

Enjoying God's Beatific Beauty: An Interview with Kyle Strobel

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-- The following rough transcript is unedited --

“How good is God, that he has created man for this very end, to make him happy in the enjoyment of himself, the Almighty, who was happy from the days of eternity in himself, in the beholding of his own infinite beauty: the Father in the beholding and love of his Son, his perfect and most excellent image, the brightness of his own glory; and the Son in the love and enjoyment of the Father.”^a

Those are the beautiful words of Jonathan Edwards. God's beauty is central to the writings of the 18th century theologian, and for good reason. Without understanding the beauty of God, the Trinitarian nature of God himself will never make sense to us, and the Christian life and eternity in heaven will not make much sense to us either. So seems to be the case made by Jonathan Edwards in his writings, and one young Edward's scholar making this connection is Kyle Strobel.

Strobel appeared on the very first episode of the *Authors on the Line* podcast, to talk about Edwards and the religious affections. He returns to the podcast to talk about his new book, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, published by T&T Clark. His new book was an easy choice for inclusion into my list of top 12 books of 2012, and for good reason—it's a fascinating book. And yet it's also an academic book which means it's not easy to read and it's not cheap either. But many of Strobel's most important points will be spread around in a more popular book published by IVP later this year. And these points are the centerpiece of this podcast about beauty and beatific in the theology of Jonathan Edwards.

The Father's delight in the beauty of the Son, and the Son's enjoyment of the Father is the ultimate Beatific Vision—the capital-b Beatific, capital-v, Vision. We look forward to the day when we see Christ with our own eyes (1 John 3:2), a blessed experience of the beatific vision, but that is only an experience that is nothing less than participation in the very experience of God right now and from all eternity. God enjoys himself, and the Christian, by grace, gets pulled up into that divine joy.

I think Strobel is right when he writes, “[Jonathan] Edwards depicts God's life as the mutual beholding of infinite beauty. God created humanity that another being might partake in God's goodness and delight. This beatific-delight ... provides the theological setting for talking about Edwards's understanding of spiritual knowledge” (151). And this is what I also find in Scripture. The point here is that at the center of Jonathan Edwards theology, Strobel writes, is the beatific beauty of God.

I began the conversation with Strobel by asking him for a general definition of an old word, a richly loaded word, but a word we don't use much anymore—the word *beatific*.

This happens every now and again, but probably not nearly as much with any other doctrine that I can think of other than beatific vision. It is, I think, Protestants have somehow... but without every actually studying it, have just assumed this is Catholic, quote, unquote. And have never really explored the fact that everyone from Hodge to Owen to Edwards made it a central part of their work. And so basically the term beatific vi-

^a Jonathan Edwards's sermon on Revelation 21:18, unpublished, <http://is.gd/WSuP77>

sion... it is... Edwards actually probably comes up with the easiest way to talk about it. At one point he calls it the *happifying sight*. And basically what that means is it is the sight that we are told about in Scripture when we are... you know, John, 1 John 3:2 when he says, "When he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is." And then when Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 says, "We will see him face to face," that, you know, later in 2 Corinthians, you know, we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. You see these... it isn't just Paul particularly makes about... that are saturated with visual imagery of light and specifically shining from the face of Christ, that somehow the image of face to face is trying to push this vision into a relational mode so it is not simply looking at an object, but it is coming to a relationship of not... a relational knowledge that is intimate, that is deep, that is face to face being not simply an image that depicts relationship at a certain kind of relational knowledge. And so the idea is that as we see God, as we are pulled into that relationship, it is *happifying*, it creates a situation where we are fully alive in the fullest sense of the term. And we are made... we are kind of finally stepping into how we were created to be, which is just glorying in the presence of God.

Those reformed thinkers you mentioned talk about beatific vision as our vision of Christ in heaven. But there's a more fundamental beatific vision that goes back into God's very nature. Explain this for us.

Well, typically for the reformed, particular the reformed high orthodox, if you were going to write a full blown systematic theology you would talk about the beatific vision in three separate places. You would talk about in your prolegomena, right up front, because the way the reformed understood knowledge was that God is the archetypal knowledge. He knows himself fully and perfectly. And that somehow forms what was called ectypal knowledge. And the way ectypal knowledge was understood it is that there were three main kinds. There was pilgrim knowledge which is the knowledge by faith. We might say that is knowledge through a glass darkly to use Paul's imagery. That knowledge of faith is, as Scripture talks about faith is the ... it is kind of necessarily of the unseen. And so typically faith was unseen to dissolve into sight in glory and that sight was the beatific vision.

And so if you take someone like John Owen, he is going to make comments like, for those people who do not contemplate the faith of God in Jesus Christ by faith here in this life, will never see him face to face in heaven. And everything that... whenever you talk about faith, then, it is kind of pressed into a visual mold, because the journey we are on is journey towards this sight. You can think of *Pilgrim's Progress* very much in these same kind of themes.

And so... and then there was a third kind of ectypal union which is the knowledge of God that Jesus had which was knowledge by union.

So when you talk about what it means to know God, immediately the reformed would talk about the very beginning of theology the beatific vision as the kind of knowledge we are all oriented towards. And so our knowledge of faith, the knowledge we have here as we are theologizing, as we are seeking to be faithful to God, is always oriented by the sight we will have.

Well, then, what happened in the higher orthodox period is the reformed also started talking about God's beatific vision. I think the Latin there is *beatitudo Dei* and so basically what you have here is that God's own knowledge of God's self knowledge is beatific. And that ... I would say Edwards ran with this more than any other thinker and it has huge implications for his theology.

And then when you finally got to heaven, in your systematic theology, that whole discussion would be oriented by the beatific vision. Obviously that is going to be the biggest place where you really try to develop it. So what Edwards does and what a lot of reformed figures did is that when you are talking about ectypal theology, you are talking about what God's knowledge is, that pure theology is God's theology in a sense,

God's self knowledge. And the question then becomes: Well, how does that theology orient our fallen version of theology, our theology through a glass darkly?

And what Edwards said was, well, basically the way we come to know God's life—and he looked at Scripture of this and he makes... in his discourse on the Trinity he makes an argument for how we should understand the trinity that is broadly Augustinian in the sense that he uses the psychological analogies, the Son as the understanding of God, that the Spirit is the will and love of God. But the way he ties these together is with the beatific vision of God, that the Father generates the Son and the Son and Father gazing upon one another generates the Spirit as love. And so God's life is perfect and infinite knowledge and perfect and infinite love. And we shouldn't see those as two separate things. So really God's life is religious affection and pure act. And religious affection is seeing God and that is thereby knowing God and having your heart, your affections inclined towards him.

And so God's life is the beatific vision or, another way of putting that is God's life is religious affection, a pure act. And this is one of the things I discovered in my study of Edwards for my dissertation is that no one had asked the question: Why does Edwards care about religious affection?

And so when I lay out my approach and then come to religious affection, what became clear is Edwards cares so much about this because there is the only way to know God is through God's own self knowledge, that God's archetypal knowledge, the knowledge of himself he has in his own life governs how we know him as well. And therefore you can't have knowledge of God without having your heart inclined towards him, because all knowledge of God is affectionate knowledge. And that is true in God's life and therefore it has to be true in our life that faith is the same kind of knowledge of God that the beatific is. It is just through a glass darkly and so it is limited and therefore our heart is, in a sense, constrained because of our sinfulness, but not only our sinfulness, our fleshliness in the sense of not only merely evilness, not merely baseness, but the distance, so to speak between us and God.

In the incarnation Jesus reveals God to us. Explain for us how Christ reveals the beauty of God, and how Edwards explains this.

Well, I mean, for Edwards, then, Christ is the image of the invisible God as Paul says in Colossians, right? I mean, if what we see in Christ is God's example, God's picture of what he is and who he is. It is God's perfect revelation that all revelation itself has to be understood through Christ and the work of redemption that is taking place through Christ working in the world. And what we see, therefore, in the person of Christ—and we will talk later about beauty—but what we are going to see is the excellency of Christ, that Christ, because of the incarnation takes on a certain kind of beauty. And therefore in a real sense what salvation entails is it is coming to see, it is, as Jesus critiqued, it is... religious people have eyes to see that they can't see. And in regeneration we are given eyes to see and we behold Christ and we behold the cross and we finally realize that this is beautiful in the sense that this is for me. This is not an extrinsic event. This is not an event even for humanity, but it is an event for me. And that moment of Edwards is what is happening in regeneration. There is illumination by the Spirit. The Spirit illumines Christ as he truly is and, you know, as ... we learn in John 15 through 17 if you have seen me you have seen the Father, Jesus tells us. So what we are having there is this... this kind of first glimpse of what we will see for eternity.

And for Edwards unlike for Owen, where Owen would say eternity will look at Christ, because if we see him we see the Father, Edwards takes the step further and I think is actually closer to Calvin on this actually is that we will then, because we are united to Christ in glory we will gaze upon the Father through the eyes of the Son. And we will then share in that in an inner trinitarian gazing. It is mediated through Christ. It is not direct.

Another way of putting this would be that the sight of the Father that Christ has by nature we are gifted by grace through his life and person, his person and work. And that would be probably what Edwards is going to say when he turns to us something like 2 Peter 1:4, that we are partakers of the divine nature. It is that union with Christ that allows us to partake in the life of God.

I'm thinking of 2 Corinthians 3:18, as we behold the glory of Christ by faith now, we are being transformed. How much of this beatific vision of faith, play a role in our present sanctification, in Christian growth now?

It plays everything. This is what makes Edwards a bit different. Edwards, unlike Owen and unlike almost anyone I have ever ... I haven't seen anyone in the reformed tradition do what Edwards does with this. Whereas typically, say, someone like Owen would say faith will dissolve into sight and so if you have this spectrum of knowledge there is a distinct category of faith and that ends and you step into a distinct new category of sight. And faith is oriented by sight and so when we talk about faith we use a lot of visual terminology, but we are not saying usually is that it is just kind of a darkened version of a beatific vision or something like that. But that is exactly what Edwards said. And so for Edwards what is interesting is that if you think of these two categories, the pilgrim knowledge by faith and beatific vision by sight in glory, they both end up seeing attributes of the other one. And so heaven, for Edwards, is an impressive state. He is very similar to Gregory of Nyssa on this point, is that we will eternally grow into the knowledge of God.

And the way he talks about this is we will always fully be satisfied, like, we will be full in the sense like a bucket will be full of water, but the bucket itself, our capacities are always growing in heaven, because we are learning about God, we are knowing God. Therefore, you know, we are... our capacity is becoming greater to receive from him and enjoy him. Well, as our capacities grow, so do our... so does our enjoyment, but because we are finite and God is infinite, that will never cease.

So now heaven becomes a pilgrim state. It becomes a journey with God. It is just now an internal journey. And the opposite happens as well. Whereas the beatific vision, having seen God face to face, there is a glory we know there that that is a very clear vision. Well now the pilgrim life, the life by faith is the beatific vision just now through a glass darkly. And it is darkened by our faith as well as our sin and also it is always a darkened sight. But the life of holiness will be, for Edwards, will include at least as a key component in it this sense of clarity of vision. And this is why beauty is so important for him. It is being transfixed by the beauty and glory of God. And so Edwards, when he talks about the Christian life, always is turning to meditative and contemplative imagery and practices, because what we are doing when we are being confronted by Christ in Scripture is we are gazing upon God in a real sense. And this orients everything for him, even preaching. You know, when Edwards preaches, a lot of people will talk up a literary value of his preaching, Edwards kind of the poet. And there is certainly something true about that. But what I see when I see Edwards, I think, is actually more accurate to Edwards himself is that Edwards is kind of still visual. He is a painter in a sense. And so when he is preaching he is casting, he is using language to paint a picture of Jesus to present for his people. And so he is. He is trying to get them to gaze upon this one, this Christ that has been revealed by God. And as we do so, that is where we know holiness. That is where we know growth. That is where we know transformation is the gaze upon this God, that we will be transformed from one degree of glory to another as we see him.

Lets transition from beatific to beauty, it's not a hard transition, it's not really a transition at all. What is the connection in Jonathan Edwards's mind between beatific and his definition of beauty?

Well, they are going to be, in one sense, identical, because what God is... God is not only good and God is not only true, but God is the beautiful God. And so Edwards will make a distinction between primary beauty and secondary beauty. Primary beauty is God's own life. And when Edwards talks about the beauty of terms like proportion, terms like harmony—and those are all relational terms. So it makes sense that in God's life

which is invisible, to talk about beauty you are clearly not talking about something visual or physical, but you are talking about how God exists as the triune God. And so it is God's all knowledge of God is pushed into this visual mold and, therefore, it is pushed into the mold of beauty.

And ultimately... and what I like about... There is a lot I like about this, but one of the things I really like about it is that we all recognize this. When we... when we... when we see something, physical beauty, so this, Edwards would call secondary beauty, that is something that is, you know.... like the image we... or the language we use when we talk about that is it took my breath away. And sometimes our... you know our heart races or we kind of incline towards it. We want to kind of be united with the beautiful. And what... that is exactly what religious affections are. That is exactly what Edwards says happens when we actually come to see God in Christ. It is we come to recognize that in some sense he is beautiful.

You once I tell my students is that when we come into contact with the cross, that is the distinctive moment where if you are just naturally looking at, this is horrific. And... but there is a reason why the Church came to call that day Good Friday, because when you look at it from with hindsight, post resurrection and ascension, what you realize is this was for me and that this act itself was beautiful in some real way, even as it is full of depravity. It is because of sin and it is brokenness. It is torturous and it is all these things. You are recognizing it as beautiful in a real sense.

And so much of the Christian life—and this is, you know, this has been true in the reformed faith. It is even true of someone like John Owen who would talk less about beauty, but because the knowledge by faith is oriented by the beatific vision, it ... the knowledge we have by faith is oriented visually. And you turn to these passages. You know, as Paul, you know, we have looked at several passages by Paul who says this and Paul obviously is a lot more like ... later on in Colossians he will make the comment that set your mind on things that are above where Christ sits at the right hand of God, you know. There is this idea of turn and orient yourself to who God is as you turn and gaze upon Christ. But even, you know, in the Psalms, Psalm 17:15 says, “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness.”

In Revelation it is that they will see his face and his name will be on their forehead. So throughout Scripture we see this visual image that God presents himself to us. And our call to repentance is a call to not only to turn, but to turn and look and be reoriented to reality as we gaze upon who God really is.

It seems like Edwards likes to use the category of holiness as God's beauty. Holiness is to be set apart. And yet his separateness is what makes Him attractive. Explain this for us from Edwards.

Well, if... the... holiness for Edwards runs along the same trajectory as his understanding of glory. And so it is actually easier to talk about glory because it will be the exact same. They trace along the same [?] they have the exact same contours for Edwards. And so what God's glory is for Edwards ultimately is, first it is the reality or we could even say the nature of God's inner life. And Edwards talks about three different levels of glory. So the first level of glory would be the kind of nature of God's inner life. The second level would be God communicating that the reality, the nature, Edwards, say, of that inner life, economically, externally to himself and the way he does this is by Son and by Spirit.

The Son and the Spirit bring God's kind of nature, God's life with them as they relate to us. They bring the understanding and love of God or the image of God and in the Spirit... it is the image of God in the Son and then in the Spirit the illumination of that image. And the third level of glory is as we are confronted by Son and Spirit, as we are indwelt by the Spirit and pulled into union with the Son, that also is called God's glory and in that moment what is taking place is we are now kind of receiving who God is, which means we are participating in his self knowledge. That is one of the things people mistake with Edwards is for holiness it means not only that ... it certainly doesn't mean that you are just trying to act well. It means you are now

partaking in God's own holiness, because he has given you holiness itself, the Spirit. There is a reason why... Edwards thinks there is a reason why the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit, because in the economy, the Holy Spirit brings holiness itself. That is the Spirit's nature. And so we receive God's own holiness and God's own love, God's own understanding as he confronts us. And we are called into that. We are pulled in to partake of that. So, again, looking at 2 Peter 1:4, partaking in the divine nature is partaking in the divine love, partaking in the divine knowledge, partaking in the divine holiness.

And the big term for Edwards in that is glory. And as we do so, we ... as we kind of receive God's self knowledge, God's self revelation, we communicate that back to God in our lives in praise, in prayer and so on and so forth. And so the holiness is oriented by sight, again, because God's own life is oriented by sight, because, again, going back to Edwards understanding of the trinity as God the Father gazing upon God the Son and God the Son gazing back upon God the Father and then existing infinitely in the love of the Spirit. So everything is this affectionate kind of knowledge.

And once you push affection like Edwards did center stage, and the Puritans generally did this as the reformed have, many of the reformed have, is once affection becomes center stage and the only way to relate to God is to relate to God in an essential way that is affectionate, then you automatically begin to tap into and to recognize these aspects of Scripture that are more visual that ... like you tend to start talking about beauty more and that... in the reformed tradition and many traditions that has been a very unutilized category. We like to talk about truth. We like to talk about goodness, but beauty, we just stop talking about. The reason why Edwards grabbed on to that is that the recognition of when we talk about knowledge of God and when we talk about what it means to see this image of the invisible God, that God presents himself to us in a certain kind of way, beauty is really the most helpful category. It is talking about it because beauty entails truth. When you are seeing something is beautiful you are seeing it truly. And it is also always tied together with goodness. When something is truly beautiful it is good. And so for Edwards this category is more of a meta category. It incorporates all that we want to talk about as Christians into one kind of big category. And because human beings are as Calvin liked to say, you know, that our hearts are idol factories, that we aren't primarily thinking things, but we are worshipping and loving things. And what we are worshipping and what we are loving is what we think and our brokenness is beautiful. And unfortunately that turns out to be ugliness. But when we are given eyes to see and we gaze upon Christ that ... I don't... it recalibrates our heart to who he is, the reality of who he is.

One thing you point out in *Formed for the Glory of God*, a book you will be publishing in June, is that beauty is fundamentally attractive and relational. You write that Edwards slips into poetry when he is writing about God. And also, Edwards wrote a poem about his to-be-wife Sarah. Beauty is a relational expression. How does this work itself out in Edwards's theology?

Yeah, one of the interesting things about the Christian claim and I think it is. I mean, I think it is one of those things we can generally call, this is what Christians have always kind of said even if we have ignored it is that if we are going not talk about beauty, it is fundamentally to say that God is beautiful, first and foremost. Well again, that means because God is invisible, that means beauty is only {?} by God's life which is relational. It is ... you know, the Father as the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is ... the eternal reality is that divine life of relationship. And so it means all beauty is, again, cast into this mold. And a lot of people throughout history have recognized. I think it was Lewis. I could be wrong about that. I think Lewis made the comment somewhere about when we see something as beautiful, we want it almost in us. And we want to kind of pull ourselves within it. And it is ... there is something innate about that, that seems in the human person. And with beauty both going into God as well as only to others, that is true. Beauty always seeks union. And so again what we end up with is love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. Putting that in beauty, have eyes to see God the Father as beautiful. And as you view, you will recognize the beauty around you and you won't climb towards it. You will love your neighbor as yourself, because you will finally see them for what they really are. You will no longer be captivated by what the world calls beau-

tiful, for instance. You will no longer think that success is what beauty is. You will recognize this. The person is created as fundamentally beautiful. And so it is at the heart of it relational because God is relational.

Lets talk about secondary beauty. When Edwards looks at the ocean, sunset, or spiders, and creation he was seeing God reflected in these things and he enjoyed the beauty. What was going on in Edwards mind as he took in the beauty of nature?

Yeah, well, you know, I mean, one of the fascinating things, the things I find fascinating, not just about Edwards, but about the Bible is, you know, if you go to, I believe, that Psalm 19, 19:15, I believe, I just totally out of the top of my head and stuff. I could be wrong with that, but I think it is about that. We are told that creation declares the glory of God and that creation pours forth speech. And this is something we see in Edwards is that just as words are signs of something beyond the midpoint, beyond themselves, so all of created reality, all beauty we see in creation points beyond itself. It is a sign of something signified by that sign which is God and his action. And to understand Edwards, one of the key caveats and I think this is one of the most neglected areas of Edwards, actually, is you have to understand how much personhood drives his understanding of things. And God.... the personal reality of God is key to that. And one of the things I argue in the Jonathan Edwards theology book is that... it is that very point, that God is personal and therefore to understand who God is, God has to reveal himself. It is God's self revelation. And this is true of any person. To know someone is to have them reveal themselves to you.

And this is important, again, for Edwards because it would be wrong to say we can't know things about people. We can deduce things. We can, I mean, we know their physical... their temporal... you know, but we and totally realize that that is not knowing them truly. A lot of theologians throughout history have maybe made that mistake, though, thinking if I can say true things about God, that must mean I know God. And there was... no, that is case at all. To know him is to have him reveal himself to you. Primarily for Edwards that is going to be reveal himself to you in Christ Jesus and then through the holy Scriptures. But it is also going to mean through nature, because the other way we learn about people is through what they do. And so nature, because God created it is ... are these words.

And in Edwards, there is a famous Edwards quote about Edwards was saying, you know, people might think I am crazy. This is a paraphrase. But, basically, you know, I realize people might think this sounds nuts, but when I look at the universe it needs a whole language full of words and if you only could learn this language, you would basically see what I do. And I think what he is saying there is what we have in Christ, when we have kind of seen who he is, it gives us eyes to see positively in a way that we couldn't see before.

We see that as Paul tells us in Ephesians as well as Colossians that in him all things hold together and he is... the plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in him. And what is going on there is that creation itself will recognize who this God is and proclaims it. And so in the beauty of nature, we see... we only get that secondary beauty because it rests on the primary beauty. So, in other words, secondary beauty it is only beautiful because it is relying upon primary beauty, which means it is relational. Now it doesn't mean it is personal. You might look at something in the nature and when you say it is relational you might say the colors are relating in certain ways or the shapes are relating. There is proportion. There is harmony between colors and nature and images and forms and things like that. But that, what that is pointing back to is a personal relational reality in the heart of God's life.

Edwards spent 13 hours a day in his office thinking and writing and slipping into poetry about God. Few of us have that luxury. How do we translate Edwards's vision of beauty into our busy lives that are taken up with 9-5 jobs and busy families?

Sure. Yeah, no that is a great point. I mean and Edwards' day is... I mean it is so different from our own. And a lot of that isn't even ... I mean, it isn't even the fact that we couldn't tap this, that we don't have the space

for it, I don't think. But you look at how our space differs from Edwards and our space tends to be filled with noise and with chaos. How many homes have multiple TVs going on at the same time? How many moments of your day is actually silence? And we live in a culture of just perpetual noise, perpetual business, perpetual chaos and Edwards didn't.

And one of the things I remember hearing a story. When I studied at the Edwards Center at Yale one of ... kind of a senior Edwards scholar who lived nearby would come in every Friday for lunch and just tell stories. And so we would just sit and listen to him. You know, he was fantastic. And he told a story about something he had come across in a... it was a pastor's diary who met Edwards once, at least once. And he was telling about the occasion and he said, "You know, I was going to pastor Edwards house wherever and Edwards." He expected to sit in his office and just chat with him a bit. And when he got there they were going to have lunch as well. And when he got there Edwards said, "I packed us a picnic lunch. Let's go for a ride and then hike to the top of a hill."

And that is what they did. And I think when I heard that—and this is early on in my Edwards studies—it kind of broke this conception I had of Edwards. You know, Edwards describes himself as, you know, I am not great with people. I am not. He has a very kind of honest self description, but it ... and it makes me think of someone who has become such an academic that they almost are unrelatable. That, I don't think that is quite right with Edwards and, I mean, I think there is something true about it. I think he did recognize some true things about himself, but Edwards loved being outside. He loved taking horse rides. He would get on a horse and by horseback ride. He just enjoyed it. He loved being a part of God's creation and I just love the image of him taking this young pastor and saying, "Let's go for a ride. Let's hike to the top of the hill and have a picnic lunch and just sort of be in creation."

I mean, I think a lot of us walk through God's creation every day and don't notice it. Edwards might have spent more time in his office than we do, but the little... the less amount of time he spent in nature he was actually there thinking about how God is present. We are often just moving from one place to another. So I think the key isn't... the issue isn't even one of time as much of utilizing the time we have well. And even within that, recognizing that any kind of work we do can be sanctified, because God is present with us, that beauty is all around, at even the darkest moments. There is something inherently beautiful about God's creation and the question is not if you hear, the question is: Do you have eyes to see?

Lets close on a summary note: How central for Edwards is beauty?

It is... it would... the same... It would be the same as asking how essential is glory or how central is love, because what you are saying are really different ways of talking about the same thing. You are talking about God's own life. And I think one of the surprising aspects... and I shared this in class and one of the things I kind of... it is just curious, I notice, with my students is that even the Christian students I have, because I have got actually a very broad mix. The Christian students are still surprised when the Bible explains to them that when there is something wrong with the world, the way God solves it is by being present. That if actually God is himself in his own life that is the solution.

That is why God sent Immanuel, God with us. That is one of the many reasons why it has to be God. It cannot be a messenger of God, because it is God's very presence that is the solution to the brokenness of reality. It is why at the end of Revelation we see the new Jerusalem descending in the shape of a cube, because that cube is a symbolic representation of the holy of holies where God's perfect presence was. And we are told in that same passage that God is now dwelling *with* mankind. And it is that very presence that is the solution to reality, the brokenness of reality, to the painfulness of reality, to sin itself.

And when we recognize that God is beautiful, that changes the nature of so many of our questions. And for Edwards one... I actually think the reason why Edwards is so attractive to so many is really the same reason

Augustine is and the same reason that most of the great theologians understood this truth that God is beautiful and Christians shouldn't have to apologize for that. And, unfortunately, for whatever reason is the Church seems to forget it and I don't know if it is because we feel the need to apologize for it, because by claiming God is beautiful we immediately make... have to make proclamations about all the other things that we give ourselves to or {?}.

But for Edwards, because God is beautiful, then all of life needs to be oriented by that and we can enjoy the beautiful realities of the world, but only enjoy them fully once we realize that they point beyond themselves to the beauty of God.

Thank you Kyle.

To repeat the words of Jonathan Edwards, "How good is God, that he has created man for this very end, to make him happy in the enjoyment of himself, the Almighty." Incredible thoughts.

That was Jonathan Edwards scholar Kyle Strobel from his Phoenix office at Grand Canyon University where he teaches. In this podcast we discussed his academic book, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, released by T&T in January of 2013. Be looking for his next book where many of these same ideas will be shared at a more popular level in the book, *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards*, due out in June from IVP.

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I'm your host, Tony Reinke. Thanks for listening.