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This is the first and introductory lecture on a series on the theology of Jonathan Edwards. May we begin with a moment of prayer. O God, we thank Thee that Thou didst give Jonathan Edwards to the church of the eighteenth century, and that in a very real sense Thou art giving him again and with even greater power to our church of the twentieth century. Bless this series and this lecture to that end, we pray Thee. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You all know something I'm sure of Jonathan Edwards, even if it's simply that he preached that powerful sermon in Enfield, Connecticut, July 8, 1741, entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Many of you may not know, however, that he's probably the finest philosophical theological mind ever to appear in the history of the American church. Some would not restrict that to the American church alone, but Perry Miller, about whom we'll say a little more in this very lecture, has made the remark that the work of Jonathan Edwards entitled *An Inquiry Concerning the Freedom of the Will* that that work alone is enough to establish Edwards as the greatest philosopher-theologian ever to grace the American scene.

Let me say few words about bibliographical matters before we begin closer examination of Edwards. A study guide that will accompany these tapes will give you far more and far more precise information on this matter. Certainly a biography of Jonathan Edwards has to begin with the first one written by his intimate friend and disciple, Hopkins. It's usually found in almost all the standard works of Jonathan Edwards, but of the later lives of Edwards, I would mention three in particular. At the turn of the century, Allen wrote his *Life of Edwards*, which I would say is still the best overall life and thought of Edwards. However, the Pulitzer Prize work of Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards 1703 to 1758*, is far more readable, far more up-to-date, far more interesting, and far superior as biography, though not so good as Allen with respect to Edwards's theology. On the other hand, Harry Miller's work

simply entitled *Edwards* is undoubtedly the most influential life of Edwards that has been produced in this century and is a kind of academic must reading.

Just a word too about other important literature. It might be interesting for you to know that at the end of last decade, two major compilations of secondary literature on Edwards were produced and they are of inestimable value, Lesser and Nancy Manspeaker's work. Lesser is the greater of the two works, although Manspeaker's compilation has the distinct advantage of being arranged in an alphabetical order so that you can find what any particular author up until almost 1980 wrote on almost any subject on Jonathan Edwards. The standard compilation of Edwards's primary works is made by Thomas Johnson and is still in print and available.

In our particular theme, the theology of Edwards, that includes a Dutch work by [Jan] Ridderbos which is more of . . . an outline than it is a real sketch of his theology, but valuable as such. Carl Bogue published a book on Edwards and the covenant a few years ago, which though restricted to the covenant is far-ranging and really more of a theology of Edwards than Conrad Cherry's book, which goes by the name *The Theology of Edwards: A Reappraisal*. It's really more of a reappraisal than it is a theology. Though it is of value, Cherry is concentrating primarily on the conversion aspect of Edward's theology. My own *Steps to Salvation* is more comprehensive, but it's highly limited to the sermons, mostly manuscript sermons, of Edwards and is designed to give you his evangelistic message.

So I'd have to say with respect to the theology of Jonathan Edwards, it has not yet been written. Genuinely comprehensive treatment of this man's massive data that he has in print, plus his profound analysis of the subjects about which he wrote, is yet to be completed. At the present time, Yale University Press is publishing *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, and a year ago it reached its seventh volume, which means it's producing the works at the rate of about a volume every seven or eight years, and at that rate if it reaches forty or fifty volumes before completed, it will not be over until the twenty-first century is over. I've been sort of breathing down these people's back hoping that they would finish the Yale University Press edition by 2003 to mark the tercentenary of the birth of Jonathan Edwards, but that does not seem likely at the present time.

I want to mention one work especially because it is available and cheap, and many ministers will want to take advantage of it because I think it is the best literary bargain under heaven, and that's the Hickman edition, sometimes called the London two-volume edition, published first in 1834 and recently republished by the Banner of Truth. Available for about fifty dollars, it gives you almost as full a survey of all the works of Edwards as we have in print, including some sixty-five sermons, for example. However, the Yale University Press edition, which each one of which I say cost about that much, is highly recommended if one can afford that price for the very specialized study that these expert scholars have expended in producing these works.

Now a few words about the actual life of Edwards; he was the son of a Congregational manse and East Windsor, Connecticut, born October 5, 1703. We don't know a great deal about his life, and some of the stories about his spider manuscript and his early writing on being and the mind which have led Davidson of Illinois to say that "if these were the product of a young teenager as until recently they had thought to be, then he is the greatest intellectual prodigy in the history of the race. Some of the recent research has indicated, however, that these works were not produced quite that early. There is no question at all that Edwards was a prodigy."

Perhaps his prodigious character is being reduced slightly as a result of the modern research in this area. At thirteen years of age, which wasn't so unusual in those days, after a very careful training in the Bible, Latin, Hebrew, Greek, as well by his father in that Congregational manse, he was enrolled as a student at the fledgling Yale University. Four years at various vicissitudes he was at that seminary, and it was near the end of his basic training there, near 1720, when he began to write his resolutions, and a little later his diary. Some of these resolutions may give you some idea of the intensity of this young man's commitment even in those early days.

Now I read a few of them as samples. The very first one, "Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God and my own good, profit, and pleasure in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of a time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved, to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved, so to do whatever difficulties I meet with, how many so ever and how great so ever."

Another resolution: “If I ever shall fall and grow dull so as to neglect to keep any part of these resolutions, to repent of all I can remember when I come to myself again.”

Number 5 reads this way: “Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can. Another reads, “To live with all my might while I do live.” As a final sample, “Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.”

Not only are those resolutions very earnest and very intense, but unlike most resolutions, they were kept by Jonathan Edwards to the end of his life, at least approximately, in a way that’s been rarely matched in the history of Christian thought. Apparently while Edwards was studying philosophy and theology at Yale, he wasn’t devoting all his time to that subject. He did take time out to notice a young lady named Sarah Pierpont, and he wrote on a blank leaf one of his papers this description of her when she was a thirteen-year-old girl, four years before she became Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, “They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is beloved of that great being who made and rules the world and that there are certain seasons in which this great being in many ways invisible comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight and that she hardly cares for anything except to meditate on Him, that she expects after a while to be received up where He is, to be raised up out of the world, and caught up into heaven, being assured that He loves her too well to let her remain at a distant from Him always. There she is to dwell with Him and to be ravaged with His love and delight forever. Therefore, if you present all the world before her with the richest of its treasure, she disregards it and cares not for it and is unmindful of any pain or affliction. She has a strange sweetness in her mind and singular purity in her affections. Is most just and conscientious in all her conduct, and you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this great being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness, and universal benevolence of mind, especially after this great being has manifested Himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place singing sweetly and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone walking in the fields and groves and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.”

As we say, after Edwards was graduated from college as salutatorian of his class and then completed the two years of divinity school

work, he had a short pastorate in the New Light Presbyterian Church in New York and returned shortly thereafter and decided to become a tutor at Yale while he was preaching at various churches in Connecticut before he was called to be the associate of his very distinguished grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, the patriarch of western Massachusetts and the pastor of the large congregation for those days, Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards went there in 1726 and was ordained as a congregational pastor, and in 1727 Sarah joined him as his wife, and in 1729, when the great Stoddard died, Edwards became the sole pastor of the utmost, outstanding church in western Massachusetts.

One detail about these early days that won't come out inevitably in the course of perusing his theology is the matter of his conversion. It seems as if Edwards did not consider himself converted when he was a son of the manse or even in those college days at Yale, but at the very end, judging from a remark he made twenty years later in his personal narrative. This indication, a part of which I'd like to read, of his conversion is not only significant as an event itself, but it indicates to us the heart of his theology at the same time.

Let me read a part of his personal narrative. He says, "There had been a wonderful alteration in my mind in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty from that day to this, so that I scarce ever found so much as the rising of an objection against it in the most absolute sense, and God showing mercy to whom He will show mercy and hardening whom He will. God's absolute sovereignty and justice with respect to salvation and damnation is what my mind seems to rest assured of as much as of anything that I see with my eyes, at least it is so at times. But I've often since the first conviction had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty that I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction." I call the hearers' attention of that phraseology as especially significant, because as we will notice, especially as we come to study his doctrine of regeneration and conversion and spiritual illumination, what marks a converted soul is not his understanding of doctrine or even his acquiescence in it, but fundamentally his joy in it and seeing a delightful excellency in it, though I think I may safely exegete this statement here as virtually tantamount to a declaration of persuasion of his own conversion by Jonathan Edwards.

I read the sentence again, and then continue, "I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine

has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, right, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God, but my first conviction was not so. From my childhood up my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty in choosing whom He would to eternal life and rejecting whom He pleased, leaving them eternally to perish and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear as a horrible doctrine to me." . . . Here it was to Jonathan Edwards an awesome doctrine, but now he's changed and it's a delightful conviction, but to conclude, "I remember the time very well when I seemed to be convinced and fully satisfied as to the sovereignty of God and His justice and thus disposing of men according to His sovereign pleasure, but never could give an account how or by what means I was thus convinced. Not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it, but only that now I saw further and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it."

In a certain sense that is a summary of a theology of Jonathan Edwards. He understood the Reformed doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith as taught very rigorously by his father, he had profound reservations about acquiescence in it, but there came a time in his life when he was apparently about twenty years of age, just having finished college before beginning what we would today call seminary training when he not only acquiesced in it, but delightfully so, and even then only afterward, sometime afterwards did he realize that the delightful experience was probably a conclusive evidence that he was born again of God's Holy Spirit.

But Edwards, as we say, to finish this brief resume of his life, became the sole pastor of a Northampton congregation with some six hundred families ultimately connected with it in 1729, and I may describe the rest of his life as following very much the pattern of the Lord he served. We know that our Lord's first year was a year of obscurity, and so the first years of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, with the sole exception of giving a lecture in Boston in 1731, were years of obscurity. He was a young minister living in the shadow of the great patriarch who had preceded him, and while his ministry was being felt by his local congregation, he was an obscure unknown in the fringes of civilization in western Massachusetts for those opening years.

Just as the second year of our Lord's ministry became the year of His great popularity, so Edwards in 1733 and 1734 entered

a decade which could be described “the years of Edwards’s popularity.” It was at the end of 1733 and the beginning of 1734 the first great awakening in the Northampton congregation took place. A tremendous outpouring of the Spirit of God, according to Jonathan Edwards, and his people were knocking on his door constantly asking about their conversion and seeking their conversion, and he was to write up later in his faithful narrative of surprising conversion a description of what was taking place in Massachusetts because what began in Northampton spread along the Connecticut Valley and down into Connecticut itself as well as Massachusetts. And it so interested Isaac Watts and others in London when they heard about it that they published this faithful narrative, and even John Wesley, just coming on to the scene in those days, was so deeply impressed by it that he too gave an edited edition of it to leading all his specifically predestinarian touches Edwards had in it and rejoicing, however, in the wonderful conversions that took place.

But then after 1734 and 1735, that first great awakening in the Northampton congregation was terminated very rudely by one of the relatives of Jonathan Edwards. In the excitement of the time, feeling he heard a voice saying, “Cut his throat,” and obeying it and in a certain sense he ended that revival which was characterized by some extremes as well as by very remarkable and genuine conversions which are related in the faithful narrative.

The succeeding years, Edwards continued faithfully to preach his marvelous sermons. If I may say just a word about his sermons, I have read every sermon that Edwards ever wrote that’s extant, and we have almost all of us sermons extant, and personally I never found one of them that was not profoundly moving, including even the simple outlines that he was later to preach to the Stockbridge Indians and further west of Massachusetts where he spent the latter part of his life, as we’ll see in moment.

His sermons always began with what we would call a contextual introduction. He would take a particular passage of Scripture and concentrate on a verse and show the immediate surrounding material and then in what was called a doctrine, sometimes a proposition, he would state what he believed that particular part of the text was teaching, and then for about a half an hour he would develop the meaning of that text, drawing from a fabulous knowledge of the Bible and quoting from unknown sections of it very, very effectively. And then when it came to the use or the application, the following half hour was a very intensive

application of that particular doctrine. I was once asked to speak on a college campus, and they sent certain directions to me and one of them was don't begin your address with a joke. Well, I've never stopped laughing at the thought it would be if anybody ever wrote to a Puritan saying, "Don't begin a sermon with a joke." I'm sure it never even crossed Jonathan Edwards's [mind]. I never found a joke in all of Edwards's twelve [hundred] or thirteen hundred sermons. Difficult to say exactly how many sermons Edwards preached because we don't know in every case whether a sermon is one or multiple, but at least thirteen hundred sermons he preached. You won't find any jokes in them; you'll find a good deal of wit! Edwards is quite witty in some of his most somber messages, but jokes, no, and another thing that's very interesting is that I don't think I can recall in one of those thirteen hundred sermons a single reference to himself, his wife, or his children. You'll realize what a family of eleven children could do in providing illustration for ministers for their Sunday sermons and realize that this man resisted every conceivable temptation to do that. You realize how concentrated he was in his intention of expounding the Word of God. We'll see this more clearly when we come to his doctrine of Scripture and applying the Word of God. The only personal reference you'd ever find in Edwards was at times he would remind the people, pull rank if you please, that he was their pastor and he had certain responsibility, but he'd never do that, which was quite obvious, unless it was extremely important for them to remember at a particular juncture the role which he performed under God to which they had called him to perform in their own midst.

But the Great Awakening as we usually designate that term came in 1740, and it wasn't associated so much with Jonathan Edwards as it was with the Billy Graham of the eighteenth century, George Whitefield, who made almost as many trips to the States as Graham has made to Britain to conduct evangelistic campaigns. And George Whitefield moved up the coast from the South and had tremendous responses from people even like Benjamin Franklin in the Middle Colonies and then into New England; he spent four days in the household of Jonathan Edwards, which had a tremendous effect on Whitefield, just as Whitefield's preaching in Edwards's church moved Edwards to tears constantly and great movement of the Spirit was in evidence there, but that period from 1740 to 1742 was a period of a Great Awakening all over in New England and the Middle Colonies as well, and Edwards and his church was a conspicuous part of it.

Edwards himself was involved in itineration. That famous sermon to which I've already made reference, which you already know, was preached as a part of his itinerate at Enfield, Connecticut, further down the Connecticut River in 1741—July 8, 1741—right at the heart of the second era of the Great Awakening. And we will say that decade, roughly from 1734 to 1744, were the years of Edward's great popularity as a great preacher, an evangelist, and beginning to be recognized as a great theologian, but in the middle 1740s, just somewhat parallel to our Lord's final year of opposition, a deep opposition that Jonathan Edwards began in earnest. There were many factors here. I'll only mention in passing something we'll develop a great deal more in a later tape. The crucial one was his difference with the long-dead patriarch Solomon Stoddard with respect to admitting persons to the Lord's Supper.

Stoddard had taken the position which has come to be known as converting ordinances; that is, that a person who came to the Lord's Supper, though he must be orthodox in his tenets and he must be moral in his life, may be unconverted or at least think he's unconverted, and Solomon Stoddard maintained such a person as that should not refrain from the Lord's Supper but had a moral obligation to come to it and that he might very well be converted in the reception of it. That's what led to the term "converting ordinances doctrine." Edwards had misgiving about that doctrine from the beginning, but he had such a respect and admiration and even awe for his great grandfather, predecessor, senior pastor Solomon Stoddard that it made him tarry long and think deeply before he finally became convinced in the early 1740s that Stoddard was wrong and that he had to oppose him, even though Edwards was fully aware that it would probably lead to what it did lead: namely, his dismissal. Because Edwards became convinced that the Lord's Table was for the Lord's children and only for the Lord's children, and only if a person was persuaded that he was converted and could give evidence to the pastor of his soundness of doctrine and soundness of life and that he did believe himself to be converted, could he be admitted to the Lord's Supper.

As I said, I won't develop this now, but perhaps even here I ought to point out that frequently it is said that Edwards was insisting that the person prove that he was converted. That is far from the truth and a downright caricature of Edwards's thinking. The person who applied for access to the Lord's Table must believe himself to be converted and must persuade the pastor that he believed himself to be converted and there was nothing that would

militate against that. The pastor didn't have to be persuaded that he was converted. As a matter of fact, the little covenant which Edwards drew up, a very nominal profession of a person's trust in Jesus Christ, but it did lead to the rallying of the forces. In the meantime, the great son of Solomon Stoddard, John Stoddard, probably the most influential civil military figure in western Massachusetts at that time and a stalwart friend and defender of Jonathan Edwards, had died. And the enemies of Edwards realized that the great bulwark that was protecting Edwards . . . was gone and the opposition started in earnest and it led to his dismissal in July 1750 and that ended, as it were, his years of opposition.

Here he was a man with a wife and eleven children approximately at that time and not knowing where to go. He had various invitations. The South was far away. Scotland was even more nonnegotiable, though he finally settled for a small white settlement fifty miles or so west of Northampton, right on the edge of Indian territory where the Stockbridge Indians had settled and had a school and where he would be joint pastor of a few white settlers there and a rather large number of mostly illiterate Stockbridge Housatonic Indians with some Mohawks visiting from time to time. I refer to this as a sort of burial of Jonathan Edwards. He'd reached an apogee of fame and now was in the boondocks of the age in a tiny little village on the edge of civilization.

As a matter of fact, that led the great German philosopher Fichte, when he read Edward's work on the will later on, to express great amazement that an intellect of that prowess could flourish on the absolute fringes of civilization. But that's where, somewhat as our Lord did His great redeeming work and his very death, Edwards did his greatest work in his veritable exile from the civilization of his time. It was at Stockbridge that he produced *Freedom of the Will* in 1754, *The End for Which God Made the World*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*, 1757, though it wasn't published until later, and then finally his great *Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*, which was going through the presses when he died. He did not die in Stockbridge because the fledgling University of West Jersey, which has come to be Princeton University, extended a call to him to become its president.

Edwards, the great man that he was, had a very high respect for the opinion of others, and he consulted with his intimate friends as to whether he ought to accept that, explaining to them that he didn't think he should because he was in a position now to do his greatest work, *A Rational Account of Christian Divinity*, and

Stockbridge as a very exilic type of position was perfectly suited to a concentration on this type of work, but his friends persuaded him that he ought to accept the presidency of Princeton. He broke down in tears, but he went to Princeton.

His death occurred a few months later because interested as Puritans were, Cotton Mather's notable illustration, Jonathan Edwards was interested in the advance of the modern science, and inoculations were just coming on the scene. And the idea of an inoculation to prevent smallpox was just being tried and recommended by the physician. Edwards acquiesced in the experiment, and it unfortunately led to his death because pox were formed in his throat and he died of asphyxiation March 22, 1758.

So much for the life of Jonathan Edwards as a brief sketch. We'll fill in more details, I suppose, we go along, but we're interested in this course in not the man's life so much as his theology. And the first question I take up as I address myself to the topic of the theology of Edwards is a question which is being asked a good deal these days, as Edwards has been rediscovered, as it were, in the twentieth century: Was he a neo-Calvinist? That's the expression, for example, that Douglas Elwood uses in his *Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, and a number of other people recognizing his virtual genius and his powerful thought can't quite acquiesce the notion that this man was just a Calvinist. He was certainly no garden-variety Calvinist. He was no run-of-the-mill Calvinist, but I think the truth of the matter is that he was a Calvinist and not a neo-Calvinist, and we mean by that an essential deviation from that particular pattern of thought. But on the other hand, one does have to recognize that there are certain positions which Jonathan Edwards developed, some of which we'll consider in this series, which are certainly not standard Calvinism. For example, he held the doctrine of continuous creation. The standard doctrine of Calvinism is certainly preservation of the creation, instantaneous and constant preservation of what God has made by the God who made them is standard Calvinistic orthodoxy.

But there's always been a minority report, shared for example by Richard Sims in England a century earlier, than whom there's no more orthodox Calvinist, of the continuous creation idea, that preservation doesn't really make sense, that created being cannot exist of itself for a moment, that the only way it can seem to exist is by God constantly creating it. But that is one doctrine of Edwards that does illumine his preaching. It's not overly significant in his

heritage, but it's definitely a part of his thought, and it can't be called standard Calvinism.

He was very emphatically a postmillenarian. That again has become much stronger in nineteenth-century Calvinism when you think of Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield as holding it. Loraine Boettner, the author of *Predestination*, is a strong postmillenarian, and all of the modern theonomists, every one of whom is a Calvinist, are energetic postmillenarians, but at the same time the amillenarian position is probably more common as a consensus of Calvinism. But Edwards was postmillenarian and strongly so. As Steven Stein has pointed out, the only commentary on the Bible he ever wrote was on the book of Revelation, about the only book in the Bible on which Calvin did not write a commentary was the one on which Edwards did.

Another deviation of Edwards from standard Calvinism and to my mind a serious error as a matter of fact on Edward's part is his attempt to explain the origin of sin. Most Calvinists have left that problem lie, somewhat like the catechism saying, "Adam being left to the freedom of his will sinned." Period. They all agree that Adam had a free will, that Adam did choose, and that he did choose to disobey, but Edwards made more of an attempt than anyone in the history of Reformed theology to my knowledge has ever done. At this point I compare him with Augustine as one of the two who have made the deepest effort to expound and in my opinion have failed, Augustine and Edwards even more so. But even here, if you agree or disagree with me when we come to an exposition of this deviation of his, there is no question at all that he did believe that Adam sinned and Adam sinned culpably and he sinned representatively, but the main lines of Calvinism are maintained even there.

Sometime after Jonathan Edwards's death, Jonathan Edwards Jr. was asked to write about his father, and he listed about ten areas in which he felt his father had made contributions, but the fundamental thing that Jonathan Jr. was saying is something with which I basically agree myself. Fundamentally Jonathan Edwards tried to give a more thorough, rational defense of Calvinism, [more than] almost any Calvinist. Whether you agree with his defense or not, I think you would notice that he is himself, in his own opinion, a Calvinist who is trying to explain in reference to the controversies of his own day the fundamental soundness and rational defensibility, as well as biblical doctrine, of Calvinism. He's famous for the statement at the beginning of his greatest

work, *The Freedom of the Will*, that he's a Calvinist if you want to call him that, "but don't think for a moment that I get my ideas from John Calvin or in any way a slave to the thinking of John Calvin." That's about the way to put it. He was a Calvinist. He believed essentially in the doctrines of the Bible in the way John Calvin did, but he did enter into an area where Calvin was very reluctant to move. As a matter of fact, I can't help thinking at this particular point of a famous remark of John Calvin, and I hope he wouldn't apply it to Jonathan Edwards, and I don't think he would. I certainly wouldn't. And that is that "hell is made for the overly curious." I don't think that Calvin would think Edwards was overly curious, but he certainly was a great deal more curious than John Calvin was about those things, and I would say he was a Calvinist who thought very, very deeply and tried very profoundly to [explain] the views of Calvinism.

Let me conclude this particular tape with a quotation from my friend the dean of Covenant Seminary, David Jones, who once in a letter to me suggested that perhaps the three great theologians, Augustine, Calvin, and Edwards, could be described this way: "As Augustine giving us the profoundest Reformed analysis of the goal of moral endeavor. Calvin giving us the finest statement of the standard of moral endeavor, and Jonathan Edwards as giving us the deepest analysis of the motive of moral endeavor, namely, love." This would be rather compatible with the liberal Haroutunian's essay entitled "Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Great Commandment."