Where *Earthly Riches Make Themselves Wings* (Sermon on Prov. 23:5, no. 116) focuses on the danger of trusting in earthly possessions and indulging sensual appetites, *Spiritual Appetites*, its companion, reveals the joy that comes from indulging “gracious appetites.” Where in the previous sermon the leitmotiv was the bird that flies away, representative of earthly wealth and desires, in *Spiritual Appetites* the leitmotiv is the river of God’s love and grace, a river that never runs out. As such, this sermon plays off of “Images of Divine Things” no. 15, where Edwards likens the Spirit of God to an ever-flowing river and saints to trees that “flourish” upon the benefits of the river (WJE 11:54–55).

Edwards uses the sensual language of Canticles to describe what he calls “the beauty of holiness.” Inordinate indulgence of the “animal” appetites, he states, are contrary to reason because they “darken and blind the understanding.” As such, they should be restrained. Indulging “spiritual appetites,” however, is “becoming of the station God has set us in,” and fulfills the “proper excellency and dignity of human nature.” Since these spiritual appetites are the “highest perfection of our natures,” and constitute the happiness for which humankind was made, they can never be inordinate. Earthly objects are fleeting, but spiritual objects—the glory and grace of God—are infinitely meritorious. Believers, Edwards affirms, can swim “in the rivers of spiritual pleasure.”

This sermon was for a sacrament service held, in all likelihood, on Sept. 7, 1729. In the second direction, Edwards prompts his listeners to indulge (though with “the utmost seriousness and consideration”) their
spiritual appetites in the Lord’s Supper, which is the visible representation of “that spiritual feast . . . which God has provided for poor souls.”

* * *

The manuscript consists of ten duodecimo leaves.
CHRIST, in [the] latter part of the foregoing chapter, had compared his spouse, the church, to a garden of pleasant fruits and the sweetest spices, beginning with the twelfth verse: "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." In the last verse, we have the church praying that the wind should blow upon her garden, that the spices thereof might flow out, or that they might put forth themselves and grow and be brought to perfection, and might send forth their fragrancy, that her garden might be prepared for the reception and entertainment of her spouse. By which we are to understand no other than that the Holy Spirit would come and breath his gracious influences upon the heart of the spouse to cause her graces to flow and to be in a vigorous exercise, that it might be the more fitted for Christ's presence and enjoyment.² And then we have the spouse inviting of Christ to come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits; that is, to come into her heart and accept of her faith and love and gracious exercises, and give the tokens of his acceptance of the same. 

In this verse, we have Christ answering this invitation. "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk."
And then, in the words of our text, he reciprocates [the] invitation. As the church invited Christ to feed on the graces of her heart, he accepts of that and invites her to feast on his love and grace: “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” Agreeable to that in Rev. 3:20, “If any man hear my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

In the words we may observe,

1. Who this invitation is directed [to]: the friends and the spouse of Christ, which are the same; the church, which is his beloved, is made up of believers that are his friends. John 15:15, “I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

2. What they are invited to: to eat and drink, to partake of his spiritual benefits and delights, and satisfy their spiritual appetites.

3. In what manner he would have them to eat and drink: that is, abundantly. “Drink; yea, drink abundantly.” It is in the Hebrew, “Drink; yea, be drunken, O beloved.” Christ would not have his people to lay any restraint upon themselves at this spiritual feast. There are no rules of temperance that take place here. And therefore the doctrine is:

DOCTRINE.

Persons need not and ought not to set any bounds to their spiritual and gracious appetites.

Man, when he was first created, was made with two different kinds of appetites: with natural or animal appetites, and with holy and spiritual appetites. The former were given only to be as servants unto the latter, and
so were to be in subjection to them. They were given to be restrained and kept within their proper bounds and limits by the superior and spiritual appetites, and then they did their proper work. But if by any means they exceeded those bounds, they necessarily suppressed those spiritual appetites.

By the fall, the spiritual appetite was lost, and so the animal [appetites] were left sole masters, and having no superior principle to restrain them. In regeneration, the spiritual appetites is again in some measure restored, and the sensual appetite is again restrained and kept within bounds by it. And it is our duty, with all possible care, watchfulness and resolution, to restrain them and to see that they don't go beyond their due bounds.

And this is one main part of the work that a Christian has to do in this militant state: to mortify carnal affections, to subdue his animal appetite, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, to keep under the body and bring it {into subjection}.

Herein chiefly consists the difficulty of a Christian's work. The animal appetites are very strong and impatient of any restraint. It is a bearing the cross daily and like cutting off of a right hand; and it looks with a frightful countenance to carnal men, and is what makes many afraid indeed to embrace Christianity and a holy life.

However, there is something else in Christianity besides self-denial or restraining our inclination. There is a crown as well as a cross. And though we are so strictly required to restrain and keep within bounds our animal inclinations, yet God don't desire we should set any bounds to spiritual and gracious inclinations, which are the most excellent. 4

He that is truly born again, as he has an animal appetite to meat and drink, so he hungers and thirsts after righteousness. 'Tis his meat and his
drink to do the will of his Father which is in heaven. He thirsts for God, for the living God, and sometimes his heart pants after God as the hart panteth after the water brooks [Ps. 42:1]. He has an appetite to Jesus Christ, who is the bread which came down from heaven. His soul lives upon Christ as his spiritual meat and drink.

He has an appetite to the Word of [God] as to the food of his soul, for he lives not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God [Matt. 4:4]. He as a newborn babe desires the sincere milk of the Word, that he may grow thereby [I Pet. 2:2].

He has not only a desire from a rational consideration of the need and benefit of it, but 'tis a desire immediately flowing from his nature, like the natural appetite.

As the covetous man desires earthly riches, so the regenerated person desires spiritual riches. He esteems grace in his soul as the best riches; he looks upon wisdom as better than gold and silver, and he is ambitious of the honor which is of God, to be a child of God and an heir of glory. And as the sensualist eagerly pursues sensual delights, he longs for those pleasures that are spiritual: the pleasure of seeing the glory of Christ, and enjoying his love and having communion with him; the pleasure and joys of the Holy Ghost that consist in the sweet and powerful exercise of grace, of faith and love, submission, thankfulness, charity and brotherly kindness. And with respect to those appetites self-denial has nothing to do, but here [they] may give themselves an unbounded liberty.

Here we shall,

I. Just show what is meant by not [setting any bounds to your spiritual and gracious appetites].

II. Shall insist on the two propositions contained in the doctrine.
[I.] By not setting any bounds to those gracious appetites, these two things are intended:

First. The not restraining of those appetites with respect to their degree or exercise. Men cannot exceed in the degree of those appetites. There is no such thing as any inordinateness in holy affections; there is no such thing as excess in longings after the discoveries of the beauty of Christ Jesus, or greater degrees of holiness, or the enjoyment of communion with God. Men may be as covetous as they please (if I may so speak) after spiritual riches, as eager as they please to heap up treasure in heaven, as ambitious as they please of spiritual and eternal honor and glory, and as voluptuous as they please with respect to spiritual pleasure.

Persons neither need nor ought to keep those inclinations and desires from increasing to any degree whatsoever, and there cannot be a too frequent or too powerful exercise of them.

A person can neither have too strongly energated a principle and habit of such inclinations, nor be in a frame wherein they are too much under their prevailing exercise.

Second. By not setting any bounds to those appetites is meant the not laying any restraint upon ourselves with respect to gratifying of them. Persons may indulge them as much as they please; they may give themselves their full swing. They may not only allow a very eager thirst and enlarged desire, but they may drink their fill; there is no excess. They may and ought to seek all the spiritual wealth they can obtain. They may to their utmost indulge their hungerings after righteousness, and after the Word of God, and after all spiritual pleasures. They may indulge those appetites as much as they will in their thoughts and meditations and in their practice. They may drink, yea, swim in the rivers of spiritual pleasure.
[II. We shall insist on the two propositions contained in the doctrine.]

First Prop. Persons need not lay any restraints upon those appetites. And that for these reasons:

1. There is nothing in the nature of those appetites that forbids their being exercised or indulged to any degree. The sensitive appetites have something in their own nature that requires their being restrained by certain rules and kept in certain bounds. They are of such a nature, that if a lease be given them, they become odious and abominable, and they debase the nature of man. They darken and blind the understanding, and hinder those exercises of the rational nature as are becoming of the station God has set us in, and drive on to those actions that are not consistent with the proper excellency and dignity of human nature. The unrestrained indulging of those appetites is in itself many ways contrary to reason.

But [it] is not so with respect to spiritual and gracious appetites. They are not, to whatsoever degree they are, any way unlovely or unreasonable. They were not intended to be governed and restrained by any superior and more excellent principle as animal appetites were, and therefore they cannot be inordinate. It is not [in] any degree of them, or of the gratification of them, contrary to the rational nature, because to the greater degree they are and the more they are gratified, the more doth the man act according to reason and justice.

2. God hath set no bounds by any prohibition. God hath set bounds and limits with respect to animal appetites, hath fenced up the way by his holy and dreadful commandments; he hath told us how far, in what manner and in what circumstances they may be allowed and indulged and how they may not, upon pain of his holy displeasure. But here God hath left the way open; he
leaves us without any manner of restraint. A wide and boundless world of
spiritual pleasure and blessedness is before us.

3. Our own interest will lay no restraint [upon] us here. An
unrestrained indulgence of the sensual appetite is in itself many ways
contrary to our own interest: a living in such a way will naturally lead to
ruin. Sensual lust, or inordinate bodily appetites—which are the same thing--
are a spring of woe and misery in whatsoever soul they reside, and
especially in whatsoever soul they bear rule: they bring the greatest
confusion into the soul, and therefore destroy the peace of it; they are
contrary to reason, and therefore reason will be fighting against them, which
will cause war and tumult in the soul; they bring guilt upon the mind, which
is inconsistent with the tranquility of the mind, and naturally produces
horror and misery.

And they also many ways destroy one's outward peace and comfort. A
sensual life involves men in many kinds of misery and sorrow in this world.

But it is not so with respect to the indulgence of spiritual appetites. If one is never so craving of spiritual enjoyments, and takes never so full a
swing in spiritual delights and pleasures, they are not contrary to any
superior interest, nor ordinarily to any inferior interest; but on the
contrary, those appetites are the true spring of the soul's peace and
happiness, and the stronger they are and the more indulged, so much the
greater is that soul's happiness. And the inferior interests, the interests
of the outward man, they are ordinarily promoted thereby: for length of days
are in their right hand, and in their left hand are riches and honor [Prov.
3:16].

There is no disapprobation of reason or judgment or remorse of
conscience that ensues the fully and freely enjoying those pleasures, but are
of the conscience most highly approved; and they leave no sting behind them, but a sweet relish upon the mind, a peace and serenity that is ineffable.

Second Prop. Persons ought not to lay any restraint or to set any bounds to their spiritual appetites. It is perhaps a case that can hardly happen, that any person should voluntarily and intentionally restrain their spiritual appetites. But they ought not to suffer them to be restrained by the prevalency of contrary inclinations; they ought not to suffer them to be kept down by worldly cares and pleasures.

Neither ought persons to rest in any past or present degree of gracious appetite or enjoyment of the objects of it, but to their utmost to be increasing the same, to be endeavoring by all possible ways to inflame their desires and to obtain more spiritual pleasures.

So that is not only what we may do and that we need not be afraid to do, but what God hath commanded and what it is our duty to do. For which we shall give these three reasons:

1. These gracious and holy inclinations and appetites are the true and the highest perfection of our nature. The animal appetites are good in their place because they subserve to that in man which is more excellent; but their goodness don't consist in their being subservient to themselves. But that which is the highest excellency and perfection of nature is good as [it is] subservient to itself; it can't be in too high a degree. A man surely cannot be the more imperfect for having a great deal of that which is the highest perfection of his nature. He can't have too much of that which is his true excellency, unless he can be too excellent.

'Tis by those holy inclinations that men are like God and have his image, and it is their duty to conform themselves to their utmost to God's holy nature.
2. 'Tis in those enjoyments that are the objects of those spiritual appetites, wherein consists the happiness that man was made for. God has given every man a necessary desire after happiness; he unavoidably seeks it. It is impossible he should do otherwise, and 'tis in the satisfying of those gracious appetites wherein consists the happiness God designed him [for]; and therefore men, as they ought to seek this happiness, ought to indulge those appetites to obtain as much of those spiritual satisfactions as lies in their power.

As God designed man for this happiness, he intended those appetites should be satisfied. He has promised that such hungerings and thirstings should be filled. Men therefore ought to endeavor that they obtain the satisfying of them, as they ought to do what belongs to them to do in order to their being the way to obtain the promises.

3. Let those appetites be never so strong and vigorous, yet they will not be equal to the merit of their objects. When men's appetites are violent towards earthly enjoyments, they are beyond the desert of their objects. Those things are not worth the so eager desires of a rational creature. Temporal pleasures ben't worthy, that the soul of man should be wholly possessed and governed by desires after them.

But 'tis not so with respect to spiritual enjoyments. They are of so exalted and excellent a nature, that it is impossible that our desires after them should exceed their desert; yea, they cannot be equal to it. Our hungerings and thirstings after God and Jesus Christ and after holiness can't be too great for the value of the things, for they are things of infinite value.
And in this world, we all fall shamefully short: our appetites, our desires [are] miserably cold and languid in comparison of what they deserve of us. We ought therefore to our utmost to promote and increase them.

APPLICATION.

[Use] I. Inf. Hence we learn the unreasonableness of carnal men's prejudice against religion, as though it were a thing that abridged men of all the pleasure of life. Although it limits man with respect to one sort of pleasures, viz. those that are of the more base and inferior, those that are common to the beasts, yet it lays no restraint upon [him] with respect to those pleasures that are the best and sweetest and are most able to delight and satisfy the soul. Those delights that are agreeable to the rational nature and worthy of such a creature as man, and that don't debase but exalt and perfect him, and that are also of the most exquisite sweetness, we are allowed and directed to indulge ourselves in to our utmost.

Religion is not a sour thing that is contrived for nothing but to cross our inclinations and to cut us short of the delights of life. No, it is quite of another nature: it abridges us of no pleasures, but only such as of their own nature (however pleasing for the present) do lay a foundation for woe and misery. They are in their own nature a poison, that though sweet in the mouth, do really as it were destroy the constitution of the soul. Prov. 23:32, “At last it will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.” But as for those delights that better the soul and have a tendency to the future, as well as the present, well-being of it, they are allowed fully and are promoted by religion; yea, true religion is the only source from whence they flow.
How much happier therefore is the man that chooses a holy and a spiritual religious life than he that chooses a carnal, sensual life. Sensual men may be ready to think they should be happy men if there were nothing to restrain their enjoyment of their [appetites], if they might at all time satisfy their appetites, and have their full swing at their pleasures with impunity and without any danger of any succeeding inconvenience. But if it were so, they would be but miserable men in comparison of the godly man who enjoys the pleasures of acquaintance with the glorious God and his Son Jesus Christ, and a communion of the holy and blessed Spirit of God and Christ, and a true peace of conscience and inward testimonies of the favor and acceptance of God and [Christ], and have liberty without restraint to indulge themselves in the enjoyment of those pleasures. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17).

Indeed, the spiritual appetites in this world are but low, and the advantages for indulging of them are also comparatively but small; but how great will be the happiness of the saints in heaven, where those appetites will be raised to a most vigorous and perfect exercise, and shall be under all possible advantages for the satisfying of them. They shall be surrounded with those things that are the objects of them; they shall be in God's presence and in the presence of the Lamb, and shall behold his glory and have the Holy Spirit in abundant measures poured forth into their souls, etc.

Use II is to exhort you to the utmost to promote and indulge spiritual and gracious appetites. It is to repeat and apply to you that invitation of Christ that we have in the text: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly." We, in Christ's stead, entreat you that are the followers of Christ thus to do. By all means, endeavor to raise and to obtain satisfaction for holy inclinations; delight yourselves in the Lord.
One would think you should not need urging to indulge your appetites and to enjoy your pleasures. Carnal men, by all the arguments that can be used, can scarcely be restrained from indulging their carnal appetites. 'Tis a shame that the saints should need a great many arguments to move them to promote their spiritual appetites.

Be exhorted particularly to promote a thirsting desire after Jesus Christ and after that glorious feast of spiritual good things that is provided in him. Delight yourselves in him. Rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

First Dir. Endeavor to increase spiritual appetites by meditating on spiritual objects. We are to restrain lustful appetites all that we can by casting away and avoiding thoughts and meditations upon their objects. We ben't allowed by any means to give a lease to our thoughts concerning those things, because that tends to increase lustful desires after them. But 'tis our duty to be much in meditation on the objects of spiritual desire: we should often be thinking upon the glory and grace of God, the excellency and wonderful love of Christ, the beauty of holiness.

Second Dir. Endeavor to promote spiritual appetites by laying yourself in the way of allurement. We are to avoid being in the way of temptation with respect to our carnal appetites. Job made a covenant with his eyes [Job 31:1]. But we ought to take all opportunities to lay ourselves in the way of enticement with respect to our gracious inclinations. Thus you should be often with God in prayer, and then you will be in the way of having your heart drawn forth to him. We ought to be frequent in reading and constant in hearing the Word. And particularly to this end, we ought carefully and with the utmost seriousness and consideration attend the sacrament of the Lord's Supper: this was appointed for this end, to draw forth the longings of our
souls towards Jesus Christ. Here are the glorious objects of spiritual desire by visible signs represented to our view. We have Christ evidently set forth crucified....Here we have that spiritual meat and drink represented and offered to excite our hunger and thirst; here we have all that spiritual feast represented which God has provided for poor souls; and here we may hope in some measure to have our longing souls satisfied in this world by the gracious communications of the Spirit of God.

Third Dir. Watch the first beginnings of the exercise of these inclinations, and promote them. We are to watch the first beginnings of lustful inclinations, to suppress [them], but here we are to do the contrary: whenever we feel these desires and longings, we should endeavor to forwards [them] by meditation and prayer. We should express our longings to God; they will increase by being expressed. We should be earnest in our prayers for the things we long for. The Apostle speaks of groanings in prayer that cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

Fourth Dir. Live in the practice of these inclinations. If you long after God and Jesus Christ, then often go to God and Christ and converse with them. If you long to be near to God, then draw near to him. If you hunger and thirst after righteousness, then take great care to live in the practice of righteousness, to live a more holy and heavenly life. If you long to be more like Christ, then act like him, walk as he walked. This is the way to have your holy inclinations increased, and hereby they will in some measure be satisfied.