections."

