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1 Timothy 2:9-15

Fourth Message

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TRUE CONTENTMENT FOR WOMEN

SERIES: HOW TO RESTORE A CHURCH

I received a letter last week from a woman in our congregation. She knew that I would be preaching today on Paul's word concerning women in the church, from his first letter to Timothy. My friend has been reading the thoughts of some Christian theologians about women, and I will share part of what she wrote in her letter. She begins by quoting Tertullian, the fourth century theologian. Here is what he wrote about women:

You are the Devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: you are the first deserter of divine law: you are she who persuaded him who the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man.

My friend continues:

I first read these words in a college English class last year. I was shocked. I looked around me and saw women—young through middle-aged—hurting, smarting, betrayed by these words (and many like them) which have influenced the Christian Church and the secular world's treatment of women so profoundly. And this is only one example. Is it any wonder that women feel exploited, scapegoated, at the very least dismissed? Why should one-half of the intellectual and creative resources of humankind be so demeaned—and the church has poured gas on the flames? No wonder I encounter women searching for validation: in the cult of goddess worship, in relationships with other women, in militant feminist activities. They don't think there's a place for them in the white male God's world. Black women call themselves "the mules of the world." Anger is the not the first emotion we experience; there is always an emotion preceding anger—if we care to identify it—usually pain or sadness. Angry women are hurt women. Men calling themselves Christians have inflicted just as much pain (maybe more, since they have the truth) as non-Christians. Jesus had a radical view of women, one of honor, respect, equality, and partnership. If Christian men don't uphold that teaching, who will?

Sadly, wrong interpretations of this text from 1 Timothy has only served to add fuel to the fire, as this woman points out in her letter. I hope to bring a corrective word regarding this this morning. First, an important point concerning the context here. The context of this text, of course, is rooted in Paul's instruction to Timothy to restore love in the church in Ephesus. Love was being destroyed by the false teachers and the pagan influences that were penetrating the church. Last week, we studied Paul's corrective word to the men of the church, men who were living in the high-powered, capitalistic world of Ephesus. We saw that his desire was for men to become priests, to learn to lead quiet lives, "raising holy hands in prayer," and not seek to assert their rights.

Today, therefore, we will look at Paul's word to women, bearing in mind the context of his words in this chapter. I will begin by setting out what the Greek world of Paul's day thought about women, quoting from the book *Greek Society* by Frank J. Frost:

The ancient Greeks thought very little of women. They basically treated them as chattel...on the same level with slaves. Wives always lived under the authority, control, and protection of their husbands. Women, especially wives, led lives of seclusion. 'We have harlots for our pleasure, concubines for daily physical use, wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters.' (4th century BC quote by Demosthenes.) This attitude did improve somewhat under the Greek philosophers, who promoted certain areas of equality in education, property rights, marital status (freedom to divorce, for instance), and political

service. But, by and large, the home was her sole domain, where women were expected to master the arts of cooking, spinning, weaving, and child-rearing. Seldom were women allowed to venture outside the home. Even the drawing of water was left to slaves. The playwright, Euripides, gives eloquent expression to women's sense of frustration at their limited existence. Medea complains,

*A man, when he's bored with being at home
Can go out and escape depression
By turning to some friend, or whatever.
But we have our one soul to look to.
They say we lead a safe life at home
While they do battle with the spear.
What imbeciles! I'd rather stand to arms
Three times than bear one child.*

There were only two realms where women could rise to equal status or perhaps surpass men in influence: as prostitutes and priestesses. The most emancipated women were the *hetairai*, or courtesans (meaning, female companion). She might have started life as a slave, but through unusual intelligence or good luck would have attracted a benefactor whom she could talk into purchasing her freedom. The most famous *hetairai* in Athens mixed freely in male company and are said to have discussed politics, drama, and philosophy with their clients, in addition to providing the usual professional services. But the price of their emancipation was the shame of the occupation, bearing a stigma that they sold sex as a profession.

Nothing gave women liberation to such an extreme as the Roman mystery religions. In the cult of Artemis, upon which the economy of Ephesus was based, for instance, women could serve as priestesses. Artemis was the supreme mother of nature and fertility, the ultimate symbol of female liberation because she needed no male assistance. Priestesses enjoyed great respect in that society. The priestesses of the goddess Hera at Argos were such a universally recognized institution that their terms of office were used to date events. Thucydides precisely dated the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in these words, "When Chrysis had been priestess of Argos for forty-eight years."¹

In certain ways, our own twentieth century closely parallels the ancient world of Greece and Rome. Through the generations, men in general have demonstrated precious little appreciation for women. For example, men practice double standards in sexuality, while women suffer from limited opportunities in education, in public and religious service. Like the Greeks, we have our philosophers who promise freedom for women, but we are encouraged to accomplish this by having women enter the male world and act the part of males. This so-called equality of opportunity has resulted in a generation of abused and hurt women, some of whom have responded by cloistering together in female cults where they find satisfaction in not even needing men. Even in the church there is great confusion regarding the role of women.

Paul's words here, therefore, are corrective to some of the women in the church in Ephesus. A wrong spirit, brought about through the influence of the cult of Artemis, had infiltrated the church, causing disruption, and preventing women from entering into their high calling.

Let us begin by reading the text. 1 Timothy 2:9-15:

Likewise, [I want] women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach nor exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, [and] then Eve. And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But [she] shall be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (NASB)

The apostle opens this text addressed to women by seeking to help them achieve influence in the kingdom of God. A spirit of contentment is what is necessary, says Paul. He makes use of two areas to express his counsel: first, the realm of adornment, and second, the realm of authority.

I. In the realm of adornment (2:9-10)

Likewise, [I want] women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.

(a) Adornment in dress: Simplicity and purity

In March and April, the great annual processions to the temple of Artemis took place. Thousands of tourists came to Ephesus for these ceremonies, which involved sexual orgies, magical rites, intercourse with seductively dressed sacred priestesses, etc. These pagan religious events were celebrated so as to ensure the birth of healthy children and the blessing of abundant agricultural crops. One problem that arose in the church was that some of the women were dressing seductively when they came to the meetings, thus Paul brings a corrective word here. Our world today has its own cult priestesses, doesn't it? Madonna, for instance, dresses seductively and dances before the cameras to arouse the sensual desires of men. Her lust, of course, is to gain money from men without having a relationship with them.

Paul wants the women in the church in Ephesus to teach their daughters to dress with moderation and purity.

Secondly, women should dress without ostentation. In the Greek and Roman world much attention was given to elaborate clothes, the art of plaiting the hair, etc. Women wore expensive ornaments of gold and jewelry on their fingers, arms and ankles, and in their hair they plaited golden nets. There were two problems with this practice. First, the poorer women in the congregation were made to feel inconsequential when they saw someone dressed in this fashion; and second, the entire practice was a waste of time, because a woman's true beauty was not to be discovered in what she wore.

(b) Adornment in character: Self-sacrifice

How is true beauty revealed? Here is what Paul says, "by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness." True beauty is not found in what a woman puts on, but rather in what she gives out from a contented spirit. Beauty is found in the home of a woman who invites the poor and the stranger to her table; in the ears that comfort the brokenhearted; in the eyes that weep as they share the pain of the wounded; in the hands that wash the feet of the saints; in the lips that comfort the afflicted. Rebekah in the OT is a wonderful example here. Isaac sent his servant to find a wife for him, and when he came close to Laban's home, Rebekah came out to water her father's animals. Genesis says of her: "And the girl was exceedingly beautiful in appearance, a virgin, and no man had known her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar, and came up...ran quickly and watered his camels as well" (Gen 24:16ff). Rebekah's purity and service captivated the servant, and he knew he had found his master's bride.

There is, of course, a place for sensual dance, for arousing beauty: it is in the home with your husband. The Song of Songs, however, exhorts younger women (8:10),

I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;
Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.

This bride is saying, "When I protected my body, when I covered my breasts and made my life a wall, then when the man looked at me he saw that I had peace in my spirit." This is what made this woman beautiful and attractive, unlike the woman who dresses seductively and offers herself for sale.

Where does true beauty lie? The apostle says that women are not to draw attention to themselves in their mode of dress, either by the expense of it or the lack of it. Beauty is to be found in a contented spirit that adorns itself in purity and displays itself in quiet self-sacrifice.

Next, Paul moves from true contentment for a woman, expressed through her beauty, to her authority.

II. In the realm of authority (2:11-14)

Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach nor exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, [and] then Eve. And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.

(a) The context of disruption (1 Cor 14:26ff)

We should be careful not to take these words entirely on their face value, otherwise it would seem that Paul is saying women are not to speak in church. Another NT passage, in 1 Cor 14, also seems to be saying this, so it might appear that women do not have a speaking role in the church. The problem with this interpretation, however, is that in 1 Cor 11:5, we discover that women were praying and prophesying in the church in Corinth, and there Paul gives directives to women on how to pray and prophesy.

What the apostle is actually referring to here in 1 Timothy is the practice of disruption in the church in Ephesus. 1 Corinthians 14 is a helpful passage to learn what went on in the early church when they gathered for worship. Paul writes: "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification...[mutual dependence] if a tongue interpret...and let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent...women be silent" (1 Cor 14:26ff). In the meetings in the church in Corinth, many who had the gift of prophecy (both men *and* women) would give a revelation, and then the prophets would pass judgment on what was said. The problem was that women were entering into this practice and passing judgment on their husbands' revelations (i.e. teaching and exercising authority over men), with the result that the husband's headship in the home was publicly dishonored. Thus there was tension in the homes in Corinth because some wives were publicly rebuking their husbands' teaching.

This was what was happening in Ephesus also. The cult of Artemis had bred an angry spirit of feminism in response to the mistreatment of women, so women were challenging the teaching of men, sometimes even their own husbands. This is why Paul wants women to have a quiet spirit. And this, of course, is what he wrote earlier in this chapter to men: They, too, were to lead a "quiet" life. Paul is instructing men and women how to worship together. When we worship, nothing should be said or done which would cause damage to the headship of the home. Women should not dishonor their husbands in the context of worship, in other words.

(b) The command for submission (2:11)

Next, notice the apostle's command for submission: "Let a woman quietly receive instruction." The command is a present imperative which could be translated "Let a woman continue to learn." In other words, women were to be free to learn in every environment that was open to men. This was quite unlike the practice in the synagogue, where men and women were separated. But Jesus radically broke this pattern. Men and women are equal spiritually and should be free to learn together. In the gospels, we see that women very often asked the best questions of our Lord. The

conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus didn't go very far theologically because Nicodemus couldn't get beyond the new birth that Jesus talked about. Compare this exchange, however, with the conversation the Lord had with the Samaritan woman. She had no theological training whatever, yet she was taught through the questions she asked the amazing truth of a heavenly Zion which will transcend the earthly Jerusalem. I have learned much from Carleen Brooks, our church receptionist for many years, who is a Greek and Hebrew scholar. Her insightful and challenging questions always stimulate me to think in new ways about Scripture.

Paul is saying that women are to be with men in every arena of learning, but their attitude is to be one of quiet. They are to be still, quiet, at rest, receptive, having a quiet disposition, in contrast to the undisciplined life of the busybodies who interfere in the business of others, creating a stir. For one to hear God, silence is a necessary prerequisite. Ecclesiastes says, "To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools" (Eccl 5:2). Perhaps the best NT illustration of this truth is found in the story of Mary and Martha. While Martha was in the kitchen fussing over a meal, Mary, the theologian, was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his instruction. This upset Martha. She felt that Mary was not acting out her proper role (which she took to be working in the kitchen), so she rebuked Jesus—of all people! But Jesus was forced to rebuke her, saying, in effect, "Mary has chosen the best part, learning what I have to say about her. She is content, but you are creating a stir."

So this text is not saying that women cannot speak in church. As we have seen, we have instances where women pray and prophesy in the NT. And it doesn't mean that women cannot correct men; rather, it is referring to where and how they do so. Priscilla and Aquila together corrected the gifted teacher, Apollos, who knew only half the gospel. After hearing him teach they quietly invited him home for lunch and spoke to him in a sensitive and godly way, teaching him the whole gospel. Correction is fine, but it must be done in the proper arena and in the proper manner.

(c) The reasons for submission (2:13-14)

Next, the apostle refers to the order of creation in his correction of this boisterous, arrogant spirit that was prevalent in Ephesus. It will help us greatly to remember that these remaining verses come directly from the theology of Genesis 2, 3 and 4. If we see this text in that light, the interpretation will be clear.

First, says the apostle, submission is taught by virtue of creation: "For it was Adam who was first created, [and] then Eve. And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." This order of creation is what gives rise to the doctrine of headship. Eve came from Adam, therefore Adam named his wife, a practice which in the Ancient Near East indicated expressing authority. But notice that Adam did this by expressing her equality. The major theme is Adam's word, "You are my equal," while the minor key is, "I am your head." This is why Paul says women should not dishonor the created order by taking on and disagreeing with their husbands in church.

Secondly, says Paul, this is taught by virtue of the fall: "And not Adam [who] was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." But Adam was standing by all while this was happening and he didn't open his mouth. His sin was even greater than Eve's because, although he was not deceived, he stood by passively and did nothing. This kind of thing was going on in the church in Ephesus, as we learn in 2 Timothy, where Paul says, "those [false teachers] (by the way, these were men, so don't think that men are not deceived) who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sin, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:6-7). Paul is telling men to cover and protect the women. Don't leave them out there on a limb, he is saying. Protect them and guard them from deception.

The application for us today is clear. We must not allow that boisterous, angry spirit of the cult of Artemis to creep into the church, challenging male leadership. Further, it may be true to say that women who have been hurt by men are more prone to do this.

Paul now goes on to say, in verse 15, that women have an amazing privilege.

III. Her unparalleled privilege: Giving birth (2:15)

But [she] shall be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

The commentaries give five different interpretations of these words, "[she] shall be saved." I think a careful study of Genesis 3-4, however, will make the meaning quite clear.

(a) Illustrated in the promise of redemption (Gen 3:15)

Immediately following the fall of mankind, God announced to the woman,

**"And I will put enmity,
Between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel." (Gen 3:15)**

God promised the woman that from her womb would come a seed, and through the channel of that womb all the evil of the universe would be dealt with. Thus, while Tertullian said that woman was the gateway to the Devil, God declares that in redemption, woman is to be the gateway to the Messiah who will crush the devil and bring salvation to all men! In Genesis, we can sense Eve's joy following the birth of her firstborn: "Now the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have formed a man with the Lord'" (Gen 4:1). The word "Cain" is used often to say "to form or create," as when Melchizedek said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth"; or Psalm 139, "Thou didst form my inward parts." What the woman is saying here, therefore, is, "The Lord formed the first man, and now I rejoice with unparalleled joy that I have formed the second man. I stand together [i.e. equally] with him in the rank of creators" (Casutto). What a privilege! Woman names and rules the second man! Why compete with man, O woman, when you can create a man! In this act of naming, the woman feels personal nearness to the divine presence (Yahweh), the God who draws alongside and comes near to us. This is why we had Hannah's Song read to us this morning. What she experienced in the pain of her earlier barrenness, and later in the birth of Samuel, the first prophet, was equivalent to the education of a graduate student in seminary. And she learned all of this all through the new life that was forming in her womb!

Sarah Edwards, the wife of Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian, bore 12 children in the 1700's. Once a young seminarian, Samuel Hopkins, arrived at the Edwards house in 1741, and he was received with great kindness by Mrs Edwards. "She knew the heart of a stranger," wrote Hopkins. Mrs Edwards encouraged the young man to spend the winter with them. "She had more than ordinary beauty," he wrote. "When I arrived, I was was dejected and gloomy regarding my spiritual condition, but her speech so lifted my spirit that I doubted whether the cordiality and ready conversation of Mrs. Edwards was capable of being matched by her husband."²

Where did this ability to speak and encourage come from? A glance at her diary reveals the source of Sarah's beauty of spirit:

Thursday night Jan. 28 was the sweetest night I ever had in my life. I never before, for so long a time together, enjoyed so much of the light, and rest, and sweetness of heaven in my soul...The great part of the night I lay awake, sometimes asleep, and sometimes between sleeping and waking. But all night I continued in a constant, clear and lively sense of the heavenly sweetness of Christ's excellent and transcendent love, of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him; with an inexpressible sweet calmness of soul in an entire rest in him...So far as I am capable of making a comparison, I think that what I felt each minute, during the continuance of the whole time, was worth more than all the outward comfort and pleasure which I had enjoyed in my whole life put together. It was pure delight, which fed and satisfied the soul. It was pleasure, without the least sting, or any interruption. It was sweetness,

which my soul was lost in. It seemed to be all that my feeble frame could sustain, of that fulness of joy which is felt by those who behold the face of Christ, and share his love in the heavenly world...I had a deep sense of the awful greatness of God, and felt with what humility and reverence we ought to behave ourselves before him.”²²

I have had moments of such ecstasy, but here Sarah Edwards writes that she spent an entire night enraptured with Jesus Christ. So who would you rather hear from this morning, Sarah Edwards or me?

Thus Paul says that this wonderful act of Eve’s giving birth set in motion the plan of salvation for the whole earth.

He illustrates this not only in the promise of redemption, but also in its pain.

(b) Illustrated in the pain of redemption (Gen 3:16; 4:1-7, 25)

But [she] shall be saved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Tim 2:15)

Again, we will refer to Genesis 3 to help us interpret this text. There God said to the woman that her role would not be to compete with, but rather to create a man. But this role would be a painful one. God said,

**“I will greatly multiply
Your pain in childbirth,
In pain you shall bring forth children.” (Gen 3:16)**

We know what happened, of course, Eve lost both of her sons. One was a murderer, the other a victim: “Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” And the murderer became a wanderer. To escape his sense of alienation from God he built the first city, but he did so only to escape from the wrath of God. This was what Eve had to live with: the pain of childbirth.

But the story doesn’t end there. Eve continued in faith: The they in verse 15 refers not to children, but to women. Women will find salvation if they “continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.” Eve continued to believe that if God made a promise to use her womb with a seed that would crush the serpent, culminating in the Messianic King, she would continue to believe, even through the pain. So she starts all over again: “And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and name him Seth [Hebrew: foundation] for she said, ‘God has appointed me another seed in the place of Abel; for Cain killed him.’ And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh [weak, or sick]. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.” Through the pain, Eve’s faith brought forth a new seed (Seth: “new foundation”) and would give birth to a line of men who knew they were weak. When men know that they are weak, then they “begin to call upon the name of the LORD.” Women’s role is a painful one—giving birth—but if they continue in faith, God will do new things through their pain, birthing a whole new generation of men and women who in their weakness feel they must learn to pray, and from those prayers will come the salvation of the world. This is what Eve learned.

(c) Application in the New Covenant

Thus Paul’s word to women is, don’t compete with men. So what if you can’t run an Iron Man triathlon as fast as a man, you can do something no one else can do: you can give birth to new things for the next generation. With the advent of Christ and the birth of the new kingdom, the prophet Isaiah cried,

**“Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child,
Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not
travailed;
For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous,
Than the sons of the married woman,” says the Lord. (Isa 54:1)**

In the age of the Spirit, even the unmarried and the barren woman can have countless sons and daughters in the kingdom of God. Why do you

think women were the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, bringing news of the birth of a new kingdom? It was because God was teaching women that they are the divine vessels to birth (initiate) the kingdom. Why compete with men for a ministry when you can birth your own?

On this very point, as I studied this text I thought about the many ministries that have been birthed by the women here at Peninsula Bible Church. A few years ago, we had a tremendous ministry to the Vietnamese boat people. Scores of Vietnamese came to church one evening each week to learn English and be cared for. One woman, Sue Lindstedt, a teacher, through her love for these people, initiated this entire ministry. East Palo Alto today is a war zone of shootings and drug dealing. There are more murders per capita in that city than in any city in the United States. Right in the center of the city, in one of the most dangerous areas, the Cooley Apartments, a ministry to children of minorities was begun by Joanie Tankersley. If you want to be initiated in the Biblical languages at PBC, to whom do I send you? For Greek, to Lynne Fox, Jennifer Berenson, and Dana Harris; for Hebrew, Lynne Fox and Marilyn Copland. In fact, some of my best devotional times with the Lord this year have been studying under Marilyn as she has initiated many of our leaders and pastors here in the nature of Hebrew thought. Who oversees 200 teachers and aides who minister to our more than 600 grade school and younger children? Our children’s pastor, Jane Alexander. And who birthed an entire ministry to the refugees of Eastern Europe, sought them out, fed them, clothed and brought them to church? It was Ethel Smith. Pat Patmor and Mary Ann Barnett began *Shepherding the Wounded*, a needed counseling ministry to women in our days of wounded women. The local Crisis Pregnancy Center was started by Marion Recine. Now Connie David and Muriel Thompson lead that ministry. Discovery Publishing was the vision of Betty Berte and Colleen Kuhlman. They decided to type a manuscript of a sermon and print a few copies, and this gave birth to Discovery Publishing. Grace Bunce is our hospitality leader here in PBC. Moms In Touch, a group that prays for our children who attend public schools, was begun by Terry Burns and Yvonne Hyatt. All of these women, and others among us, were doing something men cannot do: initiating and giving birth to new things that God had laid on their hearts.

The tragedy is that, in correcting the abuse of misplaced beauty and authority that sprang from the cult of Artemis, men have forgotten the greater beauty of women and demeaned their greater purpose. Tertullian said, “You are the Devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: you are the first deserter of divine law: you are she who persuaded him who the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man.” But on behalf of my brothers, I would like to repent and say to you, my sisters, “You are the Messiah’s gateway, the planter of the tree of life, He who would crush the serpent; you are the first to glory in His face, the first to hear Him speak the Divine Law, the first to weep over his blood; your loving hands brought him down from the tree; you were the first to have your sorrow turned into joy, to see the new age upon the earth; your feet were the first to carry the gospel, and your tongue the first to proclaim it, saying, “Rejoice, He is risen, and all men can be remade in His image.” And when He comes again, we men will gladly lay aside our role to join you in yours, and together we shall walk down the aisle as His radiant Bride.

O sisters, forgive us, your brothers, for our eyes have been blind to the glory He has shared with you. Amen.

1. All background taken from Frank J. Frost, *Greek Society* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1991), 90-94.

2. Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 195-196.