

“How to Know We’re Sincere”  
(2 Corinthians 4:6)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We’ve been considering Solomon Stoddard’s view on the marks of grace: how we can know whether we’re saved or not.
  - a. The theme of his work is really quite simple: a godly man may know that he is converted by the fact that he loves God.
  - b. The ungodly, or the hypocrite, on the other hand, may know he is unconverted by the fact that he doesn’t love Him.
2. That being settled, the real question becomes, How can we know whether or not we love God?
  - a. The answer to this is also quite simple: We can know by what we do.
    - (i) The gracious man, repents and believes in Christ out of love to God.
    - (ii) The unconverted man does not because he does not love God.
  - b. The problem comes in knowing whether or not we’re sincere in our faith and repentance.
    - (i) The unconverted can do everything the believer does.
      - (a) He can make a profession of faith.
      - (b) He can obey the commandments and abstain from sin.
      - (c) Outwardly, he can look the same.
      - (d) Inwardly, however, his motivation is different: he hates God.
      - (e) The problem is we cannot see the heart.
    - (ii) The believer, on the other hand, can commit nearly every sin the unbeliever can.
      - (a) David committed adultery and murder.
      - (b) Peter denied Christ.
      - (c) The disciples forsook Him in His hour of trial.
      - (d) Outwardly, believers can look the same as unbelievers.
      - (e) But inwardly, there’s a struggle going on: the believer really loves God and wants to please Him.
      - (f) But again, we can’t see the heart; often we can’t know our own hearts well enough to know what’s going on.
    - (iii) What does distinguish the unbeliever from the believer is the fact that he practices sin.
      - (a) Just because we commit sin doesn’t mean we’re unconverted.
      - (b) But, if we practice sin, even one sin – without hating it, without fighting against it – we are unconverted.

- (c) As John writes, “The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:8-9).
- (d) If we practice sin, we can know that we don’t love God.

## B. Preview.

1. This evening, we’ll consider how we can know that we do love Him, and it again has to do with the fruit of our lives.
2. What are the fruits we should be looking for? There are many different kinds, but Stoddard gives us four general things to consider:
  - a. The evidence of spiritual enlightenment that enables us to see the glory of God.
  - b. Second, the evidence that Christ and the things of Christianity are real to us.
  - c. Third, the evidence of the work of the Spirit that draws love for God from our hearts.
  - d. Fourth, the evidence of all the gracious fruits that follow from that love.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, there is the evidence of spiritual enlightening that gives us the ability to see the glory and beauty of God (*Nature*, 31).
  1. The unbeliever is characterized by darkness in Scripture.
    - a. His heart is darkened, his eyes are blind, he walks in darkness and loves it.
    - b. Because he is darkness, he hates the light – which signifies truth and righteousness – especially where that light is its purest – in God.
  2. But the Spirit changes this.
    - a. He opens our eyes – this is spiritual enlightenment. Then we see the beauty of God’s glory (34).
    - b. We saw it before, but it was unwelcome; now it becomes desirable.
    - c. Now our hearts draw us to Christ, because of who He is – the holy and spotless Lamb of God – because we see God’s great love in giving Him, because we see in Him all we need, and because we see God’s faithfulness to His promises to save all who will come to Him (38-41).
    - d. When we were unconverted, we had no desire for God or anything connected with Him. But when the Spirit opened our eyes spiritually to see the glory and beauty of these things, we believed and embraced God’s Word, and Christ became precious to us (40).
    - e. This new spiritual sight of God is one way we can know of our love for Him: when what we see of Him becomes beautiful and our heart is drawn out to Him.
- B. Second, when this happens, Christ and the things of Christianity also became more real to us.
  1. Stoddard believes that when we were unconverted, our natural reason could not convince us that the things the Bible talked about were true.

- a. We know from Scripture that we had evidence, irrefutable evidence; we might be able to deny it, but we were without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20).
  - b. We could not accept it because our hearts would not allow us to do so (v. 18).
  - c. Because of this deception of the heart and mind, we didn't want to believe it was true and convinced ourselves that it wasn't.
- 2. But once our reason was enlightened by the Spirit, our "sanctified reason sees them to be sure" (63). We are convinced.
  - a. The truth can and does affect a natural man through the common work of the Spirit, but those who are savingly illuminated are convinced of it (66).
  - b. Stoddard further writes, "The soul [of the saint] is assured of the truth of the gospel by the Spirit of God. Before, the soul was full of doubts and questions; but, when he closes with Christ, he is assured of the truth of the gospel. The reason that men do not entertain the truth of the gospel is because they are not assured of the truth of it. When they believe the truth of it, then it works effectually upon them. 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 'Ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.' When the soul first closes with Christ, it is satisfied in the truth of the gospel" (*Safety*, 219).
- C. Third, the saving work of the Spirit then draws our hearts out in love to God.
  - 1. Stoddard writes, "The illumination of carnal men does not draw forth any gracious exercises. . . . But those spiritual discoveries that God makes always draw forth the exercise of grace. . . . When God breaks into the heart by light, the heart is drawn forth in love, faith, and repentance" (*Nature*, 67-68).
  - 2. Seeing the glory and beauty of these things, and being convinced that they are real and not fairytales, our hearts begin to move us towards Him, where before we were moving away.
- D. Finally, we see that all the fruits of grace then follow: beginning with faith.
  - 1. Stoddard writes, "Believing in Christ is the first act of conversion" (13) and, "this act of faith includes all other graces" (16).
    - a. First, we receive Christ as He is offered to us in the Gospel – once regeneration takes place, and we have that love within, we can't do otherwise, because we don't want to do otherwise – think of something good you have a strong desire for: you don't choose to want it, you simply do; the same is true of Christ, once the desire is put in our hearts by God.
    - b. At the same time, all the other graces follow:
      - (i) There is "a believing of the Word of God" (16), all of God's Word, as Westminster also tells us, "By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and

resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace” (WCF 14.2).

- (ii) There is “love to God and Christ” (17) with all the heart, mind, soul and strength.
  - (iii) “A spirit of repentance” (17), a turning away from all sin.
  - (iv) “Humility” (18), being humbled over our past sins and having the desire to be a humble servant of the Lord.
  - (v) “Self denial” (18), the laying aside of sinful things, even things not sinful, to run the race with endurance (Heb. 12:1).
  - (vi) “A spirit of thankfulness” (19), in everything, for every blessing He gives.
  - (vii) “A spirit of universal obedience” (20).
    - (a) Stoddard writes, “Where there is a holy life, there is a walking in all God’s commands. There may be a reformation of some particular sins where there is not a holy life; any one way of sin makes a man’s life unholy. If men allow any way of disobedience, the life is not holy. In a holy life, there is an abstaining from every known sin and the practice of every known duty. Luke 1:6, ‘They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless’” (*Righteousness*, 251).
    - (b) The unconverted may “live from time to time in obedience unto God,” but if there is no pattern of obedience, they are hypocrites, and even that obedience they render is from another principle than grace (Ibid., 256-9).
  - (viii) A spirit of universal repentance: There will be a desire to put off everything contrary to God’s holiness (*Nature*, 21), to put to death all our remaining sin. Stoddard writes, “By putting grace into the heart, God destroys the power of sin” (Ibid.).
  - (ix) Finally, a spirit of absolute dependence on the Lord: we will see our absolute need of the Lord to provide everything that has to do with life and godliness: “This is the spirit of those that have believed – they live a life of dependence upon Christ for everything, even for outward things, for life, health, peace, liberty, provision, protection, for private and public blessings; but in special, for sanctification, acceptance, and eternal salvation” (*Righteousness*, 233).
2. Stoddard adds a very important reminder:
- a. “The grace given in conversion is imperfect. The grace given in conversion, like other qualities admits of innumerable degrees, and is very imperfect in the best of the people of God” (*Nature*, 77).
  - b. This is to remind us that as we study what grace is like in its perfect state, that doesn’t mean this will be our experience.
    - (i) We should have something of all these things, though not perfectly.
    - (ii) In other words, we shouldn’t be looking for perfection to know we’re saved, but we should see something of all these things in our lives and the desire in our hearts to be perfect, even though we won’t be able to reach perfection on this side of glory. Amen.