

“Conviction of Certainty”
(1 Peter 1:1-9)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered that gracious work of the Spirit that shows we have truly been born again: He opens our eyes to see the beauty of holiness.
 - a. This is something the unbeliever can't see and so knows nothing about.
 - (i) One who is blind can't see or understand the beauty of a rainbow.
 - (ii) One who is deaf can't hear or understand the beauty of a melody or harmony.
 - (iii) One who can't taste knows nothing of the pleasure food brings.
 - (iv) In the same way, one who doesn't have the Spirit of God united savingly in his heart knows nothing of the transcendent beauty of God, at least that aspect of God that makes Him truly lovely: His holiness.
 - b. This is what the older theologians called gracious, saving or spiritual knowledge.
 - (i) It doesn't have to do merely with knowing facts about God or His Gospel.
 - (ii) It has to do with seeing the glory of God revealed in those facts.
2. We also saw how this spiritual knowledge is tied to the leading of the Spirit.
 - a. With it, we can know what God's will is in a given situation intuitively.
 - (i) You don't need to think about whether or not something is beautiful before you immediately recognize it as such.
 - (ii) You don't have to think about whether something smells good or bad to know that it does: it simply strikes your nose that way immediately.
 - (iii) In the same way, if you have the Spirit's saving work in your soul giving you the ability to see the beauty of holiness, you can immediately recognize whether something is good or bad.
 - b. Of course, you can certainly think about what makes that thing good or bad after this immediate reaction, but you don't need to think about it to know that it is.
 - c. This is one of the main ways the Spirit of God leads His people and imparts wisdom, the other being a careful study of God's Word further to train your senses to distinguish between good and evil.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we're going to deal with one further mark of grace that flows from the work of the Spirit in opening our eyes to see the beauty of holiness, and that is in giving us a conviction of the reality of the things of the Lord.
2. We'll consider two things:
 - a. First, that spiritual knowledge will give you this conviction of the truth.

- b. Second, how it does this.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, spiritual knowledge gives you the conviction that the invisible things of the Lord are very real.
 - 1. This is strongly implied in our text this evening.
 - a. “And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:8-9).
 - b. Edwards writes, “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.”
 - c. This conviction is so strong that it will make a difference in the way you live:
 - (i) You see them as real.
 - (ii) You don’t just know that the Bible teaches that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the World, you believe it, and see Him to be real.
 - (iii) You don’t just know that the Bible teaches about heaven and the things the Lord has prepared for those who believe, but you see these things to be real, so real they have a strong influence on your life.
 - 2. Certainly, the saints had this kind of conviction.
 - a. When Jesus asked His disciples, who they thought He was, Peter answered, “‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus 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’” (Matt. 16-17). Peter knew, through the Spirit, that Jesus was the Christ without a doubt.
 - b. When Jesus asked His disciples whether they would leave as the Jews who had tasted of the bread and fish, but were offended when He told them they had to eat His flesh and blood, Peter responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). Again, he knew.
 - c. Why was Paul convinced the Gospel was the power of God to salvation so that he was not ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16)?
 - d. Why was he ready to suffer imprisonment and death for the Gospel at Jerusalem (Acts 21:13)?
 - e. It was because he had something the unbeliever doesn’t have: a clear view and conviction of the truth of these things.
 - f. This conviction is different from those who seem to believe the truth, continue for a while and then fall away.
 - g. The stony ground hearers fell away from the Lord ultimately because they didn’t see God’s glory and love Him: they merely wanted a ticket out of hell.

- B. Spiritual knowledge gives you this conviction, but second, how does it do this?
1. First, this conviction must be based on evidence.
 - a. You can't believe merely because you were taught to believe or persuaded to believe, either at home or at church.
 - (i) There are many Muslims who believe the Islamic religion today because their fathers, neighbors and nation believe it's true.
 - (ii) There are also many who believe themselves to be Christians today for the same reason, who have the same kind of faith, even though what they believe happens to be true.
 - (iii) They don't believe it because it's true, but because they were taught to believe it.
 - b. On the other hand, even if your conviction of the truth of Christianity is based on evidence, this doesn't mean you are a true believer.
 - (i) Your faith must not only be reasonable, it must also be spiritual.
 - (ii) Judas believed that Jesus was the Messiah from the things he saw and heard and experienced himself through seeing and performing miracles.
 - (iii) There were many people who saw the miracles and believed that Jesus was the Christ (John 2:23-25).
 - (iv) Simon the magician himself believed (Acts 8:13, 23).
 - (v) But they weren't saved: They held their conviction only for a short while then fell away.
 2. There is such a thing as a spiritual conviction of the truth of the Gospel.
 - a. Again, it's different from what natural men have.
 - (i) What Jesus said of His disciples is not true of all men, "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me" (John 17:7-8); "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father" (16:27).
 - (ii) Not everyone believes Jesus is the Son of God with such conviction that they are not afraid to confess Him, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15).
 - b. This kind of spiritual conviction comes only from spiritual knowledge.
 - (i) What you see of the glory and beauty of the Lord by the work of the Spirit brings a conviction of their truth that the unbeliever doesn't have.
 - (a) "At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows

who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*” (Luke 10:21-22).

- (b) “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus 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” (Matt. 16:16-17).
- (ii) The mind is spiritually convinced of the truth of the Gospel when that conviction arises from seeing its divine excellency and glory. Edwards writes, “2 Cor. 4:3-6, ‘But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that *believe* not, lest the light of the *glorious gospel* of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the *light of the knowledge of the glory of God*, in the face of Jesus Christ.’ Together with the last verse of the foregoing chapter, which introduces this, ‘but we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the *glory of the Lord*, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.’ Nothing can be more evident, than that a saving belief of the gospel is here spoken of, by the apostle, as arising from the mind’s being enlightened to behold the divine glory of the things it exhibits. This view or sense of the divine glory, and unparalleled beauty of the things exhibited to us in the gospel, has a tendency to convince the mind of their divinity . . .”
- (iii) When you see this glory, it convinces you of its truth, especially when you see it strongly and clearly. Again Edwards writes, “He that truly sees the divine transcendent, supreme glory of those things which are divine, does as it were know their divinity *intuitively*: he not only *argues* that they are divine, but he *sees* that they are divine; he sees that in them wherein divinity chiefly consists, for in this glory which is so vastly and inexpressibly distinguished from the glory of artificial things, and all other glory, does mainly consist the true notion of divinity. God is God, and distinguished from all other beings, and exalted above them, chiefly by his divine beauty, which is infinitely diverse from all other beauty. — They therefore that see the stamp of this glory in divine things, they see divinity in them, they see God in them, and see them to be divine; because they see that in them wherein the truest idea of divinity does consist. Thus a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel; not that he judges the doctrines of the gospel to be from God, without any argument or deduction at all; but it is without any long chain of arguments; the argument is but one, and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory.”
- (iv) These spiritual truths carry their own evidence that is able immediately convince your heart of their truth, just as when the disciples saw Jesus,

they were convinced that He was the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

- (v) You see what the Bible says to be true because you experience these truths for yourself. Unless you experience them, you won't be fully convinced and willing to give up your life and all you have to possess it. Edwards writes, "Unless men may come to a reasonable, solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel, by the internal evidences of it, in the way that has been spoken, viz., by a sight of its glory; it is impossible that those who are illiterate, and unacquainted with history, should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all. They may without this, see a great deal of probability of it; it may be reasonable for them to give much credit to what learned men and historians tell them; and they may tell them so much, that it may look very probable and rational to them, that the Christian religion is true; and so much that they would be very unreasonable not to entertain this opinion. But to have a conviction, so clear, and evident, and assuring, as to be sufficient to induce them, with boldness to sell all, confidently and fearlessly to run the venture of the loss of all things, and of enduring the most exquisite and long continued torments, and to trample the world under foot, and count all things but dung for Christ, the evidence they can have from history, cannot be sufficient."
- c. One of the implications of this is that you don't need to be the best apologist in the world to be useful in bringing the lost to faith in Christ.
- (i) Edwards continues, "But the gospel was not given only for learned men. There are at least nineteen in twenty, if not ninety-nine in a hundred, of those for whom the Scriptures were written, that are not capable of any certain or effectual conviction of the divine authority of the Scriptures, by such arguments as learned men make use of. If men who have been brought up in Heathenism, must wait for a clear and certain conviction of the truth of Christianity, until they have learning and acquaintance with the histories of politer nations, enough to see clearly the force of such kind of arguments; it will make the evidence of the gospel to then immensely cumbersome, and will render the propagation of the gospel among them infinitely difficult. Miserable is the condition of the Houssatunnuck Indians, and others, who have lately manifested a desire to be instructed in Christianity, if they can come at no evidence of the truth of Christianity, sufficient to induce them to sell all for Christ, in any other way but this."
 - (ii) "It is unreasonable to suppose, that God has provided for his people no more than *probable* evidence of the truth of the gospel. He has with great care, abundantly provided, and given them, the most convicting, assuring, satisfying and manifold evidence of his faithfulness in the covenant of grace; and as David says, *made a covenant, ordered in all things and sure.*"
 - (iii) "It is reasonable to suppose, that God would give the greatest evidence of those things which are greatest, and the truth of which is of greatest

importance to us: and that we therefore, if we are wise, and act rationally, shall have the greatest desire of having full, undoubting and perfect assurance of. But it is certain, that such an assurance is not to be attained by the greater part of them who live under the gospel, by arguments fetched from ancient traditions, histories, and monuments.”

- (iv) “And if we come to fact and experience, there is not the least reason to suppose, that one in a hundred of those who have been sincere Christians, and have had a heart to sell all for Christ, have come by their conviction of the truth of the gospel this way. If we read over the histories of the many thousands that died martyrs for Christ, since the beginning of the Reformation, and have cheerfully undergone extreme tortures in a confidence of the truth of the gospel, and consider their circumstances and advantages; how few of them were there, that we can reasonably suppose, ever came by their assured persuasion this way; or indeed for whom it was possible, reasonably to receive so full and strong an assurance, from such arguments! Many of them were weak women and children, and the greater part of them illiterate persons, many of whom had been brought up in popish ignorance and darkness, and were but newly come out of it, and lived and died in times wherein those arguments for the truth of Christianity, from antiquity and history had been but very imperfectly handled. And indeed, it is but very lately that these arguments have been set in a clear and convincing light, even by learned men themselves: and since it has been done, there never were fewer thorough believers among those who have been educated in the true religion; infidelity never prevailed so much, in any age, as in this, wherein these arguments are handled to the greatest advantage.”
- (v) “The gospel of the blessed God does not go abroad a begging for its evidence, so much as some think; it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself. Though great use may be made of external arguments, they are not to be neglected, but highly prized and valued; for they may be greatly serviceable to awaken unbelievers, and bring them to serious consideration, and to confirm the faith of true saints; yea, they may be in some respect subservient *to the begetting* of a saving faith in men. Though what was said before remains true, that there is no spiritual conviction of the judgment, but what arises from an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things . . .”
- (vi) Have you seen the glory of God in the face of Christ and are you so convinced of the truth of the Gospel to sell all for Him? If not, then you need yet to see Him.
- (vii) Let’s not forget that there are degrees of this spiritual sight and conviction. But there is no true and saving faith without some degree of it.
- (viii) Let’s bow in silent prayer and let the Lord show us what we need.