

“Charity and Its Fruits” – Jonathan Edwards

Chapter 10: The Spirit of Charity the Opposite of a Censorious Spirit

Bible Text: 1 Cor. 13:1-3: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or **resentful**; ...” [v. 5 (KJV): “...thinketh no evil”]

Review: The Fruits of the Poisonous Trees

I. The Nature of Censoriousness.

A. Censoriousness Defined: “a disposition to judge or censor others uncharitably.”

B. How It Presents: the disposition presents based on evil-thinking or speaking about others based on:

1. Hasty and Ignorant Conclusions : judgment or remarks made without really knowing the person or observing only external evidence (John 1:45-46)(Philip and Nathanael);
2. Their qualities: judgment that overlooks a person’s good qualities or magnifies their ill ones; (John 9:1-3)(Jesus and the man blind from birth – who sinned?).
3. Their actions:
 - a. Judgment without evidence based on rumor, gossip and slander, suspicion, or prejudice (1 Tim. 6:4)(slander as the fruit of pride and ignorance);
 - b. Judgment based upon the worst construction of a person’s actions (Matt. 9:32-34)(Pharisees allege Jesus is casting out demons by the prince of demons)

C. Is every exercise of judgment censorious? No, like anger, judgment is not always sinful.

1. Judgment by duly appointed civil, criminal, or ecclesiastical judges, or
2. Judgments rendered in our private affairs, when
 - a. Based on clear and convincing evidence measured against biblical or authoritative legal standards, not rumor, gossip, suspicion or prejudice 2 Cor. 13:1; Deut. 19:15 (charge must be established by two or three witnesses [all church members]; 1Tim. 5:19-21 [elders])
 - b. Exercised in love, not in sinful pleasure derived from rendering adverse judgments, as evidenced by pronouncing judgment with ridicule, contempt, bitterness, or maliciousness James 3:17 (compare the wisdom that is from above)

II. How Christian Love Is Contrary To A Censorious Spirit

- A. Censoriousness is *contrary* to the command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28-31) and to love fellow Christians as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-35; 15:12-14), in three ways:
1. It arises from a high, charitable view of ourselves and a low, critical view of others (Mt. 7:1-5) (with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged);
 2. It allows our friendships and family relationships to impair our judgment (James 2:1-9 - partiality); and
 3. It drives us to the lowest view of others when in conflict situations, especially when we are angry (Prov. 17:27 (maintaining a cool spirit; 19:19 (great anger – great transgression); the remedy - Jas. 1:19-20) (quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger)
- B. Censoriousness is the fruit of a proud and selfish heart (i.e., a fruit of inordinate self-love), based on:
1. The false, unexamined assumption that we are *much better* than the person we are censuring and condemning (Mt. 7:1-5, above); and
 2. Blindness to our own faults Rom. 2:17-21b (hypocrisy between teaching and action);(2 Pet. 1:5-10 (cultivating Christian graces avoids “nearsightedness”)

III. Applications to the Christian Life

- A. Remember the Ninth Commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16) and the exceedingly broad scope of this commandment. See WLC Q144-145 (attached)
- B. “Think no evil – speak no evil” (Ps. 50:19-20; Mark 7:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:1; Titus 3:1-2) How have our proud and selfish thoughts generated evil-thinking and evil-speaking? How do we repent of such things?
- C. Beware of your first reactions to, and thoughts about, people and situations. (Jos. 22:10-31 – the “Altar of Witness”; Jas. 1:19-20, above)
- D. Does the situation really require my input? Does Christian wisdom dictate that I walk away? (Prov. 17:14; 15:18; 16:28; 26:17; 1Cor. 4:1-7, 5)
- E. Be mindful of the great burden of rendering judgment (Mt. 7:1-6)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Read the passages below from Edwards, Chapter 10 and answer the discussion questions in your group:

A censorious spirit appears in a forwardness to judge evil of the actions of others. By actions, here, I would be understood to mean all the external voluntary acts of men, whether consisting in words or deeds. And a censorious spirit in judging evil of others' actions discovers itself in two things: First, in judging them to be guilty of evil actions without any evidence that constrains them to such a judgment. A suspicious spirit, which leads persons to be jealous of others, and ready to suspect them of being guilty of evil things when they have no evidence of it whatever, is an uncharitable spirit, and contrary to Christianity. Some persons are very free in passing their censures on others with respect to those things that they suppose they do out of their sight. Very often, again, persons show an uncharitable and censorious spirit with respect to the actions of others, by being forward to take up and circulate evil reports about them. Merely hearing a flying and evil rumour about an individual, in such a thoughtless and lying world as this is, is far from being sufficient evidence against anyone, to make us believe he has been guilty of that which is reported; for the devil, who is called "the god of this world," is said to be "a liar, and the father of it," and too many, alas! of his children are like him in their speaking of falsehoods.

1. How do pride and selfishness give rise to the censorious evils upon which Edwards comments above?
2. How must Christians deal with such evils (a) in themselves, and (b) in others who practice such things?

Second, is a disposition to put the worst construction on their actions. The censorious are not only apt to judge others guilty of evil actions without sufficient evidence, but they are also prone to put a bad construction on their actions, when they will just as well, and perhaps better, admit of a good construction. Very often, the moving design and end in the action is secret, confined to the recesses of the actor's own bosom; and yet persons are commonly very forward to pass their censure upon the act, without reference to these: and this is a kind of censoriousness and uncharitable judging, as common, or more common, than any other.

1. How does the brand of censoriousness mentioned in this passage differ from that described in the first passage above? Does it have the same roots in pride and selfishness?
2. Pray together that we, individually and as a congregation, will be watchful against temptations to the sin of censoriousness, in all its forms, and produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Westminster Larger Catechism

Q. 144. *What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

Q. 145. *What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any; endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.