

In Reformed theology the idea of seeking is understood in two ways. First, and generally, it is understood in the sense of preparation for glorification. Secondly, and less familiar, it is understood in the sense of preparation for regeneration. In the present day most in Reformed churches are unaware of the second understanding of preparation and its history within the Reformed tradition. It is in this second and less familiar sense, seeking as preparation for regeneration, that the theology and preaching of Jonathan Edwards is distinctive and has much to teach us.

John Gerstner (Reformed scholar, spiritual mentor to RC Sproul and leading Edwards researcher) writes concerning Edwards' understanding of seeking in this second sense in his three volume work, *THE RATIONAL BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS*:

Probably the most distinctive thing about Jonathan Edwards' evangelistic message is his theory of seeking...For now, suffice to say that in Edwards' view the natural man could do certain things (use the means of grace, obey the commandments outwardly, etc.) that would probably issue in his salvation. This theory falls between the Arminian, on the one hand and the extreme Calvinistic, on the other. According to the Arminian theory of salvation, the sinner was able of himself alone to repent, believe, and be saved: all without the working of regeneration having previously taken place. According to Calvinism, regeneration must precede such gracious acts as believing and repenting. When the message comes to the unconverted, he has no ability to receive it savingly unless God, at the time the message is given, works faith in the person. He will then evince this regeneration by believing the gospel which is presented. But if God does not work faith, there is nothing, according to some Calvinists, that the sinner can do. At this point perhaps the Calvinist Edwards is distinctive (though certainly not among Puritans). He insists that there is something that the sinner can do; in that, he agrees with the Arminians. Still, he denies with vigor that sinner can do what the Arminian thinks he can do. At the same time he disagrees with those Calvinists who say that there is nothing that the sinner can do. According to Edwards, he can do something non-saving but promising and hopeful: namely seek."

To further explain Edwards' view and to not misunderstand him we must note that he, like all Calvinists, rightly held that men cannot make satisfaction for their sins, cannot earn a righteousness that will make them acceptable to God, and cannot of their own change their hearts. Edwards, however, insisted there is much the sinner can do and should do. Though fallen, man is still in possession of his created faculties of thought and will. The legs that carry him to the tavern can just as easily carry him to the church house. With his mind he can understand the gospel message and the need to respond to it even though his heart is adverse to it. In this regard Edwards rightly understood that sin did not destroy the power of the hand but rather the willingness of the heart. Edwards emphasized there are outward acts that remain in the power of sinful, fallen man and though these outward acts are not virtuous the sinner still has a moral responsibility to do them. Further, he emphasized that such actions that the unregenerate man is capable of must not be excused on the basis of what he is incapable of. Gerstner rightly notes, "For Edwards this doctrine of seeking was the answer to the question of how one maintains the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God without rendering the sinner altogether inactive, if not despairing." Perhaps, nowhere in the preaching of Edwards is his understanding of this doctrine more clearly set forth than

in his sermon on II Kings 7:3-4: "That a possibility of being saved is better than a certainty of perishing."

We would do well to read and study Edwards on this largely neglected understanding of seeking. He has much to teach us concerning it, its importance and place in evangelical preaching and that within the Reformed tradition.