

Clark University

Clark Digital Commons

A Series of Biographical Sketches of Important
17th and 18th century Congregational
Preachers in New England

History Manuscripts, -1907

April 2022

Jonathan Edwards

Earl Clement Davis

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.clarku.edu/history_manuscripts_3

Recommended Citation

Davis, Earl Clement, "Jonathan Edwards" (2022). *A Series of Biographical Sketches of Important 17th and 18th century Congregational Preachers in New England*. 5.

https://commons.clarku.edu/history_manuscripts_3/5

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the History Manuscripts, -1907 at Clark Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Series of Biographical Sketches of Important 17th and 18th century Congregational Preachers in New England by an authorized administrator of Clark Digital Commons. For more information, please contact larobinson@clarku.edu.

Jonathan Edwards,

We have already seen how there was developing in New England a certain liberal tendency in regard to theological problems. We have traced in a general way the life of Chas. Chauncy, who was the leader of that free movement, and noticed that in the three great controversies, the Great Awakening, the Episcopal controversy, and the Theological controversy, Chauncy was the champion of the ideas that were in accord with the developing movement of the times. In the great awakening, he stood for the extreme clericalist congregational ideas. In the Episcopal controversy, he was again clericalist. In the Theological controversy his own position was franked by the epiphany that he laid in measures of grace, and Arminianism.

Opposed to him was Jonathan Edwards, a man of great power, who represented the Calvinistic thought, and had the courage to carry his thought to its logical conclusions, and paved the way for the overthrow of Calvinism. Edwards was born Oct 5, 1703 in the town of Br.

mind, He came of a family of great intellect
 power, coupled with great activity. His father
 Timothy Edwards was a minister of great power,
 Edwards's mother was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard
 of Northampton, one of the ablest ministers of the
 period.

As a child he was very precocious, and in
 September ~~he~~ before he was fifteen years old
 he entered Yale College, from which he graduated
 in 1720.

At about the age of 19 or 20 he passed through
 a great religious experience of conversion. This was
 of great importance in his life, and was the founda-
 tion of his theological system.
 After a trial of preaching in New York, and a
 period of two years when he was tutor at Yale
 and he was called to and ordained at the
 Church of Northampton of which his father
 colleague to his grandfather St. Solomon
 Stoddard. During the same year he was married
 to Sarah Pierpont, daughter of James Pierpont, minister
 of New Haven.

His preaching in Northampton soon soon began to give evidence of the fact that he was no ordinary person. Walker says, "The town was not unfamiliar with religious quickenings. At least five had occurred under the able ministry of Solomon Stoddard, but Edwards' sermons were on themes calculated to stir a community, and especially an isolated rural community. Two sudden deaths in the spring of 1734 excited the concern of the little town - a concern which was deepened by a vague alarm lest the spreading Arminianism which the Northampton folk felt denounced, was a token of the withdrawal of God's Redeptive mercy from sinful men" See W. E. Leach, Walker P. 233.

During the winter of 1734 and 5, Edwards conducted a revival in his own church, in which there were about three hundred conversions.

These conversions in general carried the people through three stages according to Edwards himself. The first stage was an awful oppression of the "conscience in which men stood by nature," this was so overwhelming as to produce

often times fearful physical effects. Next followed, 4
in cases which Eschwege believed to be the
genuine work of the spirit of God, a conviction
that they justly deserved the Divine Wrath, not
infrequently leading to expressions of wonder that
'God has not cast them into hell long ago.' From
this state of extreme humiliation they emerged
into 'a holy refuge of the soul in God through
Christ.'

It is not strange that his sermons should
have had such an effect on the people, when
he says that the wicked are useful simply as
objects of the destructive wrath of God; when he
tells the unconverted members of his congregation
that they are withheld for a brief period
by the restraining hand of God from the hell into
which they are to fall at their appointed times; when
he pictures the damned glow in hellish burning
agony like a spider in the flame; when he
pictures heightens the happiness of the redeemed
by the contrast between the felicities of heaven

5

and the eternal torments of the lost, visible for-
ever to the saints in glory, one ~~it~~ is not sur-
prised to hear that the people sat on the edges
of their seats and clutched ~~around~~ ~~convulsively~~
on the backs of the ones in front. Not only were
many converted by one who was led to commit
suicide, and two others contemplated during
the same thing.

But the fruits of these sermons are not all seen in
the 300 conversions, for after the excitement
was over, there came a great relaxation. Edwards
became especially estranged from his young
people. ~~He~~ He even waited at one time for four
years from 1744-48 for a single person to join
his church. One is so surprised that he lost
his hold, when one learns that he said "Men is walking
because of his inherent wickedness," or "As
innocent as children seem to us, yet in
God's sight they are evil and loathsome
like a viper" or "Men are a generation of vipers."

on the simple subject of his famous "Evangelical Sermon."
"Sinners in the hands of an angry God!"

Thus you see that Edwards was prepared by his own experiences for the Great Awakening of 1740 and he welcomed Whitefield to his pulpit, and ~~not~~ went himself to other places as a preacher of the revival gospel. It is but natural therefore that Edwards, himself having experienced conversion, and been the chosen means (to say the least) of 300 conversions in his own church, should have taken of the Revival Controversy, and offered chauncy and the general annihilation movement.

His theological system rests upon the idea of the Absolute Sovereignty of God. If God is absolute, and yet there is evil in the world, then God must be responsible for sin. Edwards went the full length of his logic and declared God responsible for sin, urging that God's hatred of Sin could not be shown

there is sin in the world, and he furnishes ⁷
the sinners. In his Sermon, "Sinners Useful
in their Downfall" he brings out this idea
showing that they are useful to glorify God.

But one is forced to say that a man who regards
God as a God of love and justice cannot put together
these two ideas of Edwards. (1) his idea of
absolute Sovereignty. (2) the damnation of man.

In 1750 Edwards came into trouble with his
church over the question of a Pure church,
and was dismissed from Northampton and
came to Stockbridge, then but a small village.
but with his clerical or pastor he combined the
clerical as missionary, to the Housatonic
Indians,

In January 1758 Edwards was elected
President of Princeton College in New Jersey
and moved there by ~~stage~~ in about one

worth, on Feb 13, 1755 of Swoll Provolution. 18

despite Edwards' Theology, he placed great emphasis upon the ethical side of life, and he was especially strong in emphasizing the moral fruits of the spirit.

I wrote a summary of Edwards, and note the things for which he stands

- (1) The idea of the Absolute Sovereignty of God.
- (2) His spiritual mystical Theology, i. e. man coming face to face with God himself (seen in his idea of Communion)
- (3) His high Standard of Ethics.

It was the high Ethical standard of Edwards, that Channing and Parker used in fighting against Edwards' God.

Jonathan Edwards

Earl Clement Davis

Harvard University or Pittsfield, MA¹

No Date

We have already seen how there was developing in New England a certain liberal tendency in regard to theological problems. We have traced in a general way the life of Chas. Chauncy, who was the leader of that free movement, and noticed that in the three great controversies, the Great Awakening, the Episcopal controversy, and the Theological Controversy, Chauncy was the champion of the ideas that were in accord with the developing movement of the times. In the Great Awakening he stood for the extreme democratic congregational ideas. In the Episcopal controversy, he was again democratic. In the Theological controversy his position was marked by the emphasis that he laid on means of Grace and common sense.

Opposed to him was Jonathan Edwards, a man of great power, who represented the Calvinists' thought, and had the courage to carry his thought to its logical conclusions, and paved the way for the overthrow of Calvinism.

Edwards was born Oct 5, 1703 in the town of So. Windsor. He came of a family of great intellectual power, coupled with great activity. His father, Timothy Edwards, was a minister of great power. Edwards' mother was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, one of the ablest ministers of the period.

As a child he was very precocious, and in September before he was fourteen years old he entered Yale College, from which he graduated in 1720.

¹ The manuscripts in this series covering early New England Congregational preachers have no date. They are hand-written, dating them before Earl Davis started typing his manuscripts in 1907. So, they date either from his time at Harvard University, or the first year or two of his ministry in Pittsfield.

At about the age of 19 or 20 he passed through a great religious experience of conversion. This was of great importance in his life, and was the foundation of his theological system. After a trial of preaching in New York, and a period of two years when he was tutor at Yale he was called to and ordained at the Church of Northampton to act as colleague to his grandfather Solomon Stoddard. During the same year he was married to Sarah Pierpont, daughter of James Pierpont, minister of New Haven.

His preaching in Northampton soon began to give evidence of the fact that he was no ordinary person. Walker says, The town was not unfamiliar with religious quickenings. At least five had occurred under the able ministry of Solomon Stoddard. But Edwards' sermons were on themes calculated to stir a community, and especially an isolated rural community. Two sudden deaths in the spring of 1734 excited the concern of the little town—a concern which was deepened by a vague alarm lest the spreading Arminianism which the Northampton pulpit denounced was a token of the withdrawal of God's redemptive mercy from sinful men. (Ten N.E. Leaders, Walker, p. 233²).

During the winter of 1734 and 5 Edwards conducted a revival in his own church, when there were about three hundred conversions. These conversions in general carried the people through three stages according to Edwards himself. The first stage was an awful apprehension of the condition in which men stand by nature. This was so overwhelming as to produce oftentimes painful physical effects. Next followed, in cases which Edwards believed to be the genuine work of the Spirit of God, a conviction that they justly deserved the divine wrath, not infrequently leading to expressions of wonder that 'God has not cast them into hell long ago.' [And] from this state of extreme humiliation they emerged

² *Ten New England Leaders* by Williston Walker. New York: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901.

[often suddenly,] into 'a holy repose of the soul in God through Christ'"³

It is not strange that his sermons should have had such an effect on the people, when he says that the wicked are useful simply as objects of the destructive wrath of God. When he tells the uncommitted members of his congregation that they are withheld for a brief period by the restraining hand of God from the hell into which they are to fall at their appointed times; when [he] pictures the damned glow in endless burning agony like a spider in the flame; when he heightens the happiness of the redeemed by the contrast between the felicities of heaven and the eternal torments of the lost, visible forever to the saints in glory, one is not surprised to hear that the people sat on the edges of their pews and clutched convulsively on the backs of the ones in front. Not only were many converted by Edwards one was led to commit suicide, and two others contemplated doing the same thing.

But the fruits of these sermons are not all seen in the 300 conversions, for after the excitement was over there came a great relaxation, Edwards became especially estranged from his young people. He even waited at one time for from years from 1744-48 for a single person to join his church. One is not surprised that he lost his hold, when one learns that he said, "Man is loathing because of his inherent wickedness," or "As innocent as children seem to us, yet in God's sight they are evil and loathsome like a viper." or "Men are a generation of vipers," or the simple subject of his famous Enfield sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God."

Thus you see that Edwards was prepared by his own experiences for the Great Awakening of 1740 and he welcomed Whitefield to his pulpit, and went himself to other places as a preacher of the revival Gospel. It is but natural therefore that Edwards, himself having experienced conversion, and been the human means (to say the least) of 300 conversions in his own church, should have taken up the

³ *Ten New England Leaders* by Williston Walker. New York: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901, pp. 233-4.

Revival Controversy, and opposed Chauncy and the general Arminian movement.

His theological system rests upon the idea of the Absolute Sovereignty of God. If God is absolute, and yet there is evil in the world, then God must be responsible for sin. Edwards went the full length of his logic and declared God responsible for sin, urging that God's hatred of sin could not be shown. There is sin in the world, and he punishes the sinners. In his sermon, "Sinners Useful in their Damnation," he brings out this idea showing that they are useful to glorify God.

But one is forced to say that a man who regards God as a God of love and justice cannot put together these two ideas of Edwards. (1) his idea of absolute sovereignty. (2) the damnation of men.

In 1750 Edwards came into trouble with his church over the question of a pure church, and was dismissed from Northampton and came to Stockbridge, then but a small village but with his duties as pastor he combined the duties as missionary to the Housatonic Indians.

In January 1758 Edwards was elected President of Princeton College in New Jersey and moved there but died in about one month, on Feb 13, 1758 of small pox inoculation.

Despite Edwards theology, he placed great emphasis upon the ethical side of life, and he was especially strong in emphasizing the moral fruits of the spirit.

To make a summary of Edwards and note the things for which he stands:

- (1) The idea of the Absolute Sovereignty of God.
- (2) His spiritual mystical theology, i.e., man coming face-to-face with God himself (seen in his idea of conversion).
- (3) His high standard of ethics.

It was the high ethical standard of Edwards that Channing and Parker used in fighting against Edwards' God.