Course Description

This course will be an intensive investigation of some of the major elements of the theology of Jonathan Edwards. Our readings will focus primarily on Edwards's major published theological treatises. This is a "textual" approach (rather than a "topical") to Edwards and students will be encouraged to develop a very precise understanding of the basic point(s) Edwards makes in each of the treatises we read.

Prior to beginning our actual discussion of Edwards, however, the instructor will seek to provide one perspective on the context within which Edwards ministered and wrote. This context is both the American Puritan tradition as manifested in New England between 1630 and 1703 (Edwards’s birth date) and the cultural/political context of early 18th century New England. These contexts will be the primary focus of the class session on Monday, July 6. From July 7 through July 10, we will be discussing and working in groups on Edwards material directly.

Further, Edwards wrote and ministered in the 18th century. Of what relevance are his ministry and theology for the church today? This will be a key question throughout our discussions and it should be a key question for students as they work their way through the assigned material.

Our concern ultimately, of course, is to trace the formative principles of Edwards's theology in order to answer the most important question of all - to what degree is Edwards a biblical theologian whose insights can be of use to the Church of Jesus Christ today?

Course Requirements

1. Very careful and thoughtful reading of the assigned material.

2. Attendance at and active participation in the meetings of the class.

3. A group project dealing with the theology of Jonathan Edwards which also must be completed and turned in by 12:00 noon on Friday, July 17 (requests for extension will not be granted except under the most extreme circumstances). For this project, the entire class will be divided into groups of between four and six individuals and each group will present its written project AS A GROUP. Each group will function something like the theological commission of a local church or a denomination and each will be charged to investigate and to make a judgment regarding a particular issue arising out of the theology of Edwards.

This is the “problem” on which each group will work: to what degree do Edwards's treatises on
Religious Affections and Qualifications for Communion provide valid biblical guidelines for the life of the church today? Admission to full membership in the church (and thus to the Lord's Supper) and the examination of candidates for the ministry must be addressed. Other areas of church life may also be considered at the group's discretion.

All members of each group will receive the same grade for this project; grades will be based on thoroughness and accuracy of the analysis of Edwards and on the thoroughness and accuracy of biblical evaluation. Secondary materials definitely should be consulted and references provided in the final report of each group. There is no "correct" answer to the question posed in this assignment; either a vigorous rejection of Edwards's ideas or a vigorous acceptance of Edwards's ideas could earn a grade of "A."

In its final form, each group's report must be written in high-quality standard English, typed, double-spaced, and completely free from uncorrected typographical errors, from spelling errors, and from grammatical errors. At the end of each report, this statement must be written out and signed by each member of the group: "We understand and have not violated the Seminary's statement on plagiarism."

The report must be turned in to the instructor no later than 12:00 noon on Friday, July 17. It may either be e-mailed to the instructor or sent by regular mail. The report should be 5 - 7 pages long. Minority reports are not required. However, one minority report may be submitted. If it is, it must be in addition to the 5 - 7 pages of the basic group report. Students will be given significant time during the week of July 6 to work on this group project.

This project will count as a third of the student's final grade.

4. A longer individual project dealing with some aspect of the theology of Jonathan Edwards. The exact shape of this project will be determined by the student's own interests and must be approved by the instructor in advance (i.e., before work is begun on the project). A student might want to write a formal article (paper) on some aspect of Edwards's theology. If this option is selected, the student must identify the exact journal or other publication for which he/she is writing and must utilize in this project the style and format appropriate for that publication.

Another student might want to write a sermon based on Edwards's understanding of the religious affections. In this case, the sermon, an explanation of how the sermon seeks to build on Edwards, and a brief analysis of the type of congregation to which the sermon is to be preached must all be submitted.

A third student might wish to design a course on Jonathan Edwards. In this case, the context of the course must be described (for example, high school, or college, or adult Sunday School), the assigned readings listed, and a full set of lecture outlines provided.

These are just three possible options - student are urged to explore other possibilities, according to their interests, with the instructor.
Whatever the project, it must be approved by the instructor in writing no later than 12:00 noon on Friday, July 10 (a copy of this written approval must accompany the final project when it is turned in). In its final form, the project must be written in high-quality standard English, typed, double-spaced, and completely free from uncorrected typographical errors, from spelling errors, and from grammatical and spelling errors. The project must be turned in to the D.Min. office by October 30. As a guide in terms of length, this project should be roughly the equivalent of a twenty-page research paper. This project will also count as a third of the student's final grade.

5. By October 30, each student must turn in an 8 - 12 page review of George Marsden’s biography of Jonathan Edwards (Jonathan Edwards: A Life, Yale University Press, 2004). In this review, the student must indicate for what audience the review has been written, must relate the review to the specific issues being faced by the audience for which the review is being written, and must give clear evidence of having worked carefully through Marsden’s book. In its final form, the review must be written in high-quality standard English, typed, double-spaced, and completely free from uncorrected typographical errors, from spelling errors, and from grammatical errors. This review will also count as a third of the student’s final grade.

6. There will be no final examination in this course.

Course Reading Assignments (in addition to George Marsden’s book described above)

NOTE: In spite of the danger that it represents to the eyesight of students, reading assignments from Edwards himself are given with reference to Volume I of the Banner of Truth edition of The Works of Jonathan Edwards. This is simply an economic matter. The preferred edition of Edwards’s works is that published by Yale University Press. Perhaps students at RTS are able to afford to purchase those volumes and, if so, they are to be commended and envied. Students at other seminaries where the instructor has taught have not been able to afford to purchase the several volumes which would be required to complete the assignments in this course and the instructor has, therefore, continued to give the assignments with reference to the Banner of Truth edition.

Should be completed before July 6:

“The Half-Way Covenant” (available in numerous collections, such as Cotton Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana)
Jonathan Edwards, Justification by Faith Alone (1734), pp. 622 - 53
Narrative of Surprising Conversions (1737), pp. 344 - 64
Thoughts on the Revival (1742), pp. 365 - 430

Should be completed before July 8:

Treatise Concerning Religious Affections (1746), pp. 234 - 336
Qualifications for Communion  (1746), pp. 431 - 84

Should be completed before July 9:

The Freedom of the Will (1754), pp. 3 - 93
The Doctrine of Original Sin Defended (1758), pp. 143 - 233

Should be completed before July 10:

The Nature of True Virtue (1765), pp. 122 - 42.

NOTE: The instructor would like students to feel free to contact him at any time about issues relating to the course - before the course begins, during our time together in Charlotte, between the end of our time in Charlotte and the final due date for course materials (October 30), and after October 30. E-mail is usually best (samueltlogan@aol.com) but telephone calls are also welcome (home: 215 576-6072; cell: 267 243-2574).