

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*GOD'S PASSION FOR HIS GLORY: LIVING THE VISION OF JONATHAN EDWARDS.
AND
THE END FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD*

A BOOK REVIEW

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DR 37380 THE MODERN ERA

BY

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Piper, John, and Jonathan Edwards. *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards, with the Complete Text of The End for Which God Created the World.* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006. 266 pp. \$22.99.

Biographical Information

John Piper was born to Bill and Ruth Piper in Chattanooga, TN on January 11, 1946.

Piper attended Wheaton College, where he majored in literature and minored in philosophy. He earned his Bachelor of Divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. Piper then completed a Doctor of Theology at the University of Munich in Germany. Piper has written more than forty books on a range of topics. He still writes for and communicates on the website desiringgod.org, which was the website founded for his ministry in 1994.¹ Piper identified this book to be a secondary teaching on the primary teaching of Edwards (Piper, xi).

Jonathan Edwards was born to the Reverend Timothy Edwards and his wife Esther on October 5, 1703. He began attendance at what is now Yale University at the age of 13 and graduated after 4 years. Edwards then completed his graduate studies at Yale by 1723. Solomon Stoddard, the grandfather of Edwards, pastored in Northampton, MA and brought the young Edwards alongside him in ministry. In 1729, Edwards succeeded his grandfather as pastor of the church in Northampton until 1750. Edwards was a key figure in the Great Awakenings when revival broke out in his church from 1734-1735.² Edwards' writings continue to influence the landscape of theology into the twenty-first century.

Synopsis

Part One

¹DesiringGod.org. “Our Founder, John Piper,” Founded March 1994. <https://www.desiringgod.org/our-founder>.

²Holifield, E. Brooks. *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War.* (New Haven, CT: London: Yale University Press, 2005), 102.

The book, *God's Passion for His Glory*, was divided into two parts. Part One consists of a description of Piper's perspectives on several of the works of Jonathan Edwards, particularly *The End for Which God Created the World (The End)*. In the preface, Piper described Part One as a “focused glimpse into the roots of this vision (God-centered, soul-satisfying, sin-destroying vision of reality) as I have come to see it in the life and thought of Jonathan Edwards” (Piper, xiii). The four chapters were devoted to the accomplishment of this purpose.

Chapter One was comprised of two sections. In Section One, Piper established a contextual paradigm for reading Edwards. The paradigm included a focus on the relevancy for the contemporary American Protestant Christian culture and theological implications that Edwards offered by his vision of God. Piper further addressed the pragmatic aspects of the American culture that demand the need for a theological engagement with the ideas of Edwards. Piper displayed how he and others reasoned that old and difficult books are necessary reading to challenge the thinking of the current age. In the end, Piper encouraged his readers to pursue reading Edwards though it might be difficult or challenging.

Piper identified fifteen implications that reading *The End* by Edwards may impact a reader. Specifically, Piper insisted that the reader would see many ways that the glory of God and the joy of man are related, which is the focus of *The End*. Piper provided an excellent overview of the thoughts of Edwards in Chapter One to offer these succinct conclusions.

Chapter two entailed a biographical sketch of Edwards. In the brief biography, Piper traced events in the life of Edwards and identified perspectives, works, and disciplines of Edwards during various life stages. Piper assessed that Edwards' years in the frontier village of Stockbridge were difficult, yet they providentially enabled Edwards to write four of his most influential works (Piper, 65). Piper completed the chapter with a short overview and analysis of

those influential works. In this chapter, Piper shared his goal for his book, “that God is glorified most not merely by being known, nor by merely being dutifully obeyed, but by being enjoyed in the knowing and the obeying” (Piper, 75).

Piper presented his perspective on the thinking of Jonathan Edwards (Chapter Three). Piper shared his own reflections on his studies of Edwards by highlighting elements of Edwards’ thought that shaped Piper’s own theology and writing. While not intended to be exhaustive in content, Piper included relevant excerpts of Edwards ideas that clearly communicated Edwards’ own thoughts.

In Chapter four, Piper acknowledged Edwards as an influential thinker and theologian for the modern era. Piper wove his own thoughts about culture with those of Edwards in an attempt to show the contemporary relevance of Edwards, all while injecting Edwards’ theological ideas into the currents of the modern Protestant Christian faith. Piper specifically elevated the topics of self-love, God’s glory, and Christian happiness from the perspective of Edwards. Piper emphasized Edwards’ view of the regeneration of sinners and the importance of believers passionately living for the glory of God.

In part two of the book, Piper included three sections, the primary portion is the text by Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, often considered as a part of *Two Dissertations* that Edwards had written. In the other two sections, which preceded Edwards’ work, Piper presented advice on how to read *The End* and a short note on the history of the editions of Edwards’ text that is included. In an early chapter or part two, Piper presented the structure of Edwards’ work to familiarize the reader with the divisions and overall ideas presented in *The End*. Piper noted the philosophical and biblical aspects of the dissertation and suggested the less philosophically

minded reader read *The End* in reverse. Lastly, Piper encouraged the reader in the endeavor of reading *The End*, by Jonathan Edwards.

Critical Evaluation of *God's Passion for His Glory*

John Piper has accomplished a great feat in the book, *God's Passion for His Glory*. The effort he made to give a brief, yet meaningful biography of Edwards is well done. Piper also established quality means by which the reader may engage with the thoughts of Edwards. In the end, Piper gave a careful and clear glimpse into the theological brilliance of Edwards. More than identifying the brilliance of Edwards, Piper testified of Edwards' devotion to God and Edwards' sanctification of soul; in doing so Piper rightly acknowledged Edwards as one of the greatest evangelicals of the modern era.

At several points, Piper revealed either his purpose or motive for presenting Edwards in the manner he did. Piper confessed, "My conviction is that if I can infect you with Edwards, you will have a very powerful inoculation against the hollowing disease of our times" (Piper, 83). Piper would likely define that disease as the failure to find the greatest joy, which is seeing and savoring the glory of God. The joy or delight is that which Piper accurately understood Edwards to encourage his own readers to pursue through their recognition of the beauty and truth of God.

Piper effectively and succinctly navigated a treatment of Edwards' ideas in the four chapters. In the preface, Piper laid out the scheme of the chapters and through them fulfilled his plan with effectiveness that championed Edwards' influence, both intellectually and spiritually. The aim for Piper to have remained the secondary teacher in relationship to Edwards was accomplished in the four chapters.

The emphasis Piper placed on the contemporary significance of Edwards is especially important to note. Edwards, being both a theologian and a philosopher, was appropriately

engaged by Piper to effectively influence the modern reader. The emphasis on Edwards was an important element for Piper and it should be recognized that he achieved that goal in *God's Passion for His Glory*.

Part Two

The second portion of this book contains *The End for Which God Created the World*. *The End* is one of two works transcribed after Edwards' death and prepared by two friends, Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy. *The End* consists of an introduction and two chapters; each chapter contains sections that provide organization of the material.

In the introduction Edwards oriented his reader to his terms and his understanding of their meaning. He began by differentiating the use of *chief* end and *ultimate* end, which likely address his understanding of the use of the terms from the Westminster Shorter Catechism drawn up in 1648. The Westminster Shorter Catechism contains statements outlining the orthodox beliefs of Calvinists, with whom Edwards aligned. Edwards used this introduction and the explanation of *chief* end, *ultimate* end, and *subordinate* end to establish his rationale for “which God had *primarily* in view in creating, and the *original* ordination of the world” (Piper, 134).

In the introduction there are nine positions set out by Edwards to establish the grounds by which he will develop his thoughts. The nine positions are Edwards attempt to further explain the general positions that he believed to be the foundation for God's creation of the world. The positions, being progressively dependent upon one another, show the thought process of Edwards as he sets out to prove his thesis concerning the glory of God as the *chief* end. Though challenging to any reader, understanding of Edwards' positions are foundational for the remaining work.

Edwards transitioned (chapter one, section one), taking into consideration three things at stake regarding the reasoning ability of man: reason's insufficiency, reason's improvement by revelation, and reason's ability to answer objections concerning revelation. Based on those three premises, Edwards presented six dictates to propose the strength that reason provides for one's consideration of God. The dictates are Edwards support of his first premise that reason alone is sufficient to determine God's chief end for the creation of the world.

The dictates are organized to indicate the rationality of understanding God as perfectly sufficient in himself and in his works, which accomplish all that he intended. In each of the dictates Edwards emphasized the supremacy of God in and of himself. Edwards demanded a high regard of God, his self-sufficiency, his self-value, and his intentions in everything done in creation. Based on the dictates, Edwards justified the idea that human reason is insufficient to determine the chief end of God, reason requires illumination by divine revelation. In the end, Edwards expressed through the dictates how it is fitting that God create and reveal himself through his relationship with creation as the *chief* end of glory.

Section two consists of four suppositions by which Edwards understood God to effectually act and accomplish all of his aims. Edwards meant for these suppositions to show the communicative aspects of God's nature "as an emanation of His [God's] own infinite fulness" (Piper, 151). The four suppositions provide some primary thoughts for Edwards' conclusions, focusing on issues like morality and God's self-sufficiency.

Careful consideration of the suppositions create reflection on the providence of God at work in and through creation. In the suppositions, Edwards reasoned that God intends to continually reveal himself. Edwards noted that God delights in the exercise of his attributes as he manifests the excellencies of wisdom and power. Edwards believed that the beauty of the

excellencies of God are manifested in order for mankind to know God and as mankind increases in the knowledge of God, there is a furtherance of God's delight in himself. The primary concern of the suppositions is to show that God is communicative with his creation, revealing himself for the purpose his glory.

Having shown how creation reveals the amiableness of God, Edwards moved to the third section in which he expressed how he understood the delight of God: the greatest delight of God is found in the delight of himself. Edwards insisted that the aim of God in revealing his glory is the chief end of all his work. Edwards said, "his last end is consistent with his making *himself* his last end" (Piper 152). The section consists of ten statements followed by explanations that identify the intention of God to delight in himself and his actions.

In the explanation of the first delight, Edwards concluded that God takes delight in expressing his perfections, which means he delights in himself. Furthermore, as God makes those expressions of himself the end, "he makes himself his end" (Piper 153). Thus, the delight God takes in his perfections and in expressing his perfections is made known both to his creation, for his creation, and for himself, which is the delight of his glory. The glory of God and the enjoyment of that glory is found as the union of knowledge of him ever increases through eternity. The conformity of the created to God in that union is a reflection of the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son (Piper 160.) For Edwards the beauty of God communicating his divine nature and purposes increases the joy of man and the joy of God. Thus, the emphasis on God's delight in himself. Edwards concluded that the relationship of God to his creation is how this delight is fully completed, especially through God's relationship to the church, or the elect.

In section four, Edwards considered the objections that might be raised against his reasoning. The answers given by Edwards show his understanding of philosophical issues that were impacting the milieu of his day. The section shows the forethought of Edwards on his topic as he presented the potential objections. The objections and answers to them provided Edwards a unique perspective to expound on his reasons for God being right to exalt himself in creation. In a convincing manner, Edwards answered each of the objections by pointing to the necessity of God's *chief* end, glory in himself.

In Chapter one, Edwards had shown his ability to reason logically about the topic. In chapter two Edwards displayed his intimacy with the Scriptures and its emphasis on the matters he had previously submitted by his reason. The logic employed by Edwards naturally led him to expound on the teaching of Scripture. For Edwards, the Scriptures were the final authority of his vision that would confirm his reasoning.

Through seven sections in chapter two, Edwards structured an apologetic that started broadly with the Scriptures (section one). Here Edwards showed that the Scriptures consistently teach the ideas presented in chapter one. In particular Edwards identified verses that communicated his understanding that God is the supreme end of all things. He then explained that Scripture not only meant God was the last in supremacy but, being the first “efficient cause” by which all things are made, he is the “final cause for which they are made” (Piper 186).

He then narrowed his focus to methods of arguing from what is contained in the Scriptures (section two). Edwards established twelve positions to show the ultimate end of the providence of God. For Edwards, providence was a means by which God worked in general ways and in particular ways in order to reveal his ultimate aim. The providence of God was enacted “with respect to the *moral* world, or the intelligent part of the system” (Piper 186).

Providence also included a use of the world in the accomplishment of God's aim. Edwards included a perspective on the impact of providence on moral agents. In sum, the nine positions reveal Edwards conclusions about providence being the ongoing work of God by which he relates to all of creation. Providence secures God's good plans, especially in believers who express their goodness in a reflection to God. Edwards concluded that Jesus Christ understood this and perfectly completed the plan, manifesting the glory of God.

In an ever-increasing development of detailed attention, Edwards addressed passages of Scripture which identify the Glory of God as the chief end of his creation. Nine parts comprise a third section, by which Edwards showed the numerous verses that addressed God's actions, character, nature, and God's engagement with man through the gospel exhibiting how all things work together for the ultimate end, God's glory. In all, Edwards demonstrated sound means of deduction in his methodology.

Section four, consisting of three parts, focused on the Scriptures that reveal how God created the world for his praise. The three parts progress from the focus on God's name to his perfections, then to his praise for these things. Once again Edwards proved his ability to develop a logical application of his view on God's glory.

Because Edwards' goal was to show the importance of the Christian enjoying God as the believer's chief end, his argument progressed logically to the matter of God's communication of good to his creatures (section five). This section consists of ten parts in which Edwards explained how the glory of God is revealed through the gospel of Christ. Edwards addressed God's providence, government of the world, judgment of the wicked, and preparation of the kingdom, all for the elect. Edwards emphasized the importance of God's value of the elect and their response to God in praise for the grace they receive in their redemption.

In the sixth section, Edwards gave four definitions that revealed what he meant by aspects of glory. The four definitions are given to highlight the expression or manifestation that the word glory demands. Edwards noted the relationship between glory and praise in the fourth definition, which by relationship prompt the expression of joy and gratitude to God, which relates to God's name.

The final seventh section contains Edwards' conclusion of the matter. Edwards identified the glory of God as the ultimate end in creation, which happens through the knowledge and understanding of the Lord that is possessed by a person. The section includes summaries that emphasize the discovery of God's glory. According to Edwards, the discovery of glory happens in the relationship between God and his creatures and is what brings ultimate glory to God. The fulfillment of the relationship happens as there is an increase in man's understanding of the joy that God has in himself. The increase of understanding will occupy the relationship for eternity (Piper, 249-51).

Critical Evaluation of *The End for Which God Created the World*

When considering *The End*, by Edwards, there are three aspects to consider by which to evaluate the work. Each of these might represent what the modern reader would consider as a goal or aim of the work. Edwards first set out to show by reason, that God's goal in creation proves His sufficiency apart from the created order. This means that God's actions in themselves fulfill every part of His happiness. Secondly, Edwards suggested that God is self-sufficient in the aspects of holiness and joy. He further identified that it is proper for God to experience these aspects of Himself relative to His creation. Thirdly, God works all things together to the praise of his glory (Piper, 122).

Edwards intended to convince the reader that God possesses “true virtue”. True virtue is communicated to the creature so there is a reciprocal delight in the holiness of God (Piper, 158). The regenerating power of the gospel is inherent in this goal, for if the creature is not conformed to the image of God by that which Christ reveals there is no true knowledge of God and no true delight in Him.

Furthermore, the explanations given by Edwards, both Scriptural and theological, are satisfactory in content and challenging to digest. The deductive, logical, systematic, and sequential approaches made by Edwards prove valid throughout the work. His use of sequence in his logic from generic to specific, from rational thought to Scriptural teaching, enabled him to accomplish his goal.

The methodological approach, by which Edwards developed his thoughts, proved to be one of his great strengths. Beginning with the explanation of terms and positions, he effectively guided his readers through a clear and thoroughly developed rationale so as to communicate his premise: that God’s highest aim is rightly to be the pursuit of God’s glory. Edwards’ use of reason and logic, throughout, provided a thorough, and at points complicated, explanation of his understanding. It seems as though Edwards rational approach at times made for a complicated strategy to achieve his goal. However, Edwards anticipated the objections of challengers and in doing so addressed many nuances to prove his conclusions.

The second chapter is comprised of the Scriptures that are foundational to Edwards’ conclusions. If one is fairly familiar with Scripture, this chapter is easier reading. Edwards would make his points and support them with several Scripture references and a few short comments. This methodology proved a valuable and sufficient method to consider the biblical position that Edwards worked from in the *The End*.

Unfortunately, there are times when the logic and terms that Edwards employed were difficult to understand. This is largely due to the intricacies of his thought process as he explored nuances that the reader may not anticipate. However, this may also be part of the great appreciation that is to be given to Edwards, his reason, understanding and insight are not to be anticipated, he is always in a place of leadership.

Lastly, in the final paragraph, Edwards subtly identified his opponents when he mentioned the “modern free thinkers who do not like the talk about satisfying justice with an infinite punishment” (Piper, 251). Edwards understood his opponents to “place religion in morality” (Piper, 102). Edwards could not conceive of any amount of morality to exist in humanity that could provide humanity a good standing before God. Consider the statement by Edwards, “the whole system of created beings, in comparison of the Creator, would be found as the light dust of the balance, or even as nothing and vanity” (Piper, 143). Edwards logically identified that God’s perfect morality establishes God as the “supreme judge” (Piper, 145). Thereby Edwards insinuated that God is not to be judged by mankind who lacks the ability to judge God for his actions or his aim. By acknowledging God as sovereign, Edwards sought to logically and biblically place man in his right posture, humble dependence on God’s grace. For Edwards, this right posture provided the follower of Christ the greatest joy, the joy of knowing and understanding God so as to delight in God. The conclusion: it is the ultimate end of God, his aim, that the delight of God is experienced in himself and with his creatures.

Conclusion

The combination of the two works in this one book is a worthy achievement. The introductory remarks, insights, and explanations from Piper provided thought-provoking and accurate means by which to read *The End* by Edwards. The cultural relevance, identified by

Piper, will help the reader to engage with *The End* more fully; there is a timeless nature to the dissertation.

Edwards demonstrated such strength of logic, familiarity with Scripture, and mastery of the topic that every reader will be challenged by his thoughts. *The End* should be read by every seminary student and pastor alike, for it will rightly shape the motives of one's heart for education and for ministry. Reading this book will enable every reader to better participate in God's own delight in God (115). In typical Edwards' fashion, he presented a short doxology that summarizes his work, "God communicates himself to the understanding of the creature, in giving him the knowledge of his glory; and to the will of the creature, in giving him holiness, consisting primarily in the love of God: and in giving the creature happiness, chiefly consisting in joy in God" (Piper, 245-6). To Edwards the chief end was that when God's creature knows the glory of God, His fulness is received and returned producing joy in each party.