

Adult Sunday School Class: Religious Affections
Part III: Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs
of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections
(sign 7-9)
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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 tenth meeting.

Before we quickly review what we've covered
in the previous nine meetings,
has anyone figured out
in what book Winston Churchill
wrote about butterflies and predestination?

So far,
we've learned a bit about Jonathan Edwards life,
including some of the works he wrote
in addition to *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* —
The Freedom of the Will,
Original Sin,
"Miscellanies",
"The Mind",
and many others.

We've learned why he wrote
The Religious Affections,
what the affections are,
and why they are important.

When we discussed what the affections are,
I reminded you that it is very important
to remember that the affections
are not a separate part of you —
just like the will,
or the mind,
or anything else
isn't a separate part.

These are just terms used
to describe different things that the soul
(or mind)
does — different functions.

So can think of
the understanding as referring
to the mind thinking;
the will as referring
to the mind choosing;
the strength, perhaps, as referring

to the mind doing;
and
the affections as referring
to the mind yearning.

We studied twelve things
that Edwards explains in Part II
do not distinguish between godly
and ungodly affections,
and I gave short names to each of them;
I won't repeat those here this morning.

We then began studying the
twelve distinguishing marks
that Edwards asserts in Part III
are signs that religious affections
are godly.

We began this section of our study with
a quick overview of all twelve,
and have studied six of them in detail so far:
Spiritual origin of affections,
Appreciation of divine things in themselves,
Love for the holiness of divine things,
Enlightened understanding,
Certainty of divine things, and
True humility.

The plan today
is to cover three more of the distinguishing marks:
change of nature,
Christ-like spirit, and
tender spirit.

I'm going to give a brief description
of each of these signs,
and then we'll break into groups
to work on applications of the signs.

Let's look at **change of nature** first.

Edwards describes this sign like this:

Another thing,
wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others,
is, that they are attended with a change of nature.

Edwards notes that often
when the Scripture speaks of a person's conversion,
it often uses terms that imply or signify a change.

He writes:

The Scripture representations of conversion
do strongly imply and signify a change of nature:
such as

“being born again;
becoming new creatures;
rising from the dead;
being renewed in the spirit of the mind;
dying to sin,
and living to righteousness;
putting off the old man,
and putting on the new man;
being ingrafted into a new stock;
having a divine seed implanted in the heart;
being made partakers of the divine nature.”

If this class were a graduate philosophy class,
we'd spend a lot of time
talking about
what the word 'nature' means —
I did a little bit of that
in the Biblical word studies class
a few years ago —
but,
for our purposes in this class,
the following description by Edwards
is adequate:

Therefore if there be no great
and remarkable abiding change
in persons that think they have experienced a work of conversion,
vain are all their imaginations and pretenses,
however they have been affected.
Conversion is a great and universal change of the man,
turning him from sin to God.

If, therefore, after a person's high affections at his supposed first conversion,
it comes to that in a little time,
that there is no very sensible,
or remarkable alteration in him,
as to those bad qualities, and evil habits,
which before were visible in him —
and he is ordinarily under the prevalence
of the same kind of dispositions that he used to be,
and the same thing seems to belong to his character;
he appears as selfish,
carnal,
as stupid, and perverse,
as unchristian and unsavory
as ever —
it is greater evidence against him,
than the brightest story of experiences that ever was told, is for him.

That is,
in true conversion,
significant changes occur.
A person is not the same
after conversion
as he was before conversion.

That's change of nature,
now let's talk about
Christ-like spirit
and **tender spirit**.

Edwards explains these two signs like this:

Truly gracious affections differ from those affections that are false and delusive,
in that they tend to,
and are attended with
the lamb-like,
dove-like spirit and temper of Jesus Christ;
or in other words,
they naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love,
meekness,
quietness,
forgiveness and mercy,
as appears in Christ.

And

Gracious affections soften the heart,
and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.

This is really just
a particular aspect of having a Christ-like spirit.

As with many of the other marks,
Edwards cites quite a bit of Scripture
to support his naming these as signs.

For Christ-like spirit, let's look at two of these.

[Romans 8:29](#)

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

[1 Corinthians 15:47-49](#)

The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. {48} As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. {49} And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

These,
and many other,
verses show that true believers
will have a spirit more and more like Jesus.

One particular aspect of that spirit
is tenderness,
which is shown in quite a few passages, also.

Here are four:

[Galatians 5:22-23](#)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Colossians 3:12-13

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; {13} bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

James 3:17

{17} But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, {5} does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, {6} does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; {7} bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Despite these verses,

Edwards anticipates that some may object
to the assertion that tenderness
and gentleness should be part of
a Christian's character:

But here some may be ready to say,

"Is there no such thing as Christian fortitude,
and boldness for Christ,
being good soldiers in the Christian warfare,
and coming out boldly
against the enemies of Christ and his people?"

To which I answer that there doubtless is such a thing.

The whole Christian life is compared to a warfare,
and fitly so.

And the most eminent Christians are the best soldiers,
endued with the greatest degrees of Christian fortitude.

And it is the duty of God's people
to be steadfast and vigorous
in their opposition to
the designs and ways
of such as are endeavoring
to overthrow the kingdom of Christ ...

But yet many persons seem to be quite mistaken
concerning the nature of Christian fortitude.
It is an exceeding diverse thing
from a brutal fierceness,
or the boldness of the beasts of prey.

True Christian fortitude
consists in strength of mind, through grace,
exerted in two things:

in ruling and suppressing
the *evil* and unruly passions and affections of the mind;
and in steadfastly and freely exerting and following
good affections and dispositions,
without being hindered by sinful fear,
or the opposition of enemies.

...

The strength of the good soldier of Jesus Christ
appears in nothing more,
than in steadfastly maintaining
the holy calm,
meekness,
sweetness,
and benevolence of his mind,
amidst all the storms,
injuries,
strange behavior,
and surprising acts
and events
of this evil and unreasonable world.

Now that we have a general idea
of what these 3 signs mean,
we'll break into two groups
to work on applications of the signs.

The folks on the left will work on
change of nature.

The folks on the right will work on
Christ-like spirit and tender spirit together —
that is, you may treat them as a single sign.

I want you to come up
with at least one,
and preferably more,
questions to ask
for each application area,
self,
others,
ministries.

Those who are working on
change of nature
need to consider
how to apply this sign
to children who come to Christ
at a young age, also,
and not just
to people who come to Christ as adults.

Each group will have 5 minutes
to share their applications

with the others.

Are there any questions
before you start?

[Stop groups at 10:33]

Here are some application questions,
in case the groups have trouble,
or as additions to what they come up with.

For change of nature,
application to self:

For those who believe you came to Christ as an adult:

Is there a distinct difference
between my yearnings
before my profession of faith,
and after it?

For everyone, including those who came to Christ as children:

Do I have a constant yearning
to please God?

Applying change of nature to others,
and to ministries is difficult to do directly.
About the best that you can do
is look for evidence of a changed nature,
which reduces to looking for the presence
of the other signs.

Nevertheless,
there are some questions that might
be helpful.

For application to others:

In what ways
do the actions and attitudes of the person
differ from the actions and attitudes
of professed unbelievers?

For application to ministries:

Is it possible to tell that something is different
after only a few minutes of participation
in an activity of the ministry?

For Christ-like spirit & tender spirit,
application to self:

Do what extent

do I make it my practice
to treat others
as I would have them treat me?

Do I treat those
who mistreat me
with kindness?

For application to others:

How does the person
treat those with whom he disagrees?

How quickly does the person
take offense at the actions of others towards him?

For application to ministries:

How does the ministry
respond to criticism,
especially in regard to its treatment
of its critics?

Does the ministry
emphasize to its members
the importance of treating others
with kindness?

Next week,
we'll look at the tenth sign:
beautiful symmetry and proportion.

Please read that section in the book,
if you have it,
to prepare for the class.

Not only will we apply
this sign to
ourselves,
others,
and ministries,
we'll also apply it to
theology,
and we'll see how failures in the past
to understand the importance of this sign
have contributed greatly to
the prevalence
of certain errors today.

I'll close by reading from the "Miscellanies"
#397. Conversion. Spiritual Knowledge.

... [W]e learn that the prime alteration
that is made in conversion,

that which is first and the foundation of all,
is the alteration of the temper
and disposition and spirit of the mind.
For what is done in conversion
is nothing but conferring the Spirit of God,
which dwells in the soul
and becomes there a principle of life and action.
'Tis this is the new nature,
and the divine nature;
and the nature of the soul being thus changed,
it admits divine light.

Divine things now appear excellent,
beautiful,
glorious,
which did not
when the soul was of another spirit.

Indeed, the first act of the Spirit of God,
or the first that this divine temper exerts itself in,
is in spiritual understanding
or in the sense of the mind,
its perception of glory and excellency, etc.
— in the ideas it has of divine things.

And this is before any proper acts of the will.

Indeed, the inclination of the soul,
as immediately exercised
in that sense of the mind
which is called spiritual understanding
or the intellect's love,
is not only mere presence of ideas in the mind,
but it is the mind's sense of their excellency,
glory,
and delightfulness.

By this sense or taste of the mind,
especially if it be lively,
the mind distinguishes truth from falsehood.