

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs
of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections
(signs 4-5)
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(Note: These notes are a lightly edited version of the notes that I used in teaching the class. The form is based on the style used by [Winston Churchill](#) for his speech notes. The HTML version doesn't show indentation but the PDF does.)

This is our eighth meeting.

Before we review what we've covered
in the previous seven meetings,
does anyone have a proposed
solution to the butterfly problem?

Let's review a little of what we've talked about so far.

We've learned some about Jonathan Edwards himself.

When did Jonathan Edwards live?

From October 5, 1703
until March 22, 1758.

We've learned why he wrote
A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections.

Why did Edwards write *The Religious Affections*?

To address the question:
"How do we discern between that which is good,
and that which is evil?"

We've learned what the affections are,
and why they are important.

To what does the term 'the affections' refer?

The affections refer to the mind yearning.

Why are the affections important?

They are important because they are essential to true belief.

We've learned that there are some
things that are not signs one way or the other
that affections are godly.

Edwards discussed twelve of these:

Intensity
 Bodily Affects
 Verbosity
 Origin outside self
Scripture quotations
 Appearance of love
 Many kinds
 Order of appearance
Much worship
 Verbal praise
 Confidence of salvation
 Beliefs of others

We've also learned that
 Edwards lists twelve distinguishing marks
 that he says are signs that religious affections
 are from God.

What are those twelve signs?

Spiritual origin of affections
 Appreciation of divine things in themselves
 Love for the holiness of divine things

Enlightened understanding
 Certainty of divine things
 True humility

Change of nature
 Christ-like spirit
 Tender spirit.

Beautiful symmetry and proportion
 Desire to grow
 Life of obedience

Last week,
 we discussed the first three of these in some detail,

Someone tell us one thing you remember
 from last week.

Someone else tell us another thing you remember.

Today we're going to cover 2 more of the distinguishing marks:
 Enlightened understanding and
 Certainty of divine things.

Edwards describes
 Enlightened understanding this way:
 Gracious affections do arise
 from the mind's being enlightened,
 richly and spiritually
 to understand or apprehend

divine things.

In discussing this sign,
Edwards starts by showing from Scripture
the critical importance of knowledge.

We live in an age
in which many professing believers
seek to de-emphasize or completely deny
the importance of knowledge in Christianity,
so these Scripture passages are important for us, too.

Let's read three of the passages Edwards cites:

[John 6:45](#)

"It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me."

[Colossians 3:9-10](#)

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, {10} and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him

[Hosea 4:6](#)

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

These verses,
and many more we could cite —
such as Romans 10:2, Philippians 1:9, Isaiah 5:13 —
show that knowledge,
or an enlightened understanding,
is essential for true believers.

Edwards puts it this way:

Truly spiritual and gracious affections ...
arise from the enlightening of the understanding
to understand the things that are taught of God and Christ
in a new manner,
the coming to a new understanding
of the excellent nature of God,
and his wonderful perfections,
some new view of Christ
in his spiritual excellencies and fullness,
or things opened to him in a new manner
that appertain to the way of salvation by Christ,
whereby he now sees how it is,
and understands
those divine and spiritual doctrines
which once were foolishness to him.

Now, this knowledge,
this enlightened understanding
is not something that an unbeliever can have.

It is a supernatural,
divine understanding
provided by the Spirit of God alone
to the regenerate alone.

Several Scripture passages
show this. Here's one.

[1 Corinthians 2:12-14](#)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, {13} which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. {14} But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

So it is clear from Scripture
that there exists
knowledge
that God gives to His children
that others do not have,
and can not have.

The question is:
What is this knowledge?

It can't be simply
knowledge of the facts of the gospel,
because unbelievers can know these things, too.

An unbeliever can know, for example,
that Jesus was born in Bethlehem,
that He called 12 apostles to him,
that He turned water into wine,
that He raised Lazarus from the dead,
that He was crucified,
and even that He rose from the dead on the third day.

What then is it that an unbeliever cannot understand?
Does anyone have some thoughts about this?

Think about what we talked about last week.

Edwards puts it this way:

I have already shown
what that new spiritual sense is
which the saints have given them in regeneration,
and what is the object of it.

I have shown that the immediate object of it
is the supreme beauty and excellency
of the nature of divine things,
as they are
in themselves.

And this is agreeable to the Scripture;
the apostle very plainly teaches,

that the great thing discovered by spiritual light,
and understood by spiritual knowledge,
is the glory of divine things.

That is,
the knowledge that believers
have given to them at regeneration
is the knowledge
of the glory and excellence of divine things
in themselves, in particular,
as we'll see in a minute,
the holiness of God.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 to see this.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled,
it is veiled to those who are perishing,
{4} in whose case
the god of this world has
blinded the minds
of the unbelieving,
that they might not see
the light of the gospel
of the glory of Christ,
who is the image of God.

{5} For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

{6} For God,
who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness,"
is the One who has shone in our hearts
to give the light of
the knowledge of
the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Edwards expands on this in a
fairly long passage that I want you to listen to closely:

Spiritual understanding *primarily* consists in
th[e] *sense, or taste of the moral beauty of divine things;*
so that no knowledge can be called spiritual,
any further than it arises from this, and has this in it.

...

By this sense of the moral beauty of divine things,
is understood the sufficiency of Christ as a mediator;
for it is only by the discovery
of the beauty of the moral perfection of Christ,
that the believer is let into
the knowledge of the excellency of his person,
so as to know anything more of it than the devils do; ...

It is by seeing the excellency of Christ's person,
that the saints are made sensible
of the preciousness of his blood,

and its sufficiency to atone for sin;
for therein consists the preciousness of Christ's blood,
that it is the blood of so excellent and amiable a person. ...

By this is seen the excellency of the Word of God.
Take away all the moral beauty and sweetness in the word,
and the Bible is left wholly a dead letter,
a dry, lifeless, tasteless thing.

By this is seen the true foundation of our duty,
the worthiness of God to be so esteemed, honored,
loved, submitted to, and served, as he requires of us,
and the amiableness
of the duties themselves that are required of us.

And by this is seen
the true evil of sin; for he who sees the beauty of holiness,
must necessarily
see the hatefulness of sin, its contrary. ...

He that sees the beauty of holiness, or true moral good,
sees the greatest and most important thing in the world,
which is the fullness of all things,
without which all the world is empty,
no better than nothing, yea, worse than nothing.

Unless this is seen,
nothing is seen that is worth the seeing;
for there is no other true excellency or beauty.

Unless this be understood,
nothing is understood that is worthy
of the exercise of the noble faculty of understanding. ...

He therefore in effect knows nothing,
that knows not this;
his knowledge is but the shadow of knowledge,
or the *form of knowledge*, as the apostle calls it.

Well therefore may the Scriptures represent
those who are destitute of that spiritual sense
by which is perceived the beauty of holiness,
as totally *blind, deaf, and senseless, yea, dead*.

And well may regeneration,
in which this divine sense is given to the soul by its Creator,
be represented as opening the blind eyes,
and raising the dead,
and bringing a person into a new world.

So,
understanding of divine things,
is a distinguishing mark of a true believer.

Rather than talk about applications of this sign now,

I want to go on and explain the next sign,
and then we'll talk about applications
of both of them together.

Before I do that,
'Though, are there any questions?

Now let's move on to the 5th sign,
which is **certainty of divine things**,
or has Edwards wrote it:
Truly gracious affections are attended
with a reasonable and spiritual conviction
of the judgment,
of the reality
and certainty of divine things.

Continuing with Edwards, we read:

All those who are truly gracious persons
have a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction
of the truth of the great things of the gospel;
I mean, that they no longer
halt between two opinions;
the great doctrines of the gospel cease
to be any longer doubtful things,
or matters of opinion,
which, though probable, are yet disputable;
but with them, they are points
settled and determined,
as undoubted and indisputable,
so that they are not afraid to venture their all upon their truth.

Edwards cites many Scripture passages to show that this is true. We'll look at only two of them.

[Matthew 16:15-17](#)

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" {16} And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." {17} And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Peter answers with certainty.

Notice that this passage also supports
the idea that our knowledge comes directly from God.

[2 Timothy 1:12](#)

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

Those who are truly regenerate
are **as sure**
of the truth of the gospel
as they are
of anything else in the world.

For example,
a true Christian has
no more doubt that God
is a holy God worthy of praise
than that he (the Christian) is alive.

There may be brief periods of time
in which the certainty is shaken,
but it always returns.

It may also be the case
that someone *first*
comes to consider the gospel
based on something less than certainty —
that's fine,
but a truly regenerate person
will not *remain*
in a state of uncertainty.

Eventually,
he will change,
by the direct operation of God on his mind,
from believing
the gospel is
probably true,
to believing it is
certainly true.

Because the knowledge we have comes
directly from God Himself —
it makes sense that these things
would be believed with certainty.

Edwards goes on in this section
to write about the difference
between
real certainty that comes from God
and
the false certainty that comes from ourselves.

He also writes about
both direct
and indirect ways
God gives us certainty.

All of that is very interesting,
but we don't have time this morning to cover it.

I will mention only one especially important
point from those sections 'though,
which is this:
Certainty alone is not the sign,
certainty of the right things is the sign.

As we talked about a few weeks ago,
plenty of people are certain about things that are not true.

What we're talking about here
is certainty about the truths of God.

Recall from the first week,
that Edwards gave a wonderful definition of truth
in his collection of writings called, "The Mind":
"Truth is the consistency and agreement
of our ideas
with the ideas of God."

So,
the certainty
that is the sign
is certainty
about those ideas
that agree with the ideas of God.

Let's look now at some applications of these signs,
beginning with applications to ourselves.

I'll do this the same way I did last week,
namely give questions to ask.

Here are two questions you can ask yourself

To what extent
do I understand,
and know to be certain,
the truths of the Scripture?

Does my certainty
of the truths proclaimed in the Scripture
remain firm
regardless of circumstances?

As we have discussed before,
a true believer doesn't understand everything,
and he isn't always certain
about everything
all the time,
but
a true believer
does understand things
that an unregenerate person cannot,
and
his certainty in the truths of God
does not waiver long.

There's a great little song
by Twila Paris
that addresses these issues well;
It is called, "Do I Trust You?"

Here are some excerpts:

Sometimes my little heart can't understand
What's in your will, what's in your plan
So many times I'm tempted to ask you why.
But I can never forget it for long
Lord what you do, could not be wrong
So I'll believe you, even when I must cry.

Do I trust you Lord?
Does the river flow?
Do I trust you Lord?
Does the North wind blow?

Skipping a little bit ...

Do I trust you Lord?
Does the robin sing?
Do I trust you Lord?
Does it rain in spring?

And one more excerpt:

I will trust you Lord,
When I don't know why.
I will trust you Lord,
Till' the day I die.
I will trust you Lord,
When I'm blind with pain.
You were God before,
And you'll never change.
I will trust you,
I will trust you,
I will trust you Lord.

Does this express
your attitude?

If not,
if you're not certain about the truth of the gospel,
or you don't even understand how it could be true,
then you need to take a very close look
at your spiritual state.

It may well be that
you should be praying to God
that He will draw you to Himself.

So much for ourselves,
let's look now at applications to others.

Of course,
we can change the pronouns in the questions
I just gave you,
and have questions we can ask others.

Also,

I suggest the following two questions
to consider when inspecting the fruit of others.

Are the person's
expressed beliefs
consistent with
an understanding of the gospel,
and a belief in its certainty?

Are the person's
explicit actions
consistent with
an understanding of the gospel,
and a belief in its certainty?

I suspect that we're all pretty much aware
that a person's stated beliefs and actions
can be inconsistent with each other.

Usually we think of this in terms
of someone claiming to believe correctly,
but acting in a way that makes those claims
difficult to believe.

We even have a term to describe such a person;
what is it?

Hypocrite

It seems to me, 'though,
that we tend to ignore the converse of this:
a person whose claimed beliefs are not correct,
but whose actions suggest
that the person's true understanding
is much more correct
than what is expressed verbally.

We need a word for people like this,
because,
although technically "hypocrite" applies,
the connotation of that word is negative,
and we need a positive word
for these people.

I'm not suggesting that someone who says,
"I do not believe in Jesus Christ at all,"
but who lives an apparently good life
might be a Christian.

But I am suggesting
that on many matters of theology,
some people claim an incorrect belief,
but live in a way
that is consistent with a correct belief.

This seems to me to especially true today,
where,
in many circles,
theology is almost a dirty word,
and the state of education is such
that not many people can speak coherently
or reason logically.

Here's a true example,
I've changed the names
to protect the innocent,
and the guilty —
neither of the people are from this church.

I know a particular professing Christian —
I'll call her Marie —
who denies the truth of predestination.

However,
in every way that I can see,
Marie lives in a way that is entirely consistent
with a correct understanding
of God's sovereignty
over every aspect of life,
including salvation.

I know another professing Christian —
I'll call him Walter —
who professes the truth of predestination.

In fact,
Walter often has conversations
with Marie,
trying to convince her
that her stated views on the subject
are wrong.

However,
Walter fairly often acts in ways
that are not consistent
with a correct understanding of God's sovereignty.

Who has a better understanding
of God's sovereignty?

Marie,
most certainly,
although both people need better understanding.

The point of that story
is to emphasize that when applying these signs
to inspecting the fruit of others,
you need to look at both
stated beliefs,
and actual actions.

Any questions about
applying these two signs
to others?

In applying these signs
to looking at ministries,
here are two questions to consider.

Does the ministry,
in its words and actions,
testify to the certainty of the truths of the Scripture?

Does the ministry
call unbelievers to come to Christ
because the gospel is certain,
or because of the gospel is probable?

If the answer to the first question
is "No",
and the answer to the second
is "probable",
then there are certainly aspects of the ministry
that are not blessed by God,
and we need to be careful.

It doesn't necessarily mean,
however,
that there's nothing good in the ministry;
we shouldn't apply these signs in isolation.

Are there any questions,
before I close this session?

Next week,
we'll look at the sixth sign,
which I've called
True Humility.

If you have a copy of the book,
please read that section of Part III.

We'll close with a reading from the "Miscellanies"
#350 Christian Religion. Divine Revelation.
The full entry is fairly long,
So I'll only read some excerpts.

Were it not for divine revelation,
I am persuaded
that there is
no one doctrine
of that which we call natural religion
[but] would,
notwithstanding all philosophy and learning,

forever be involved
in darkness,
doubts,
endless disputes,
and dreadful confusion.

Many things,
now they are revealed,
seem very plain,
and as if
we could easily
arrive at a certainty of them
if we never had had a revelation of them.

It is one thing to see that a truth
is exceedingly agreeable to reason,
after
we have been told it
and have had it explained to us,
and have been told the reasons of it;
and
another
to find it out,
and clearly and certainly to explain it,
by mere reason.

'Tis one thing to prove a thing
after
we are showed how,
and another to find it out and prove it of ourselves.

If there never had been any revelation,
I believe the world would be full
of endless disputes
about the very being of a God,
whether the world was from eternity or not
and whether the form and order of the world
don't result from the mere nature of matter:
ten thousand schemes there would be about it.

And if it was allowed
that there was a first cause of all things,
there would be endless disputes
and abundance of uncertainty,
to determine what sort of a thing that first cause was.

We hardly can have a conception
[of] how it would be
if there never had been any revelation.

For we are bred up
in the light of revelation
from our very infancy.

If there was a nation of philosophers,
where all were taught philosophy
as soon as they came to be capable
of understanding anything,

and so they were bred up in it,
they would be surprised at the ignorance,
the thoughtlessness
of a people that did not meddle in it. ...

Knowledge is easy
to us that understand by revelation,
but we do not know
what brutes we should have been,
if there never had been any revelation.