

The Experience That Counts!

by
Jonathan Edwards

Highlighted for Leadership Training

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Introduction

Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian, wrote this treatise concerning religious affections against the background of the 1st Great Awakening. Edwards himself played a prominent part in the awakening as pastor of a Congregational church in North Hampton, Massachusetts.

Edwards' desire to distinguish between true and false religious experience arose out of his pastoral concern in the context of revival. He preached a series of sermons on 1st Peter chapter 1, verse 8, dealing with this subject in 1742. The transcripts of these sermons were revised for publication in 1746.

Edwards had to fight on 2 fronts. On one hand, he had to argue against those who dismissed the entire revival as mindless hysteria. On the other hand, he had to argue against those who seem to think everything that happened in the revival was of God, no matter how strange, wild or unbalanced it was.

Edwards confronted a series of fundamental questions. *What does it mean to be a Christian? What is conversion? How do we know that people have been converted? How far should we go in testing an apparent conversion to see if it is real? What place does assurance of salvation have in Christian experience? Which religious experiences should we encourage and which should we discourage? How can we test the sincerity and reality of our own faith? What are the signs of religious hypocrisy and delusion?*

These questions and answers are profoundly relevant to us today. Feelings and experiences have perhaps never been emphasized so strongly and sought so eagerly as they are among Christians in our generation. The results have too often been unbalanced, harmful spiritually. Reacting against this, others have retreated into a hard, cold, dry orthodoxy, looking with deep suspicion upon anything emotional.

A note on affections and emotions:

The word "affections" appears in the original title of Edwards' book and throughout its pages. To us today, affection means a certain kind of love. In Edward's day, however, it had a far wider meaning. So this book has decided to modernize the word as "emotions," which seems the best modern equivalent of what Edwards meant by "affections."

"Emotions" for Edwards were movements of the will. **Edwards defines emotions as the more vivid, powerful and lively movements of the will. Emotion always involves both the intellect and the will.** It simply means a strong response of the will to what the intellect sees, whether that response is *desire, hope, joy, love, zeal, pity, grief, fear, anger or hatred.*

Edwards called these strong responses of the will "affections." This book will call them emotions. Consequently, wherever the word affection does appear in this book, it has its modern meaning of love.

Preface

The most crucial question for the human race is this, what are the distinguishing marks of the people who enjoy God's favor, those who are on their way to heaven?

It is hard to give an objective answer to such a controversial question. *It will probably hurt many of my readers to find that I have criticized so many religious emotions and experiences in this book. Others may be angry about the things that I have defended and approved in this book.* It is not easy to support what is good about religious revivals, and at the same time, to see and reject what is bad in them. **Yet, we have to do both, if we want Christ's kingdom to prosper.**

So much good and so much bad are mixed up in the church! It is as mysterious as the mixture of so much good and bad in an individual Christian. It is no new thing for false religion to flourish at a time of revival, or for hypocrites to appear among true believers. See Jeremiah 3:10 and Jeremiah 4: 3-4. Also read John chapter 5:35. It was the same again when Christ himself preached. **Many admired Christ for a time, but few were faithful to the end.** The same was true again when the apostles preached, we know from the heresies and divisions that troubled churches during the apostle's lifetime.

This mixture of false religion with true religion has been Satan's greatest weapon against the cause of Christ. This is why we must learn to distinguish between true and false religion, between emotions and experiences which really come from salvation, and imitations which are outwardly attractive and plausible, but false.

A failure to distinguish produces terrible consequences. Here are some examples:

- Many offered to God a false worship which he rejects.
- Satan deceives many about the state of their souls.
- **Satan deludes people into thinking they are holy, when they really are hypocrites.**
- Satan spoils the faith of true believers. He mixes deformities and corruptions into it, and so causes believers to grow cold in their spiritual emotions. He also confuses others with great difficulties and temptations.
- Enemies of Christianity are encouraged, when they see the church corrupted and distracted.
- *Men commit sin under the illusion that they are serving God.* So they sin without restraint.
- False teaching deceives even the friends of Christianity into doing the work of its enemies.
They destroy Christianity far more effectively than outright enemies can do, under the illusion that they are advancing it.
- Satan divides Christ's people & sets them against each other. Christianity degenerates into empty disputes. The quarreling parties rush off into opposing extremes, until the right path becomes almost totally neglected.
- **When false religion passes for true religion, the minds of Christians become unsettled. Many doubt whether there is anything real in Christianity at all.** Heresy, unbelief and atheism begin to spread as a result.

It is vital that we do all we can to understand true religion. My plan is to contribute what I can in this book to an understanding of true religion. I aim to show the nature and signs of the Holy Spirit's work in converting sinners. I will also try to show how we can distinguish the Spirit's work from everything which is not a true experience of salvation.

- **Jonathan Edwards**

PART ONE:

The nature of emotions and their importance to Christianity

1. Opening remarks about emotions.

Peter says of the relationship between Christians and Christ, “though you have not seen him, you love him, believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy, and you are filled with his glory.” 1 Peter 1:8.

The believers to whom Peter wrote were suffering persecution. Here he observes how their Christianity affected them during these persecutions. He mentions two clear signs that their Christianity was genuine:

A. Love for Christ: These Christians seemed crazy to their unbelieving neighbors. Unbelievers saw nothing which could inspire them to suffer the way that Christians were willing to suffer. Indeed, the Christians loved someone whom they could not see! They loved Jesus Christ, because they saw him spiritually.

B. Joy in Christ: Though their outward sufferings were terrible, their inward spiritual joys were greater than their sufferings. These joys strengthened them and enabled them to suffer cheerfully. **Peter notes 2 things about this joy. Its origin came from faith.** And secondly, he describes the nature of this joy: as inexpressible and full of glory. **It was inexpressible joy, because it was so different from the joys of the world. It was pure and heavenly joy.** No words could describe its excellence and sweetness.

Being full of glory, this joy filled the minds of Christians with a glorious brightness. It did not corrupt the mind, as many worldly joys do, but gave it glory and dignity. The suffering Christians were sharing in the joy of heaven. Peter is teaching us: true religion consists mainly in holy emotions.

Peter singles out the spiritual emotions of love and joy when he describes the experience of these Christians. Their sufferings were purifying their faith, causing it to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. See verse 7. Thus, they were in a spiritually healthy condition, & Peter highlights their love & joy as evidences of their spiritual health.

2. What are emotions?

What exactly do you mean when you speak about emotions?.

***Emotions are the more lively and intense actions
of the soul's inclination and will.***

God has given the human soul 2 main powers. The 1st is "understanding," by which we examine and judge things. The 2nd power enables us to look at things, not as indifferent spectators, but as liking or disliking them, pleased or displeased by them, uprooting or rejecting them. We sometimes call this 2nd power our inclination. In its relationship to our decisions, we usually call it the will.

When the mind exercises its inclination or will, then we often called the mind our hearts.

Human beings act by their wills in 2 ways. 1st, we've moved towards the things we see, by liking them. 2nd, we can turn away from the things we see, and reject them. These acts of the will differ greatly in degree. Some inclinations move us only slightly beyond total apathy. Other degrees of movement are so great that we act upon them in an energetic, and deliberate way. *We will call the more energetic and intense acts of the will our emotions.*

Our will and our emotions are not 2 different things. Emotions differ from causal acts of choice only in their energy.

In every act of will for or towards something, we are inclined to that thing; and if this inclination is strong, we call it "desire." In every act of will in which we approve of something there is a degree of pleasure; and if the pleasure is great, we call it "joy or delight." And if our will disapproves of something, and if the displeasure is great, we call it "grief or sorrow."

Every act of will is concerned either with approving or liking, or else with disapproving and rejecting. So our emotions are of 2 kinds. **There are emotions which carry us towards what we see, clinging to it or seeking it. These emotions include: love, desire, hope, joy, gratitude, and pleasure. By contrast, emotions that turn us away include: hatred, fear, anger, & grief.**

3. True religion consists mainly in emotions.

True religion consists mainly in emotions. The religion which God requires does not consist in the weak, dull and lifeless wishes, raising us only a little above apathy. **In his Word, God greatly insists that we be serious, spiritually energetic, and our hearts vigorously involved in Christianity.** *We must be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, see Romans 12:11.* What does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God to walk in all his ways and to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **see Deuteronomy 10:12.** See also **Deuteronomy chapter 6:4-5.**

This lively, vigorous involvement of the heart in true religion is the result of a spiritual circumcision or regeneration, to which the promises of life belong. Again see Deuteronomy chapter 30:6.

If we are not serious in our Christianity, & our wills are not vigorously active, we are nothing. Our hearts do not respond suitably unless energetically and powerfully. In nothing is the exertion of our wills so necessary as in spiritual things; in nothing is lukewarmness so hateful. True religion is powerful. This is why Scripture calls true religion, "the power of godliness." See 2nd Timothy chapter 3:5. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of powerful, holy emotion in real Christians. Scripture says that God has given us a spirit of power and of love and of sound mind, see 2nd Timothy chapter 1:7. When we receive the Holy Spirit, Scripture says that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire, see Matthew chapter 3:11. This fire represents the holy emotions which the Spirit reproduces, so that our hearts burn within us, see Luke 24:32.

Sometimes Scripture makes a comparison between our relationship to spiritual things and those activities which men vigorously perform. Some examples include, running, see 1st Corinthians 9:24; wrestling, see Ephesians chapter 6:12; agonizing for a prize, see Revelation 2:10; fighting with strong enemies, 1st Peter chapter 5:8-9; and full scale war, see 1st Timothy chapter 1:18. Grace, of course, has degrees and there are weak Christians whose acts of the will toward spiritual things are comparatively feeble.

Every true Christian's emotions towards God are stronger than his natural or sinful emotions.

***Every genuine disciple of Christ loves him above all else.
(Luke 14:26)***

God who created us has not only given us emotions, but has made them very much the cause of our actions. **We do not make decisions or act unless our emotions influence us.** This applies in both secular and spiritual affairs. It is why many people hear God's Word telling them about infinitely important things, and yet it makes no change in their attitude or behavior. The reason is simple; what they hear does not affect them. It does not touch their emotions. Indeed, I boldly claim that **no spiritual truth ever changed a person's attitude or conduct, unless it aroused his or her emotions.** No sooner ever hungered for salvation, no Christian ever awoke from spiritual coldness, unless the true affected his or her heart.

4. The different emotions.

Scripture everywhere places true religion mainly in our emotions, in fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal.

Fear.

Scripture makes godly fear a chief part of true religion. A name which Scripture often gives to believers is, the "fearers of God," or those who fear the Lord. This is why true godliness is commonly called the fear of God.

Hope.

Hope in God and in his promises serve as important parts of true religion. Paul mentions hope as one of the 3 great things which make up true religion, see 1st Corinthians chapter 13:13. **Hope is the helmet of the Christian soldier, see 1Thessalonians chapter 5:8.** Hope is the anchor of the soul, see Hebrews chapter 6:9 & 19. ***Sometimes godly fear and hope are joined together as defining the character of the true believer, see Psalm 33:18.***

Love.

Scripture places true religion very much in the emotion of love: love for God, love for Jesus Christ, love for God's people, and love for all mankind. Observe though, Proverbs 8:13 tells us, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Accordingly, Scripture calls upon believers to prove their sincerity by this: **Psalm 97:10: "you who love the Lord, hate evil!"**

Desire.

Scripture often mentions holy desire, expressed in longings, hungerings and thirstings after God and holiness, as an important part of true religion. Reference the following passages: Isaiah 26:8; Psalm 63:1-2; Matthew 5:6.

Joy.

Scripture speaks of joy as a great part of true religion. See Ps. 97:12; Philippians 4:4 & Gal. 5:22.

Sorrow.

Spiritual sorrow and brokenness of heart are a great part of true religion. See Matthew 5:4 and Psalm 51:17, along with Isaiah 57:15.

Gratitude.

Gratitude, especially as expressed in the praise of God appears throughout the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms; so much so that no particular reference is required.

Mercy.

Scripture frequently speaks of compassion or mercy as an essential thing in true religion. **Jesus taught that mercy is one of the most important demands of God's law:** blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, see Matthew 5:7; Matthew 23:23 and Colossians 3:12.

Zeal.

Scripture says that spiritual zeal is an essential part of true religion. Christ had the production of this quality in mind when he told us in Titus chapter 2:14: *“Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous for good works.”*

I have mentioned just a few texts out of a great number, which placed true religion very much in our emotions. If anyone wishes to dispute this, he or she must throw away the Bible and find some other standard by which to judge the nature of true religion.

5. True religion is summed up in love.

Love is the chief of all emotions. This is what Jesus taught when someone asked him what the greatest commandment was:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the 1st and great commandment. The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”
(Matthew 22:37-40)

The apostle Paul taught the same thing in Romans 13:10; 1st Timothy 1:5; 1 Corinthians 13 and more. This clearly proves the importance of love.

Again, this clearly proves that true religion lies mainly in our emotions. For **love is not just one of the emotions, but the chief of them and the fountain of the others.** It is from love that hatred arises, hatred of the things which are contrary to what we love. **From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love of God, will arise the other spiritual emotions:** a hatred of sin; a fear of displeasing God; gratitude to God for his goodness; joy in God; sorrow when we feel God's absence; hope for a future enjoyment of God; zeal for God's glory. In the same way, love for our fellow man will produce every other right feeling towards them.

6. David, Paul, John, and Christ as examples of holy emotion.

The religion of the most outstanding saints in Scripture was a religion of holy emotions.

First, consider King David, that “*man after God's own heart,*” who has left us a lively portrait of his religion in the **Psalms**. Those holy songs are nothing else but **the outpourings of devout and holy emotion**. In them we see a humble and fervent love of God, admiration of God's glorious perfections and wonderful works, as well as desires and thirstings of the soul towards the Lord. We see love-for and delight-in God's people, great delight in God's Word and ordinances, sorrow for David's sins and the sins of others, and fervent zeal for God and against God's enemies.

Next, let us consider the apostle Paul. A man with a highly developed emotional life, in Paul's case, he knew an ardent love. **Paul was compelled by love and holy living to go forward in his ministry through all difficulties and sufferings**, see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. **Paul's letters are full of an overflowing love for Christians**. He calls them his “beloved” ones, see 2nd Corinthians 12:19; Philippians 4:1 and 2 Timothy 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8; Romans 1:11; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; and 2 Timothy 1:4.

Paul often expresses the emotions of joy... he speaks of his rejoicing with great joy in Philippians 4:10 and 2 Corinthians 7:13, and he goes so far as to say that he is “always rejoicing: in 2 Corinthians 6:10. There are many other scriptures underscoring these theological and practical truths: see also 2 Corinthians 1:12, Colossians 1:24.

Note that Paul's spiritual zeal was evident in everything he did. Clearly, Paul's religion was a religion of emotion.

The apostle John was a man of the same type. **John was a person with a profound emotional life. He addresses the Christians to whom he wrote in an extremely touching and tender way. His letters breathe nothing but the most fervent love**, made of sweet and holy infection affection.

Greater than all these, Jesus Christ himself had a remarkably tender heart, and he expressed his righteousness very much in holy emotions. **He had the greatest vigor and strength of love for God and man that ever existed.** It was this holy love that triumphed in Gethsemane. **Read Matthew 26:38** if you have any question.

We read of Jesus' great zeal for God in John 2:17. We read of his great grief for the sins of men in Mark 3:5. He even broke into tears when he considered the sin and misery of the ungodly people of Jerusalem, see Luke 19:41-42. To get greater insight into Jesus' pity and compassion, see Matthew 9:36, and 14:14, and 15:32, and 18:34; plus Mark 6:34; and Luke 7:13. **How tender his heart was when Lazarus died! How affectionate were his parting words to his disciples the evening before he was crucified!** Of all the speeches that ever came from the lips of men, the words of Christ in chapters 13 to 16 of John's Gospel are the most affectionate & affecting.

7. Emotions in heaven.

Doubtless there is true religion in heaven. According to the pictures of heaven Scripture gives us, its religion consists mainly in love and joy, expressed in fervent and exalted praises. **Grace here is the dawn of glory hereafter.** Reading chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians proves this point.

God prepares us for heaven by conforming us to it here.

8. Emotions and our religious duties.

We see the importance of spiritual emotions from the duties God has appointed as expressions of worship.

Prayer.

In prayer we declare God's perfections, his Majesty, holiness, goodness & all sufficiency, & our own emptiness and unworthiness, our needs and desires. We declared these things to move & affect our own hearts in this way we prepare ourselves to receive the blessings we seek.

Praise.

The duty of singing praises to God seems to have no other purpose than to excite and express spiritual emotions. **When divine truth is expressed in poetry and song, it has more of a tendency to impress itself on us and move our emotions.**

Baptism and the Lord's supper.

God has not only ordained that we should hear the gospel from his Word, he has also ordained that we should see the gospel displayed in visible symbols, so that it will affect us more.

Preaching.

One great reason why God has appointed preaching in the church is to impress divine truths on our hearts and emotions. It is not enough that we should have good commentaries and books of theology, they do not have the same power as preaching does to move our wills.

God uses the energy of the spoken word to apply his truth to our hearts in a more lively way.

9. Emotions and hardness of heart.

Another proof that true religion lies very much in emotions is that Scripture often calls sin the “hardness of the heart.” Read Mark 3:5 and Psalm 95:7-10 as well as Isaiah 63:17. 2 Chronicles 36:13 is another strong example. Along with such texts, consider also that Scripture describes conversion as taking away the stony heart and giving a heart of flesh. Reading Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 makes this point unmistakably clear.

A hard heart is a heart which is not easy to move or impress with spiritual emotions. It is a stone - a cold, insensitive, “unfeeling” towards God and holiness.

10. What lessons about emotion can we learn from all this?

A. We learn from this how great an error it is to reject all spiritual emotions as having nothing solid in them. **Because the lively emotions of many seem so soon to vanish completely, people begin to despise all spiritual emotions. The other extreme is to look upon all lively religious emotions as signs of true conversion. If people simply appeared to be very warm and are full of spiritual talk, others conclude that they must be godly Christians.**

Satan tries to push us from one extreme to the other. He sows his own weeds among the wheat. He mingles false emotions the work of God spirit. In this way he deludes and eternally ruins many, confuses true believers, and corrupts Christianity. However, **when the evil consequences of these false emotions become apparent, Satan changes his tragedy.** Now he tries to persuade people that all spiritual emotions are worthless. He seeks to shut out everything spiritual from our hearts, and to turn Christianity into a lifeless formality.

The right way is neither to reject all emotions, nor to approve all, but to distinguish between them. We should approve some, and reject others. We must separate between the wheat and the weeds.

B. If true religion lies much in our emotions, we should set a high value on what produces those emotions in us. Desire the sort of books and preaching and praying and singing that will deeply affect your heart.

Do not misunderstand me. These things can sometimes stir up the emotions of weak and ignorant people without doing any good to their souls. This is because **it is possible for these things to excite emotions which are not spiritual and holy emotions. There has got to be a clear presentation and a right understanding of spiritual truth in our religious books, preaching, prayers, and songs.** As long as this is the case, the more they move our emotions, the better they are.

C. We have great cause for shame that spiritual realities do not affect us more.

God has given us emotions for the same purpose as all our other powers, to serve man's chief end, his relationship with God. *Yet how common it is for human emotions to be taken up with anything except spiritual realities! In matters of people's worldly interests, their outward delights, their reputation, and their natural relations, in these things, their desires are eager, their love is warm, and their zeal is ardent.*

Yet how insensitive and unmoved most people are about spiritual things! Here their love is cold, their desires are sluggish, and their gratitude is small. Can any Christian entertain the thought that the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ should not stir & excite human emotions?

The cross shows Christ's love for sinners in the most touching way. We see the dreadful effect which our sins had on Jesus, as he suffered for us.

***How great is our shame to be,
that these things do not affect us more!***

**PART TWO:
Things which do NOT prove
that our emotions come from a true experience of salvation.**

Religious emotions can be natural or spiritual in origin. They can exist in people who do not accept Jesus Christ as Lord. Religious emotions can exist in people who are not saved, as well as in those who are truly converted. Now, I am going to examine experiences which proved neither that our emotions are spiritual, nor that they are unspiritual in nature. In other words, I want us to look at experiences which tell us nothing about whether our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual.

**1. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if they are strong and lively.**

Some people condemn all strong emotions. Yet if, as I proved, true religion lies very much in our emotions, it follows that a great amount of true religion in a person's life will produce real emotions.

Is there any Christian who can say, I am quite satisfied with the amount of love and gratitude I feel towards God, and the amount of hatred and sorrow I feel towards sin?

1 Peter 1:8 speaks of strong and lively emotions. Indeed, **Scripture often requires us to feel strongly.** In the 1st and greatest commandment, Scripture strains language to express the degree in which we should love God, read Mark 12:30. Scripture also commands us to feel high degrees of joy, read Psalm 68:3. The Bible also frequently calls on us to feel high degrees of gratitude for God's mercies.

The most outstanding believers whose experiences Scripture records often express lively emotions. Read the following passages from the book of Psalms: Chapter 119:7, chapter 42:1, chapter 38:4, again 119:136, and chapter 63:3,4 and 7.

This proves that *the existence of religious emotions in a very high degree is not necessarily a sign of fanaticism.* **We are in serious error if we condemn people as fanatics just because their emotions are strong and lively.**

On the other hand, the fact that our emotions are strong and lively does not prove that they are truly spiritual in nature. Scripture shows us that people can become very excited about religion without being truly saved. Exodus chapter 15:1-21 offer a good Old Testament example.

In the New Testament, **the crowds in Jerusalem professed great admiration for Christ, and praised him highly. Yet soon the same crowds would cry out: *Crucify him! Crucify him!***

All Orthodox theologians agree that feelings about Christianity can be very lively without any genuine experience of salvation.

2. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they produce great effect on the body.

All our emotions have an effect on our bodies. This is because of the intimate union between body and soul, flesh and spirit. However, **strong emotions can be either neutral or spiritual.** The presence of ***bodily effects cannot prove whether the experience is simply natural or truly spiritual.***

Psalm 84:2 tells us: *“my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. This verse offers a plane distinction between heart and flesh.”* Psalm 63:1 says: *“my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you.”* In both cases, **the Bible gives us clear distinction between our heart and flesh, as well as our soul and flesh.** Additional reading on this topic can be found in Habakkuk 3:16; Psalm 119:20; Daniel 10:8; Revelation 1:17; and a multitude of others.

Bodily effects do not prove that the emotions which produced those effects are spiritual. Strong emotions which are not truly spiritual in origin can produce great bodily effects. Therefore we cannot point to mere bodily effects as the proved that our experience is from God.

Sidebar note: Edwards was concerned to defend the integrity of the revival against the charge that such bodily phenomena proved it was all near hysteria.

3. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if they produce a great warmth & readiness to talk about Christianity

If an abundance of religious talk seems warm and serious this especially convinces many people that it must be a sign of conversion.

However, warm speech & religious dialog are not necessarily a signs of conversion. **Scripture nowhere says that spiritual talk is a sure sign of conversion.** Such talk may be just the religion of the tongue, which Scripture symbolizes by the leaves of the tree. No tree should be without leaves, but leaves do not prove that the tree is a good tree. *Fruit proves the tree!*

People who talk freely and warmly about spiritual things are obviously excited about Christianity, but I have already shown that religious excitement can exist without a true experience of salvation. **Some people are over full of talk about their experiences. This is a bad sign. A tree that is overfull of leaves does not usually bear much fruit. False emotions, if strong, are quicker to declare themselves than true emotions.** It is the nature of false religion to love displaying itself, like the Pharisees.

4. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual... if we did not produce them by our own efforts.

Many condemn all emotions. They ridicule the idea that we can actually feel the Holy Spirit working powerfully within us. The Spirit, they say, always works in a silent, unseen way. They insist that he only works through the truths of the Bible and through our own efforts, for example prayer. It is also true that the Spirit works in many different ways. Sometimes he does work silently and unseen.

***It is the Spirit of the Almighty God who produces salvation
in our hearts. Why, then, should we not feel
that it is the Spirit working within us?***

***We are wrong, then, to call people delusional just because they claim
they have felt the Holy Spirit working within them.***

Scripture describes the salvation of a sinner as a rebirth in John chapter 3, as a resurrection from the dead in Ephesians 2:5, and as a new creation in 2nd Corinthians 5:17. These descriptions have one thing in common. They all describe events which the person experiencing them could not have produced. God alone is the author of a sinner's regeneration, spiritual resurrection, and new creation. **Make no mistake, salvation does not have its origin in ourselves.**

The Holy Spirit, according to the New Testament, does not convert people in a silent, secret, gradual way. He usually converts people with a glorious display of supernatural power. Today people often regard such experiences as a sign of delusion!

On the other hand, we must not think that our emotions are truly spiritual just because we did not produce them on our own efforts.

***An experience which does not come from ourselves
might have come from a false spirit.***

There are many false spirits who disguise themselves as Angels of light, see 2 Corinthians 11:14. ***They imitate the spirit of God with great skill and power.*** The trances and raptures of some religious fanatics are not from God, but from Satan.

We can also have experiences which come from God's Spirit but which do not save us, or do not prove that we are saved. Read Hebrews 6:4-8.

Religious experiences can also happen without the influence of a good or evil spirit. We do not produce dreams by our own efforts when we are asleep. Imaginative people can have religious feelings and impressions which are like dreams even though they are awake.

**5. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if they come to us accompanied by a Bible verse.**

True spiritual emotions can come to us accompanied by a Bible verse. *Such emotions are spiritual if they arise out of a spiritual understanding of the truth which that verse teaches.*

On the other hand, **it is no proof that any emotion is spiritual just because it arises from a Bible verse, which comes suddenly and powerfully into the mind.** *Some people think this sort of experience is a sign that they are saved.*

People persuade themselves that their emotions and experiences are from God, and that they are truly saved. The Bible does not tell us to test the reality of our faith in this way. ***The Bible does not say that we are saved if Bible verses come suddenly into our minds.*** In the Bible alone, is our infallible rule of religious belief, practice, and authority.

Many people think that an experience must be from God if it involves God's Word, the Bible. All we can argue is that an experience must be right if the Bible tells us we should have that experience. ***An experience is not right just because it involved the Bible.***

How do we know it is not Satan who is putting these Bible verses into our minds? *Satan used the Bible to try to tempt and deceive Jesus himself, read Matthew 4:6. Why should Satan not even use positive and encouraging verses to delude us? **The devil loves to produce false hopes and joys in the unsaved. He wants to persuade them that they are Christians before they have truly repented.** Why should he not misuse encouraging Bible verses to produce this false assurance?* After all, **false teachers pervert the Scriptures in this way and deceive people.** **And false teachers are Satan's servants.** Satan can do what his servants do.

**6. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if there seems to be love in them.**

Love is the essence of true religion. So if people who claim to be Christians seem to be loving, this is often taken as proof that their Christianity must be real. The argument is that love must come from God, because Satan cannot love.

Unfortunately, love can be imitated.

In fact, *the more excellent anything is, the more imitations there will be.* **Nobody makes imitation rock's and pebbles. Yet there are all too many imitation diamonds and rubies.** It is the same with Christian virtues. Satan tries more than anything else to imitate Christian love and humility, since these qualities reveal the beauty of Christian character in a special way.

Scripture teaches that people can seem to have Christian love without being saved. Read Matthew 24:12-13. This shows that if we have a love which does not endure to the end, but grows cold, we will not be saved. **Many Jews who praised Jesus so highly and followed him day and night without food, drink or sleep later grew cold and did not endure.**

Regardless of their temporary emotions, their lack of lasting love proved it to be a false love for Christ. In Ephesians 6:24 Paul says, *"grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."* He believed there were others who had a love for Christ which was not sincere.

Sadly, *Christian love for other Christians can also be imitated.* Read Galatians 4:11 & 15.

**7. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if we experience many kinds of them.**

There are imitations of all kinds of spiritual emotions. Scripture is full of examples: 1st Samuel 15 versus 24 and 25, 26 verse 21; 2nd Kings chapter 17 versus 32 and 33 as well as chapter 5 verse 15; Matthew 13 verse 20; Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3 verse 6; Romans 10 verse 2; Luke 18 versus 9 through 14; and John 5 versus 39 and 40 represent just a handful of the many.

Unsaved people can have all sorts of false emotions that resemble true spiritual emotions.

For instance, the crowds who accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem seem full of admiration and love for Jesus. They expressed great gratitude. They expressed strong desires for God's kingdom to come, and had great hopes in Jesus. They were full of joy and zeal in their praises of Jesus and their eagerness to accompany him. ***Yet how few of these people were Jesus' true disciples!***

The existence of many false emotions at the same time in the same person is no mystery. ***When one strong emotion arises, it naturally produces other emotions.***

Picture someone whom Satan comes to and deceives into thinking that God has forgiven their sins. Let us suppose Satan deceives that person through a vision of a man with a beautiful smiling face and open arms. The sender believes this is a vision of Christ. Or perhaps Satan deludes him with a voice saying, "Son, your sins are forgiven..." which the sinner thinks is the voice of God. So the sinner believes he is saved, even though he has no spiritual understanding of the gospel.

What a variety of emotions would come into this sinner's mind! He would be full of love for his imaginary savior, whom he thinks has saved him from hell. He would be full of gratitude for his imaginary salvation. He would feel an overwhelming joy. His emotions would move him to talk to others about his experience. It would be easy for him to be humble before his imaginary God. He would deny himself and zealously promote his imaginary religion, while the warmth of his emotions lasted.

***The person we have depicted experiencing these emotions
is NOT a Christian!***

His emotions have come from the natural workings of his own mind, not the saving work of God spirit.

**8. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if comfort and joy seem to follow in a certain order.**

Many people reject the idea that spiritual emotions and experiences should happen in a certain order. They do not think conviction of sin, fear of God's judgment, and a sense of spiritual helplessness need to come before the experience of conversion. So they are skeptical when a person's religious experiences do happen in this order. They are particularly suspicious if the person's feelings, 1st of conviction, then of assurance, are very strong and lively.

However, **it is surely reasonable to think that God gives sinners a sense of their need of salvation before he saves them. If sinners are under condemnation outside of Christ, is it not reasonable that God should make them aware of this?**

Scripture teaches that God does make people aware of their helplessness before he sets them free. In Exodus 2 verse 23, *before God saved the Israelites at the Red Sea, he made them see how helpless they were.* The Red Sea was in front of them, and the Egyptian army behind them! God showed them that they could do nothing to help themselves, and that he alone could rescue them.

Read Exodus chapter 14; Matthew chapter 8 verses 24 through 26; 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 verses 8 and 9; Hebrews 6 verse 18; acts 2 verse 37 and acts 16 verse 29 and 30.

Throughout Scripture we see great and humbling convictions of sin and helplessness, and fear of God's judgment, such should come before the experience of conversion.

On the other hand, it is no proof that assurance of salvation is right just because it follows the fear of hell. The fear of hell, and conviction of sin in the conscience, are 2 different things. This conviction can “produce” the fear of hell, but it is not the “same” as the fear of hell!

In fact, **the fear of hell can exist without a true conviction of sin** in the conscience. Vivid impressions of hell can come from Satan. Satan can terrify people with visions of damnation because he wants to convince them they can never be saved. Such visions can also come from a man's own imagination.

There is also a false conviction of sin. Some people do not see sin as something that offends God's holiness. Such people are not troubled in a spiritual way about sin.

Even if the Holy Spirit himself produces conviction of sin and fear of hell, this will not necessarily lead to salvation.

There is also such a thing as a false humility before God. King Saul represents a good example of such false humility.

In a similar way, sinners can humble themselves before God, even though they really hate him. Their apparent submission to God hides a secret attempt to bargain with him.

However, what if we experience the fear of hell at the same time as a conviction of sin which humbles us before God? What if this then leads to joy in the gospel? Does this not prove that our experiences are spiritually genuine? **No! The order of our experiences proves nothing.** If Satan can imitate the spiritual experiences which lead to conversion, he can imitate the order of them to.

Satan can produce a false conviction of sin, a false fear of hell, and a false humility before God. Why should he not then produce a false joy in the gospel, as we have seen that he can do?

Scripture alone is our infallible guide to religious belief and practice. It does not say that we are saved if we have had experiences in a certain order. God's grace, according to God's Word, is the only means of promised salvation. Stated differently, God's Word promises salvation only to those who receive God's grace and bring forth its fruits. The Bible never promises salvation to those who feel great conviction of sin and fear of hell, followed by great joy and assurance. *Our trust is in God's Word, not our own ideas.*

I should point out that people can become Christians without passing through a clear order of experiences. It is true that they need to feel a conviction of sin, of helplessness, and of God's justice in condemning sinners. Even so, there is no need for God's Spirit to produce these things as distinct and separate experiences, one after another. *The conversion of a sinner is sometimes like a confused chaos, and other Christians do not know how to interpret it!*

The Holy Spirit often works in a very mysterious way in bringing people to Christ. See John 3:8.

**9. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if they cause us to spend much time in the outward duties
of Christian worship.**

For example, Anna a prophetess did not depart from the Temple, but served God with fasting and prayer night and day, (Luke 2:37). Similarly, Daniel had a time of private prayer 3 times every day, (Daniel 6:10). The experience of salvation also causes believers to delight in singing praises to God: "praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" - Psalm 147:1. Salvation causes believers to love to hear God's word preached, (Isaiah 52:7). And salvation makes believers love to worship with other believers, (Psalm 84:1-4).

On the other hand, **it is no sure sign of conversion if we are enthusiastic in the outward duties of true religion.** *Such behavior exists in many who are not saved.* See Isaiah chapter 1 verse 12 through 15. During the time of the prophet Ezekiel, many celebrated hearing him preach God's Word. However, God condemned them. Read Chapter 33:31-32.

**10. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if they cause us to praise God with our mouths.**

Many seem to think that if people are enthusiastic in praising God this is a sure sign of conversion.

No Christian will condemn another person for enthusiasm and praising God. Nevertheless, such enthusiasm is not a sure sign of conversion. *Satan can imitate all kinds of spiritual emotions.* Scripture gives us many examples of unsaved people praising God and Christ enthusiastically.

Israel sang God's praises at the Red Sea, but they were soon worshipping the golden calf. Isaiah says that those who hated God's true servants were crying out: "Let the Lord be glorified,;" in Isaiah 66:5. Thus, it follows that enthusiasm in praising God is not a reliable sign of conversion.

**11. It does not prove that our emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
if they produce assurance of salvation.**

Some people think that we must be diluted if we have assurance of our salvation. By contrast, Protestants have always believed that assurance is a proper feeling for any Christian. **Scripture contains many examples of God's people feeling sure of their relationship with God.**

It is clear from Scripture that all Christians, not just apostles and prophets, can and should have this assurance. Peter commands us to make certain about God's calling and choice of us in 2nd Peter 1:10. He goes on to say that the believer should obtain this certainty in 2nd Peter 1:5-8. Paul speaks about **a lack of assurance as something highly unsuitable in a Christian, in 2nd Corinthians 13:5.** John gives us many tests by which we can be sure we are saved: see 1st John 2 verse 3; 1st John 3 verse 14; and 1st John 4 verse 13.

It is very unreasonable, then, to criticize a Christian just because he or she feels a deep assurance of his own or her own salvation.

On the other hand, it is no proof that a person is saved just because he or she feels sure they are saved. A person may have the greatest and liveliest assurance of salvation, and yet still be unsaved. He may seem to be very close to God, and use very bold and affectionate language. He may say things like, I know with complete certainty that God is my Father. I know that I will go to heaven. ***He may be so sure of himself that he no longer sees any reason to test the reality of his faith. He may despise anyone who suggests that he might not really be saved. However, none of this proves he is a true Christian.***

In fact, this sort of boastful assurance, which is always making a display of itself, does not look like real Christian assurance at all. It seems more like the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14.

True Christian assurance is humble, not boastful.

The hearts of unsaved people are blind, deceitful and self-centered. *It is not surprising that they have such high opinions of themselves. If Satan works on their sinful desires with false comforts and joys, it is not surprising that unconverted people should have a strong but false assurance of salvation.*

When an unsaved person has this false assurance, he or she is free from those things which can cause a real Christian to doubt his or her own salvation:

A. The false Christian has no sense of the seriousness of his eternal destiny, and the infinite importance of building on a right foundation. By contrast, the true believer is humble and cautious; he feels what a great thing it will be to stand before God, the infinitely holy Judge.

B. A false Christian is not aware of how blind and deceitful his heart is. His false assurance produces a great confidence in his own opinions. The true believer, however, has a modest view of his own understanding.

C. Satan does not attack false assurance areas, he attacks the assurance of the true Christian, because true assurance produces greater holiness. On the other hand, ***Satan is the best friend of false assurance, because it places the false Christian completely in his power.***

D. False assurance blinds a person to the true extent of his sinfulness. The false Christian seems clean and bright in his own eyes. The true Christian, by contrast, knows his own heart; he feels he is a great sinner. He often wonders whether a truly saved person could possibly be as simple as he knows himself to be.

There are 2 kinds of false Christians. Those who think they are Christians because of their mere external practice of morality and religion. These people often do not understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Then there are those whose assurance comes from false religious experiences/works.

*It is this last kind of false Christian that **represents the worst example**. Their assurance often comes from supposed revelations. They call these revelations the witness of the Spirit. It is no wonder such a supposed revelation about their salvation produces the highest degree of assurance.*

In fact, great confidence is a distinguishing mark of people who seek guidance from imaginary revelations. They despise all argument and rational inquiry which might make them doubt their experience.

It is easy to understand the confidence of these people. It pleases their self-love to think God has told them in a special way that they are his dear children. And it increases their false assurance if these revelations come with vivid emotions, which they misinterpret as the Holy Spirit working within them.

Now I would give a word of warning to preachers: you sometimes preach true doctrines in a wrong way, which encourages a false assurance! You tell people to live by faith, not by sight, to trust God in the dark, and to trust in Christ, not in our feelings. These are true doctrines if rightly understood.

True faith means coming out of spiritual darkness and death into Christ's light and life.
To tell someone to trust in Christ although his heart remains dark and dead, is to tell him to have faith in Christ even though he remains an unbeliever!

A faith lacking spiritual light is not the faith of the children of light, but the delusion of the children of darkness.

(John 6:40; 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 4:6)

To trust God in the dark means trusting his Word when our circumstances are dark and painful. This is totally different from trusting God without any spiritual light or experience, with dead in worldly hearts!

Those who insist on living by faith without spiritual experience have absurd ideas of faith. What they really mean by faith is simply believing that they are saved. That is why they think it is sinful to doubt their salvation, no matter how dead and worldly they are.

The Bible says that faith brings sinners into salvation. So faith cannot mean believing we are already saved. If faith means believing we are saved, faith would mean believing that we believe! It is desirable that we should doubt our salvation if our hearts feel totally dark and worldly. This is according to God's plan. When love for God decreases, anxiety for ourselves increases.

In times of spiritual deadness, we need such anxiety to restrain us from sin, and to spur us to fresh spiritual effort.

We contradict God's plan if we tell people to keep up their assurance when their hearts are worldly and dead. **To encourage assurance in those whose hearts are worldly and dead, is to encourage false assurance.**

When our experiences and emotions become more important to us than God, and when we think that God himself should admire us for our wonderful emotions, then we are in danger! In fact, then we are in a worse spiritual condition than an immoral atheist!

**12. We cannot know that someone's emotions are spiritual or unspiritual...
just because they give a moving account of them.**

No Christian can infallibly distinguish between true and false believers. *A Christian can see into his own heart, but he cannot see into anyone else's.* All we can see in others is the outward appearance. **Scripture clearly teaches that we can never infallibly judge a person's heart** from his outward signs. Hear the words of 1 Samuel 16:7. *“The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

When a person seems outwardly, as far as we can tell, to be a Christian, it is our duty to accept him as a brother in Christ. Yet even the wisest Christian can be deceived.

This should not surprise us. *Satan can imitate all kinds of spiritual emotions, love for God and love for Christ as well as other Christians, sorrow for sin, submission to God, humility, gratitude, joy, and zeal. All these imitated emotions can appear at the same time in the same person. That person might also have a good knowledge of Christian doctrine, a likable personality, and a powerful ability to express himself in Christian language.*

***How great the resemblance can be, then,
between a false and true Christian!***

Only God can infallibly tell the difference. We are arrogant if we pretend we can.

Believers love to see sinners converted. It touches our hearts when someone professes conversion. Still, that does not prove that his conversion is genuine.

Scripture tells us to judge by a person's life, not his talk. *Claims are like blossoms in the spring. There are many blossoms on the trees, and they all look beautiful, but soon many of these blossoms will wither, dropped off and rot. For a time, they look as beautiful as the other blossoms, and smelled very sweet. We cannot distinguish the blossoms which will bear fruit from those which will wither and die. It is only afterwards that we can tell the difference, when some have fallen and others bear fruit.*

It is the same in spiritual things. We must judge by the fruit, not by the beautiful colors and scents of the blossom. Talk proves nothing. We must judge by the fruit, by the lasting results in people's lives. *The way professing Christians live is the best proof we can have of their sincerity and salvation.*

Some argue as follows: if I feel a strong Christian love for a fellow Christian, the Holy Spirit must have produced this love. But the Spirit cannot make mistakes. If the Spirit produces this love, he must know that the other person is a true Christian.

This argument is completely false. God has commanded us to love as our fellow Christians all who make a credible profession of faith in Christ. So a strong Christian love for another professing Christian only proves that God's Spirit is enabling us to obey God's command. It does not prove that the professing Christian is a true Christian.

Not only is this idea absent from the Bible, it contradicts the Bible. God's word teaches that no one can be 100% certain about the condition of another person's heart towards God, read Romans 2:29 and 1 Corinthians 4:5.

Surely, we are being very arrogant if we think we can judge men's hearts, when the apostles did not think that they could!

PART THREE.

The distinguishing signs of TRUE spiritual emotions.

Opening remarks.

I want to lay down the following guidelines

A. I am not going to help anybody to distinguish infallibly between true and false spiritual emotions in other people. Christ has only given us enough tools for our own safety, to prevent us from being led astray. He has also given us many rules in Scripture which church leaders will find useful in counseling church members about their spiritual state. However, God has not enabled us to make an infallible separation between the sheep and the goats.

B. **I am not going to help Christians who have grown spiritually cold to obtain assurance of their salvation.** It is not God's plan that such Christians should have assurance. We gain assurance, not so much by self-examination, as by action. **The apostle Peter tells us to make our calling and election sure, not in the 1st place by self-examination, but by adding to our faith moral excellence,** see 2 Peter 1:5-7.

C. No one should expect to find rules which will convict hypocrites diluted by imaginary revelations and false emotions, who have become fixed in a false assurance. **Such hypocrites are so sure of their own wisdom, and so blinded by a subtle self-righteousness disguising itself as humility, that they often seem beyond repentance.** However, these rules will be useful to convict real Christians who have mixed false emotions with true.

The distinguishing signs of true spiritual emotions.

1. True spiritual emotions arise from spiritual, supernatural, & divine influences on the heart.

The New Testament calls Christians spiritual people. It contrasts them with people who are merely natural. See 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. The New Testament also makes a contrast between spiritual and carnal people, see 1st Corinthians 3:1. The terms natural and carnal in these verses mean I'm sanctified, vs. lacking the spirit. **"Spiritual," then, means sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

We read of a spiritual mind in Romans 8:6 -7 and spiritual understanding in Colossians 1:9, as well as "spiritual blessings" in Ephesians 1:3.

A quality is not spiritual just because it exists in a man's spirit as opposed to his body. **Scripture calls some qualities carnal or fleshly, even though they exist in a man's spirit.** For example, Paul describes pride, self righteousness, and trusting in one's own wisdom as fleshly in Colossians 2:18; even though all these qualities exist in a man's spirit.

Christians are spiritual because they are born of God's Spirit and because the Spirit lives within them. Things are spiritual because of their relationship to the Holy Spirit, see 1 Corinthians 2:13.

God gives his Spirit to true Christians to live within them, and to influence their hearts as a source of life and action. Galatians 2:20 underscores this point and tells us that Christ, by his Spirit, not only is in them, but lives in them, and they live by his life. See also John 4:14. *The sap of the true vine does not flow into them as into a cup, but into living branches, where the sap becomes a resource of life, see John 15:5.* **Scripture, then, calls Christians spiritual, because God unites his Spirit to them in this way.**

The Spirit of God can and does influence natural man; see numbers 24 verse 2; 1st Samuel 10 verse 10; and Hebrews 6 verses 4-6. In these cases, however, God does not give his Spirit as a source of spiritual life. **When the Spirit of God only acts upon the soul, but does not become a source of spiritual life within the soul, that Soul has not become spiritual.**

The Holy Spirit within Christians produces results which are in harmony with the Spirit's own true nature.

Holiness is the nature of the Spirit of God; therefore Scripture calls him the Holy Spirit. ***Holiness is the beauty and sweetness of the divine nature, and is the essence of the Holy Spirit, as heat is the nature of fire.*** The Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of Christians as a fountain of life. The believer has fellowship with the Father and with the Son, by participating in the Holy Spirit. This is what Christ means in John 3:6, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The new nature which the Holy Spirit creates is the same in nature as the Spirit who created it; so Scripture calls it a spiritual nature.

It is only in true Christians that the spirit works in this way. Jude, verse 19, describes worldly minded men as not having the spirit. Paul tells us in Romans 8:9, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not Christ's. According to John, by this we know that we abide in him, and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit, 1st John 4:13. By contrast, Jesus taught that the unbelieving world has no acquaintance with the Holy Spirit.

The effects which the Holy Spirit produces in true Christians are different from anything men can produce by natural human powers. True spiritual emotions arise from supernatural influences.

It follows that Christians have a new inward perception or sensation in their minds, entirely different in its nature from anything they experienced before they were converted. It is a new spiritual sense for spiritual things. The Christian perceives something different from anything the natural man perceives. This is why Scripture often compares the Spirit's work of regeneration to the giving of a new sense: sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, etc. Scripture compares its bestowal to raising the dead and a new creation.

A light, a man, a cross, a throne, a voice... these imaginary ideas are not spiritual in nature. A natural man can have vivid ideas of shapes and colors and sounds. A mental image of Christ hanging on a cross is no better than what the unspiritual Jews had, who stood around the cross and saw Christ with their physical eyes. Think about it. Is a picture of Christ in a person's imagination any better than the idea of Christ which our Roman Catholic friends get from their idolatrous paintings and statues of him? And are the emotions which these imaginary ideas inspire any better than what ignorant people feel when they worship these paintings and statues?

These imaginary ideas are so far from being spiritual in nature, that Satan can very easily produce them. If he can suggest thoughts to men, he can also suggest images. **We know false prophets had dreams and visions from false spirits, the Bible is filled numerous examples.** *If Satan can, and he does, create in the mind these imaginary ideas, then they cannot be evidence that it is God at work.*

Even if God did produce these ideas in someone's mind, it would prove nothing about the person's salvation. A clear example from Scripture would be Balaam. God impressed a clear and vivid image on his mind of Jesus Christ. See numbers 24:16. **Balaam saw Christ in a vision, but he had no spiritual knowledge of Christ.** He was unsaved, despite this God-given image in his mind of the Savior.

Emotions arising out of ideas in the imagination are not spiritual.

Ideas in the imagination cannot produce spiritual emotions. Spiritual emotions can only arise from spiritual causes, **from the Holy Spirit giving our spiritual understanding of spiritual truth.** Still, it is not surprising that imaginary religious ideas often stir up natural emotions to a high degree. *What else should we expect, when the person who has these ideas believes they are divine revelations and signs of God's favor?* Of course, that person becomes excited!

This may be a good place to say something about the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit, that we are God's children per Romans 8:16. Many misunderstand this verse. They think the spiritual witness is an immediate revelation of the fact that they are God's adopted children. The word witness misleads these people into making such a mistake. By bearing witness or testifying, the New Testament often means presenting evidence from which anything may be proved true, see Hebrews 2:4; 1st John 5:8; and Acts 14:17.

The Holy Spirit gives us evidence that we are God's children, by dwelling in us, leading us, and inclining us to behave towards God as children of the Father.

So the witness of the Holy Spirit is not some spiritual whisper or immediate revelation. It is the holy effect of God's Spirit in the hearts of his believers, leading them to love God, hate sin, and pursue holiness. Again see Romans 8:13-16.

When Paul says that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit, he does not mean there are 2 separate independent witnesses. He means that we received by our spirit the witness of God's Spirit. Our spirit sees and declares the evidence of our adoption which the Holy Spirit produces in us. Our spirit is the part of us Scripture elsewhere calls the heart and the conscience... see 1st John 3 verse 19 through 21 and 2nd Corinthians 1 verse 12.

Terrible harm has resulted from thinking that the Holy Spirit's witness is a kind of inward voice, suggestion or declaration from God to a man, that he is loved, forgiven, elect, and so forth. How many lively but false emotions have arisen from this delusion! I fear that multitudes have gone to hell deceived because of this.... That is why I have dealt with it at such length.

2. The object of spiritual emotion is the loveliness of spiritual things, not our self interest.

The primary object of spiritual emotions is the excellence and beauty of spiritual things, not the relation they have to our self-interest. A person must love God before he will regard fellowship with God and God's glory as his own happiness.

Love for God which arises essentially out of self-love cannot be spiritual in nature.

Self-love is a purely natural principal. Nothing can be spiritual if it is merely the result of self-love. Christ speaks about this in Luke 6 1st 32: if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

The deepest cause of true love for God is the supreme loveliness of God's nature.

People whose love for God is based on God's usefulness to them are beginning at the wrong end. They are regarding God only from the viewpoint of their own self-interest. They are failing to appreciate the infinite glory of God's nature, which is the source of all goodness and all loveliness.

Natural self-love can produce many emotions towards God and Christ, where there is no appreciation of the beauty and glory of the divine nature.

***Men may love a God of their own imaginations,
when they have no love at all for the One true God!***

Again, self-love can produce a love for God through a lack of conviction of sin. **Some people have no sense of the vileness of sin, and no sense of God's infinite and holy opposition to sin.** They think God has no higher standards than they have! So they get on well with him and feel a sort of love for him, but they are loving an imaginary God, not the One true real God. Others *self-love produces a sort of love for God simply because of the material blessings they have received from his providence.* **There is nothing spiritual in this either!**

Others feel a vivid love for God because they believe strongly that God loves them. If you ask these people whether God is lovely and excellent in himself, they might well say yes. However, they allow God to be lovely in himself, only because he has forgiven and accepted them, loves them so much, and has promised to take them to heaven.

***Anything is lovely to a selfish person...
if it advances his or her self-interest.***

True spiritual love for God arises in Christians in a quite different way. Real Christians do not 1st see that God loves them, and later on find out that he is lovely. They 1st see that God is lovely, that Christ is excellent and glorious. Their hearts are 1st captivated by this view of God, and their love for God arises chiefly from this view.

**True love begins with God and loves him for his own sake...
Self-love begins with self, and loves God in the interest of self!**

There is such a thing as spiritual gratitude. True spiritual gratitude differs from your self interested gratitude in the following ways:

A. True gratitude to God for his blessings flows out of a love for God. The Christian has seen the glory of God, and it has captivated his heart. So his heart becomes tender. Our love for what God is prepares the way for our gratitude for what he does, see Psalm 116 verse 1.

B. In spiritual gratitude, God's goodness touches people's hearts, not just because it blesses them, but because God's goodness is part of the glory and beauty of his very nature. **Grace revealed in the work of redemption, and shining in the face of Christ, is infinitely glorious in itself.**

Some people might object to everything I have said by quoting 1 John 4:19: *"we love him because he 1st loved us."* They think this means that our knowledge of God's love for us is what 1st causes us to love God. I disagree. Our love for God is something God puts in our hearts, as a token of his love to us. **We love him, because he graciously inclines our hearts to love him.**

So God's love for us produces in us a love for God's moral perfection. We love God with a holy and spiritual love because he 1st loved us. This is the kind of love for God that 1st John 4:19 is talking about.

What I have said applies equally to a Christian's joy and his delight in God. **Spiritual delight in God arises chiefly from his beauty and perfection, not from the blessing he gives us.** Of course the Christian rejoices that Christ is his personal savior. Still, this is not the deepest cause of his joy.

How different it is with false Christians! When they hear of God's love in sending his son, Christ's love in dying for sinners, in the great blessings Christ has purchased and promised to his people, they may listen with great pleasure and feel highly elated. Yet, if you examine their joy, you will find they are rejoicing because these blessings are self-centered, all this exalts them. They can even delight in the doctrine of election, because it flatters their self-love to think they are heaven's favorites! Their joy is really a joy in themselves, not a joy in God.

In all the joys of false Christians, their eyes are on themselves. Their minds are occupied with their own experiences, not the glory of God or the beauty of Christ.

Instead of rejoicing in Christ's beauty and fullness, they rejoice in their wonderful experiences. **They are great talkers about themselves. The true Christian, when he feels spiritually warm and lively, loves to speak of God and Christ in the glorious truths of the gospel.** False Christians are full of talk about themselves, the wonderful experiences they have had, how sure they are that God loves them, how safe their souls are, how they know they will go to heaven, etc.

3. Spiritual emotions are based on the moral excellence of spiritual things.

What do I mean by the moral excellence of spiritual things? I am not referring to the mere outward performance of duties or the unspiritually motivated virtues an unbeliever can have, such as honesty, justice, generosity, etc. What I mean is the sort of excellence that belongs to God's moral character. I am talking about the holiness of God. **God's holiness is the sum total of his moral perfections, his righteousness, his truth, and his goodness. I am talking about the qualities of God's character.**

What a true Christian loves about spiritual things is their holiness. He or she loves God for the beauty of God's holiness.

It is holiness that makes qualities lovely.

It is from God's holiness that the rest of his being derives its beauty. We will not see anything beautiful in God's knowledge, power, eternity, or other attributes, unless we 1st see the pure loveliness of his Holiness.

Holiness is the beauty of all spiritual things.

The beauty of Christianity is that it is such a holy religion. The beauty of the Bible is the holiness of its teachings, see Psalm 19:7-10. The beauty of our Lord Jesus is the holiness of his person, the Holy One of God, Acts 3:14. The beauty of the gospel is that it is a holy gospel. The beauty of heaven is its perfect holiness, the holy city, per Revelation 21:10.

God gives Christians a new spiritual sense. This spiritual sense sees and feels and tastes. The beauty of holiness is something that unbelievers cannot see.

Scripture points to the beauty of holiness as the true object of a spiritual appetite.

Psalm 119 is one of the clearest passages in Scripture about the nature of true religion. It celebrates God's law, which reveals his Holiness. It declares the excellence of this law. The same is true in Psalm 19. See in particular verse 10 of Psalm 19.

*A spiritual person loves holy things for the same reason that an unspiritual person hates them, and **what an unspiritual person hates about holy things, is precisely their holiness!*** We see this in the saints and angels in heaven, read Isaiah 6:3. Then read Revelation 4:8, 15:4; and Psalm 99:5.

We can test our longings for heaven by this rule. Do we want to be there because of the holy beauty of God that shines there? Or **is our desire for heaven based on a mere craving for selfish happiness?**

4. Spiritual emotions arise out of spiritual understanding.

Spiritually emotions are not heat without light. They arise out of spiritual illumination. **The true Christian feels, because he sees and understands more of spiritual things** than he did before. See Philippians 1 verse 9. See also Colossians 3 verse 10.

I want to emphasize that there is a great difference between doctrinal knowledge and spiritual knowledge. **Doctrinal knowledge involves the intellect alone**, but spiritual knowledge is a sense of the heart by which we see the beauty of holiness in Christian doctrines. **Spiritual knowledge always involves the intellect in the heart together.**

We need to understand Scripture intellectually, and taste the holy beauty of that meaning with our hearts.

A person can have great knowledge of doctrines intellectually in his head, while he does not know spiritually these truths in his heart. *Doctrinal knowledge is like a person who has looked at and touched honey. Spiritual knowledge is like a person who has felt the sweet taste of honey on his lips.* He who has tasted knows much more about honey than a person who is only looked at it and touch it!

A person might know how to interpret without having a single rate of spiritual light in his soul. See 1st Corinthians 13 verse 2.

The spiritual meaning of Scripture is the divine sweetness of its truths, not the correct interpretation of its symbolic passages.

There is another common error about spiritual understanding I want to correct. Some people claim that God reveals his will to them by impressing the text of Scripture on their minds...

**Spiritual understanding sees what is actually in Scripture;
it does not make a new meaning for it!**

Making a new meaning for Scripture is equivalent to making a new Scripture; it is adding to God's Word, a practice God condemns. See Proverbs 30:6.

***The true spiritual meaning of Scripture is
the meaning it originally had when the Spirit first inspired it.***

My point is this: none of these experiences consists in a sense or taste of the beauty of God's holiness. And emotions are spiritual only when they arise out of the spiritual sight of the loveliness of God's holiness.

A large part of the false religion in the world is made up of these experiences and the false emotions they excite. These experiences captivate people, they think that these impressions, visions, and raptures are what Christianity is all about. So Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, deceives multitudes, and corrupts true religion.

***Church leaders must be constantly on their guard
against these delusions, especially during times of revival.***

**If our emotions rise out of these imaginary ideas, and not out of spiritual knowledge,
then our emotions are spiritually worthless.**

***Keep this distinction in mind:
Imaginary ideas can arise out of spiritual emotions,
but spiritual emotions can not arise out of imaginary ideas.***

Spiritual emotions can only arise out of spiritual knowledge...

5. Spiritual emotions bring a conviction of the reality of divine things.

The true Christian has a solid conviction of the truth of the gospel. He no longer hesitates between 2 opinions. **The gospel becomes settled and indisputable in his mind.** Read 1 Peter 1:8: *though you have not seen him, you love him, and though you do not see him now, you believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.*

Invisible things of the gospel influence his heart as powerful realities. God opens his eyes to see. These things are undoubted realities. Consequently, **they have a practical influence on his heart and his behavior.** (Matthew 16:15-17; John 17:6-8; 2 Timothy 1:12; & 1 John 4:16.)

There are many religious experiences which failed to bring this conviction. Many so-called revelations are moving but not convincing. They produce no lasting change in a person's attitude and conduct. There are people whose emotions blaze up for a while, then die away again, to spiritual behind no lasting conviction.

No doubt the truth a Christian believes is best, but if his belief in that truth comes only from his upbringing, then the belief itself is on the same level as that of people of other religions. The emotions that flow from such a belief are no better than the religious emotions found in other faiths. Furthermore, unspiritual emotions can arise even from a reasonable belief. The belief itself has to be spiritual as well as reasonable. The fact is that **rational arguments will sometimes convince a person intellectually that Christianity is true, and yet that person remains unsaved.** See Acts 8:13 and 23. **Intellectual belief can produce emotions, as in the demons who believe and tremble** (James 2:19). Even so, such emotions are not spiritual.

Spiritual conviction arises in a spiritual person.

Only when God's Spirit enlightens our minds to understand spiritual realities, can we have a spiritual conviction of that truth.

Many of the most important truths of the gospel depend on its spiritual beauty. Since the natural man cannot see this, it is little wonder he does not believe these truths. **Unless we see the beauty of holiness, we will be blind to the ugliness of sin.** In consequence, **we will not understand the way Scripture condemns sin.**

A person can only see and feel the desperate depravity of his own heart, if the Holy Spirit gives him the ability to taste the sweetness of holiness and the bitterness of sin.

It also shows that God is just in punishing sin so severely & that man cannot atone for his own sin.

We cannot obtain certainty from what scholars and historians tell us. Instead, God himself gives it to us. He opens our eyes to see the unspeakable beauty and divine glory that shines in his Gospel. We see God in it. This evidence is totally convincing. *The natural man may be blind to it, as an uncultured person is blind to the beauty of great poetry.*

I am not saying that historical evidence and other arguments for Christianity are useless. We should value them. They can confirm the faith of believers. What they cannot do is produce spiritual certainty.

6. Spiritual emotions always exist alongside spiritual humiliation.

Spiritual humiliation is the sense a Christian has of how insufficient and detestable he is, which leads him to abase himself and exalt God alone. There is another kind of humiliation, we may call legal humiliation. Legal humiliation is an experience which only unbelievers can have. The law of God works on their consciences, and makes them realize how sinful and helpless they are. However, they do not surrender themselves to God. They feel humbled as if by force, but they have no humility. They feel forced to admit that God is in the right, but they remain unconverted.

Spiritual humiliation, by contrast, springs out of the true Christians sense of the beauty and glory of God's holiness. It makes him feel how vile and contemptible he is in himself because of his sinfulness. It leads him to prostrate himself freely and gladly at God's feet, and to deny himself and renounces since.

Spiritual humiliation is the essence of true religion. Those who lack it are not genuine Christians, no matter how wonderful their experiences may be. Scripture is full of its testimony to the necessity of this humiliation. See Psalm 34 verse 18; Psalm 51 verse 17; Isaiah 66 verse 1 and 2; Matthew 5 verse 3; and the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18 verse 9 through 14.

Spiritual humiliation is the essence of Christian self-denial.

Spiritual humiliation consists in 2 parts. 1st, a man must deny his worldly inclinations, and forsake all sinful pleasures. 2nd, he must deny his natural self-righteousness and self-centeredness. *Many have done the 1st, without doing the 2nd.*

Of course, **proud hypocrites pretend to be humble**, but they generally make a bad job of it. Their humility usually consists in telling others how humble they are. They say all this, and yet expect others to regard them as outstanding examples. **If someone else said about a hypocrite what that hypocrite says about himself, how offended he would be!**

Spiritual pride can be very subtle, disguising itself as humility, but there are 2 signs which betray it:

A. The proud man compares himself with others and has a superior opinion of himself. He is eager for leadership among God's people, and wishes his opinion to be everyone's law. The truly humble man is the opposite of this. His humility makes him think others better than himself, see Philippians 2:3. He is more eager to listen than to speak, see James 1:19. He does not enjoy exercising power over others, but would rather follow their lead.

B. Another sign of spiritual pride is that the proud man tends to think very highly of his humility, whereas the truly humble man thinks of himself as very proud!

The proud man and the humble man have different views of themselves. The truly humble man never feels that he has sufficiently abased himself before God. He feels that however low he bends he could bend lower. He always feels that he is above his proper position before God. **It is his pride that appears to him to be great, not his humility.** It does not seem to him to be a great sign of his humility that he should lie in the dust at the feet of the cross... He thinks that is exactly where he belongs.

Dear reader, be careful, lest you become proud of your humility! Examine yourself...

Perhaps you are proud of the fact that you do not have a high opinion of your humility? You might be proud of admitting how proud you are!

7. Spiritual emotions always exist alongside a change of nature.

Spiritual sight has a transforming effect. See 2nd Corinthians 3:18. This transforming power comes only from God, from the Spirit of the Lord.

Scripture describes conversion in terms which imply or signify a change of nature: born again, new creatures, rising from the dead, renewed in the spirit, putting off the old man and putting on the new, becoming partakers of the divine nature, and so on.

It follows that **if there is no real and lasting change in people who think they are converted, their religion is worthless, whatever their experiences may be.** God can restrain unconverted people from sin, of course, but in conversion he turns the very heart in nature from sin to holiness. **The converted person becomes the enemy of sin.**

A person who says he has experienced conversion, but whose religious emotions soon die away, has his actions speak against him much louder than any religious experiences or claims may speak for him.

Though God's grace does not destroy the failings of temperament, it can correct them. If a man before his conversion was inclined by his natural temperament to lust, drunkenness or revenge, his **conversion will have a powerful effect on those evil inclinations.** He may still be in danger from those sins more than others, but they will not dominate his soul and his life as they did before. **They will no longer be part of his true character.** In fact, sincere repentance will make a person particularly hate and fear the sins of which he used to be most guilty.

8. True spiritual emotions differ from false ones, in promoting a Christ-like spirit of love, humility, peace, forgiveness and compassion.

All real Disciples of Christ have this spirit in them. It is their true and proper character. Christ makes this clear in the Sermon on the Mount, when he describes the character of those who truly are blessed. See Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. Paul also tells us that this spirit is the special character of God's elect in Colossians 3:12 and 13. James teaches the same in chapter 3:14-17.

Holiness and all its aspects belong to the Christian character.

Scripture particularly points to humility, gentleness, love, & forgiveness in the character of Christ. These qualities shine out in that title of Christ, “the Lamb.” **The great shepherd of the sheep is himself a lamb, and he calls believers his lambs.** If we follow the Lamb of God, we must imitate his gentleness and humility. Scripture holds out the same qualities under the symbol of the Dove. The dove is a symbol of gentleness, innocence, love, and peace. **True Christians will exhibit the same dove-like qualities of gentleness, peace, and love which characterized Jesus.**

There is indeed such a thing as Christian courage and boldness. **The most outstanding Christians are the greatest warriors, and have a brave and intrepid spirit. It is our duty as Christians to be vigorous and resolute in opposing those who try to overthrow Christ's kingdom and the cause of his gospel.** However, *many people totally misunderstand the nature of this Christian boldness.* It is not a brutal fierceness. Christian boldness consists of 2 things:

- A.** Suppressing the evil emotions of the mind;
- B.** Resolutely following and acting on the mind's good emotions, without being hindered by sinful fear or the hostility of enemies.

The courage and resolution of the Christian soldier appears most gloriously when he maintains a holy calmness and humility and love against all the storms, injuries, strange behavior, and disturbing events of an evil and unreasonable world. See Proverbs 16:32: he who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, then he who takes a city.

There is a false boldness for Christ which arises from pride. Men will often oppose those whom they call carnal, simply to gain the admiration of their own party. **True boldness for Christ, however, will rather offend all parties than offend Christ.** In fact, boldness for Christ appears more clearly when a man is ready to lose the admiration of his own party, then when he opposes enemies with his party behind him. The truly intrepid Christian is brave enough to confess a fault to his enemies, if conscious requires.

Scripture is quite clear about the absolute necessity of forgiveness, love, and mercy, as qualities in the character of every Christian.

A forgiving spirit is a readiness to forgive others the harm they do to us. Christ teaches that if we have this spirit, it is a sign that we are in a state of forgiveness ourselves. On the other hand, if we lack the spirit, God has not forgiven us. See Matthew 6 verse 12, 14, and 15.

Scripture is very plain that all true Christians have a loving spirit. Love is the quality that Scripture insists on more than any other, as a sign of genuine Christianity. Read John 15 verse 12; John 13 verse 35; 1st John 4 verse 7 and 8; and 1st Corinthians 13 verse one and 2.

Scripture is also clear that only those who have a merciful spirit are true Christians. Read Psalm 37 verse 1; Proverbs 14 verse 31; and James 2 verse 15 and 16.

Scripture knows nothing of true Christians who have a selfish, angry, quarrelsome spirit. No matter what a person's religious experiences may be, he has no right to think himself truly converted if his spirit is under the control of bitterness and spite. All real Christians are under the government of the Lamb-like, Dove-like Spirit of Jesus Christ.

9. **True spiritual emotions soften the heart, and exist alongside a Christian tenderness of spirit.**

***False emotions may seem to melt the heart for a time,
but in the end they harden it.***

People under the influence of false emotions eventually become less concerned about their sins - their past, present, and future sins. They take less notice of the warnings of God's Word. They become more careless about the state of their souls and the manner of their behavior. They become less discerning about what is sinful, and less afraid of the appearance of evil in what they say and do. Why? Because they have such a high opinion of themselves. They have had religious impressions and experiences. So they think they are safe. Now that they think they are no longer in danger of hell, they begin to forsake self-denial, and allow themselves to indulge in their sins.

Such people do not accept Christ as their Savior FROM sin. They trust in him as the savior OF their sins!

***They think Christ will allow them the quiet enjoyment of their sins...,
and protect them from God's displeasure.***

(Jude 4 & Ezekiel 33:13)

True spiritual emotions have the opposite effect. They turn a heart of stone more and more into a heart of flesh. They make the heart tender, like bruised flesh which is easily hurt. See Matthew 10 verse 42 and Chapter 18 verse 3, as well as John 13 verse 33. *The flesh of a little child is tender. So is the heart of a spiritually new born person. A little child easily feels sympathy and cannot bear to see others in distress. So it is with a Christian. Kindness easily wins the affection of a little child. So it is with a Christian. A little child easily becomes afraid at the appearance of outward evils. So a Christian becomes alarmed at the appearance of moral evil. When a little child meets anything threatening, it does not trust in its own strength, but runs to its parents. So a Christian is not self-confident in fighting spiritual enemies, but runs to Christ. A little child easily feels afraid of his elders, fears their anger and trembles at their threats. So a Christian fears offending God and trembles at God's chastening.*

***A true Christian resembles a little child. In spiritual things,
the tallest and strongest saint is the smallest and tenderest child.***

10. True spiritual emotions, unlike false ones, have a beautiful symmetry and balance.

The symmetry of the Christian's virtues is not perfect in this life. Even so, **true Christians never display grotesque lack of balance which marks the religion of hypocrites.**

In the true Christian, joy and comfort go along with godly sorrow in mourning for sin. See Matthew 5:4. The joy of salvation and a godly sorrow for sin go together in true religion. *On the other hand, many hypocrites rejoice without trembling.*

Hypocrites also display a grotesque lack of balance in their attitudes toward different persons and objects. For instance, **some make a great show of their love for God, but they are quarrelsome, envious, vindictive, and slanderous towards their fellow men. This is sheer hypocrisy!**

If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. See 1 John 4:20. On the other hand, there are people who seemed very warm and friendly and helpful to their fellow man, but they have no love for God!

A Christian's love must be universal!

Some people show love to others in respect of their bodily needs, but have no love for their souls. Others pretend a great love for men's souls, but have no compassion for their bodies. **True Christian love extends both to the souls and to the bodies of our neighbors.** This is what Christ's compassion was like, in Mark 6:34-44...

Christ's compassion for the people's souls moved him to teach them, and his compassion for their bodies moved him to feed them.

False religion is unbalanced and devoid of symmetry. A true Christian, feels more concerned over his own sins than the sins of other people.

Then there are those who show a zeal for spiritual leadership, but no corresponding zeal for prayer. Others feel warm religious emotions when in the company of Christians, but grow cold in solitude, etc.

11. True spiritual emotions produce a longing for deeper holiness, but false emotions rest satisfied in themselves.

The more a true Christian loves God, the more he desires to love him, and the more uneasy he is at his lack of love for him.

The more a true Christian hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and grieves that he still loves it so much.

True Christians become more and more eager to press forwards, see Philippians 3:13-15.

Someone may object, saying, how is this ceaseless striving consistent with the satisfaction that spiritual enjoyment brings? There is no inconsistency here! Spiritual enjoyment satisfies the soul in the following respects:

A. *Great desire produces great anticipation.* When we receive some worldly joy we have greatly desired, it often disappoints us, but not so with spiritual enjoyment! They always live up to our expectations.

B. *If we are not as spiritually satisfied as we could be, the fault lies in us.* We are not opening our mouths wide enough. All this is perfectly consistent with ever thirsting for more and more of the same, until our enjoyment becomes perfect.

It is different with false religious choice. When convicted of sin and afraid of hell, a person might long for spiritual light, faith in Christ, and love for God. **When false experiences have deceived him into thinking he is saved, he rests** content with this. **He no longer desires grace and holiness, especially if his experiences have been very impressive. He does not live for God and Christ in the present, but lives off his conversion in the past.**

The true Christian is totally different. ***He is constantly seeking God.*** In fact, those who seek God, is one of the ways the Bible describes genuine believers. See Psalm 69:32 and Psalm 70:4. Scripture depicts the seeking and striving of the Christian as occurring mainly after his conversion. Scripture is speaking about those who are already Christians when it talks of running the race, wrestling with principalities, pressing forward, and crying to God day and night.

Doubtless some hypocrites will say that they do constantly seek more of God and Christ in holiness, but a hypocrite does not really seek spiritual things for their own sake. He wants better spiritual experiences for the sake of the selfish assurance. He wants to feel God's love for himself, rather than to have more love for God. Because he knows a real Christian is supposed to have certain desires, he imitates them. However, a longing for experiences, or for a feeling of God's love, or for death and heaven, are not the most reliable signs of a true Christian.

The best sign is a longing for a holier heart and a holier life.

12. The fruit of true spiritual emotions is Christian practice.

Christian practice means 3 things:

- A. The true Christian directs all aspects of his behavior by Christian rules.
- B. He makes holy living the main concern of his life.
- C. Perseveres to the end.

Let us establish these 3 points from Scripture.

- A. The true Christian seeks to conform every single area of his life to the rules of God's Word.** Read John 15:14; 1st John 3:3 and 7; 1st Corinthians 6:9 and 10; and Galatians 5:19-21.

This commitment to total obedience does not mean a mere negative avoidance of evil practices. It also means positively obeying God's commands.

B. The true Christian makes holy living the main business of his life. Christ's people not only do good works, **they are zealous for good works!** Read Titus 2:14. *All true Christians are good and faithful soldiers of Christ Jesus.* See 2nd Timothy 2:3. **All true Christians fight the good fight of faith!** Read 1st Timothy 6:12.

Lazy and negligent people are not running so as to obtain the prize. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24. The true Christian puts on the whole armor of God. Read Ephesians 6:13-17. **He forgets the things which are behind, and reaches forward, pressing towards the goal, of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** Read Philippians 3:13-14. Laziness in serving God is as damning as open rebellion; a lazy servant is a wicked servant, and will be cast into outer darkness. Read Matthew 25:26 and 30. **A real Christian is one who is diligent, earnest, and committed.** If there is any doubt, read Hebrews 6:11 and 12.

C. **The true Christian perseveres in his obedience to God throughout all the difficulties he meets, to the end of his life.** Scripture teaches very fully that true faith perseveres. See for example, the parable of the sewer in Matthew 13:3-9 and verses 18-23.

Scripture emphasizes in the doctrine of perseverance, that the genuine Christian keeps on believing and obeying despite the various problems he meets. God allows problems to come into the lives of people who claim to be Christians, to test the reality of their faith. *It then becomes clear to themselves, and often to others, whether they really mean business with Christ.*

The sign of the genuine Christian is that he perseveres through these problems and difficulties, and remains true to Christ.

***“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
(Revelation 2:10)***

I admit that true Christians can grow spiritually cold, surrender to temptation, and commit great sins. Nevertheless, they can never fall away so totally that they get tired of God and obedience, and become settled in a fixed dislike of Christianity. They can never adopt a way of life in which something else is more important than God. They can never entirely lose their distinctness from the unbelieving world, or revert to exactly what they used to be like before their conversion.

If this is the effect that problems have on a professing Christian, it shows that he was never truly converted! Read 1 John 2:19.

True spiritual emotions, then, always result in Christian practice.

- A.** True spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they arise from spiritual, supernatural, and divine influences on the heart.

***Christ is not in the heart of the Christian as a dead Savior,
but as a risen and living Savior in His temple.***

- B.** Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because their object is the loveliness of spiritual things, not our self-interest.

***People have a defective Christianity because they are seeking
their own interests and not God's.***

Consequently, they accept Christianity only to the extent that they think it serves their interests. A person's private interests may after a time clash with Christianity. So a person who accepts Christianity from selfish motives is liable to abandon it from selfish motives. Private interests change, but the spiritual beauty of Christianity never changes.

- C.** Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they are based on the moral excellence of divine things.
- D.** Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they arise out of spiritual understanding. We cannot forget him or exchange him for something else. He has made too deep an impression on us!
- E.** Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they bring a conviction of the reality of divine things. ***If a person was never fully convinced there is any reality in Christianity, he or she will not commit to a persevering obedience.***
- F.** Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they always exist alongside spiritual humiliation.

***Humility before God inspires obedience,
just as pride inspires rebellion.***

- G.** Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they always exist alongside a change of nature.

Men will not thoroughly change their practice unless they have a change of nature.

Until the tree is good, the fruit will not be good.

***If an unconverted person tries to live a Christian life,
it is like throwing a stone upwards. Nature finally prevails,
and the stone comes down again.***

H. Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they promote a Christ-like spirit. Love, humility, peace, forgiveness, compassion, etc. are all largely what Christian practice is all about!

I. Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they soften the heart and exist alongside a Christian tenderness of spirit.

***The softened heart & tender spirit of the true Christian
make him painfully sensitive to sin,
creating a profound influence & impact on the way he lives his life.***

J. Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because of their beautiful symmetry and balance. **The Christian will NOT obey *some* of God's commands and ignore others.** He is determined to be holy in every area of his life, in all circumstances, at all times.

K. Spiritual emotions result in Christian practice because they produce a longing for deeper holiness.

It is clear, Christian practice is a distinguishing feature of true conversion.

***Christian practice is the most important of all the marks and signs
of conversion, both to the believer and to others.***

13. Christian practice is the chief sign to others of a convert's sincerity.

Christian practice is the chief sign by which we are to judge the sincerity of professing Christians. Scripture is very clear about this. Read Matthew 7:16 and Matthew 13:33.

Nowhere does Christ say, you will know the tree by its leaves and flowers. Nor will you know men by their talk, by the story they tell of their experiences, by their tears and emotional expressions. **No! A tree is known by its fruits.**

Christ tells us that we must show this fruit to others in our own lives. Jesus said, ***“let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven”*** - Matthew 5:16. The rest of the New Testament says the same. For instance, in Hebrews 6:4-10 we read about those who were enlightened, who “tasted” the heavenly gift, and yet fell away.

We find the same teaching in James. James is telling us that it is useless to say we have faith, if we do not show our faith by good works. **Everything we say is worthless, if it is not confirmed by what we do.** See James 2:14.

This is really just common sense. Everyone knows that actions speak louder than words.

Words are cheap.

It is by costly, self-denying, Christian-practice that we show the reality of our faith.

A person cannot claim to be a Christian without claiming to believe certain things. *We would not and should not accept as a Christian anyone who denies essential Christian doctrines, no matter how good and holy he or she seems.*

Along with Christian practice, there has to be an acceptance of the basic truths of the gospel.

Christian practice is the best proof of the sincerity and salvation of those who say they believe, but it proves nothing about the salvation of those who deny them!

No outward appearances are infallible signs of conversion.

Christian practice is the best evidence we have that a professing Christian is a real Christian. Yet, we cannot see all the person's outward behavior, much of it is hidden from the world. Nor can we look into a person's heart and see his or her motives.

We cannot be certain how far an unconverted person can go in an outward appearance of Christianity.

14. Christian practice is a sure sign of conversion to a person's own conscience.

This is clear from 1 John 2:3... by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

John says we can have assurance of salvation if our consciences testify to our good works. See also 1 John 3:18 and 19. Paul also tells the Galatians to examine their own behavior in Galatians 6 verse 4. Moreover, **when Christ says, by their fruits you will know them, this is in the 1st place a rule for judging others, but Christ also wants us to judge ourselves by this rule, as the next verse makes clear.** Listen to Matthew 6 verse 21: "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven."

Christian practice certainly does not refer merely to outward bodily actions.

Christian practice refers more to the inward obedience of the soul than to the outward actions of the body.

The Christian has to judge his own practice, not just by what he does outwardly with his body, but by the inward motives of his soul.

This is how God judges us: “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” Jeremiah 17:10. Revelation 2:23 reiterates this promise: “I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

I do not want anyone to think that motives are all that matter, and that what we do outwardly with our bodies is irrelevant. Not at all! **We cannot divorce soul and body** like that.

Holy motives produce an obedient lifestyle.

So a person who lives an outwardly sinful life cannot make the excuse that his heart is in the right place.

Christian practice includes both the inward motives and the outward actions!

We need to pass the test in both areas. Outwardly good deeds without inwardly holy motives are not Christian practice. Nor are supposedly spiritual motives which do not produce practical bodily obedience.

We should not place much confidence in religious experiences, convictions, converts, joys, or those inward meditations which do not result in practical obedience.

Let me offer 6 arguments to prove this point:

- A.** My 1st argument is from common sense. The proof that a man prefers something is that he does it. **The proof that a man prefers obeying God to disobeying him, is that he obeys.**
- B.** My 2nd argument is from God's providence. God sends problems and tests into our lives to see whether in practice we will prefer him to other things. **We must choose. Our choices show whether we love God supremely or not.** Read Deuteronomy 8:2. **These tests are for our benefit.** God already knows what is in our hearts. **God brings us into testing situations so that we might know what is in our hearts.**
- C.** Christian practice brings the new birth to perfection. James 2:22 tells us that by works Faith is made perfect.

Our practical obedience perfects our love for God.

Christian practice perfects faith and love.

D. Scripture emphasizes practice more than any other evidence of salvation. I hope this is clear by now. We have to keep to this emphasis... **It is dangerous to stress things which the Bible does not stress.**

We have lost our biblical balance if we major on feelings and experiences which do not express themselves in practical & faithful obedience.

If we ignore God's clear emphasis on Christian practice, and stress other things as tests of sincerity, we are on our way to delusion and hypocrisy.

E. Scripture speaks very clearly about Christian practice as the true test of sincerity.

God has spoken from heaven in the Bible! He has again and again told us that Christian practice is the highest and best proof of real faith. Christ repeats this test over and over and over again in chapters 14 & 15 of John's Gospel. ***Is this unclear?***

F. God will judge us by our practice on Judgment Day.

God will not ask us to give our personal testimony on Judgment Day.

The evidence on which the Judge will accept or reject us will be our practice!

From these arguments, it is clear that Christian practice is the best evidence, to ourselves and others, that we are true Christians.

There are 2 main objections people will raise to what I have said... The 1st objection is that spiritual experience, rather than practice, is the real proof that we are Christians. This is a miss understanding of what I have said. **To speak of spiritual experience and Christian practice as if they were 2 separate things is completely wrong.**

***Christian practice is spiritual practice.
It is the action of soul and body together...
the soul moving and governing the body.***

There is an outward religious practice without inward experience. That is good for nothing. However, there is also a religious experience without practice, without Christian behavior. This is worse than nothing!

True religious experience is where we love God, and our love makes us choose him, and obey him, and stand by him in all difficult in testing situations.

The 2nd objection is that my emphasis on practice is legalistic, it concentrates too much on works, and so will lead people away from the great gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone.

This is nonsense!

***I have not said that our practice is the price of God's favor.
It is the sign of God's favor.***

The doctrine of God's free grace to sinners means that there are no good qualities in us which can earn or deserve his grace. Similarly, justification without works means that no lovely quality or action in us can ever atone for our sins.

***God accepts us as righteous because of
Christ's obedience, not ours.***

Faith joins us to the Savior quite apart from any goodness or beauty it may have. Why? Simply because **faith means receiving, accepting, and resting on Jesus with our souls.**

We are united to Christ by faith alone.

To have a casual attitude toward good works because they do not justify us, is really no different from being casual about all obedience, all holiness, all spiritual mindedness, because they do not justify us either!

Yet what Christian will say that a zeal for obedience, Holiness, and spiritual mindedness is inconsistent with justification by faith?

***Holy practice is the sign of faith,
just as activity and movement are the signs of life.***

15. Conclusion.

What a lot of trouble the church would have escaped if Christians had kept to what Scripture teaches about a true experience of salvation!

Scripture tells us to judge ourselves and others in this area, mainly by the fruit of practical Christian obedience.

If only we kept to this, it would expose hypocrisy and self deception more powerfully than anything else could. It would rescue us from the endless confusion caused by man-made theories about what we ought to be experiencing.

Many opportunities of spiritual pride would be cut off, to the frustration of the devil.

Worldly people would cease to laugh or scorn Christianity because of the follies of Christians; instead, unbelievers would become convinced that there is reality in Christianity, and would pay attention to its claims, when they saw the lives of true believers.

Knowledge is the key that first opens the hardened heart to receive spiritual emotions, which unlocks the kingdom of heaven to us. This is why Jesus condemns the Pharisees for “*taking away the key of knowledge*” in Luke 11:52. However, there are many emotional experiences which do not flow out of any light of understanding in the mind...

If our emotions do not have their basis in an enlightened grasp of God's truth, those emotions are not spiritual in nature, no matter how powerful the emotions may be.