

“True Believers Are Led by the Spirit”
(Romans 8:1-14)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered what makes God beautiful to the believer:
 - a. It's not His natural attributes of infinite power, knowledge, presence, eternity, and immutability by themselves.
 - b. It's His moral attributes of holiness, righteousness, faithfulness and justice.
 - (i) God would be the worst of all conceivable beings if He possessed all these infinite attributes of knowledge, presence and power, but was not holy.
 - (ii) But having holiness, it adorns all the other attributes and makes them glorious.
 - (iii) This is what makes Him beautiful to the believer; this is what draws the heart of a believer after Him; this is what produces holy affections.
 - (iv) It is the same thing, on the other hand, that makes the unbeliever hate and shun Him.

2. When we ask the question of whether or not the Spirit of God is working in a saving way in our souls, we must begin here.
 - a. Here is a very great difference between the believer and the unbeliever.
 - b. It is the holiness of God that draws the heart of a true believer out after God; it's not merely what He gives us or the things we hope to receive from Him that makes Him lovely – which are the only grounds an unbeliever can have for thinking he loves Him.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we're going to examine this subject a little more carefully.
 - a. The beauty of this holiness that believers are enabled to see by the Holy Spirit is something an unbeliever knows nothing about.
 - (i) As the blind man can know nothing about color.
 - (ii) Or as the deaf man can know nothing about music.
 - (iii) These things can't even be described to him because he hasn't experienced anything like them.

 - b. It has been called by different names in the history of Theology, but most commonly gracious, saving or spiritual knowledge.
 - (i) It's something only those who have experienced the saving work of the Spirit know anything about.
 - (ii) And so it something that clearly distinguishes a true believer from one who is false.

2. This is what we're going to consider now; we'll look at two things:
 - a. What spiritual knowledge or understanding is.
 - b. And how this spiritual knowledge is tied to the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

II. Sermon.

A. First, what is spiritual knowledge or understanding?

1. First, let's consider what it isn't.

- a. Spiritual understanding is not just learning more of God's truth.
 - (i) There are many unconverted biblical scholars who know much more about God's Word than all of us ever will.
 - (ii) It's not learning a new meaning to a verse that wasn't there before.
 - (iii) It's not just new information.

- b. It's not the Spirit's directly revealing ideas to you that you didn't know before.
 - (i) It's not special revelation: Even if He did continue to give revelation today, it wouldn't necessarily be spiritual knowledge, but only additional facts or information.
 - (ii) Balaam was a prophet whom God used to declare His truth to Balak, but Balaam, since he was unconverted had no spiritual understanding.
 - (iii) To add a new meaning to the Scripture would be to add to the Scripture, which is something we know that God strictly forbids under a very serious threat.

- c. Nor is it having passages of Scripture come to your mind that somehow answer your questions for guidance that really don't apply to that situation.
 - (i) Like the person who prays and asks whether the Lord would have him go onto a very difficult mission field, who then remembers the words that the Lord spoke to Jacob, "Do not fear to go down into Egypt for I will be with you and will surely bring you up again (Gen. 47). That was something God said to Jacob, not to that person.
 - (ii) Now certainly if the Lord made a promise to Jacob that also applies to you, you can use that passage for guidance. But the fact that these words came into your mind doesn't necessarily mean the Lord intends them for you, nor does it mean that the Spirit is leading you through them.
 - (iii) Spiritual understanding begins with a right understanding of what a passage means in its original context to its original audience. It doesn't have to do with finding a new meaning in the text.

2. What is spiritual, saving, gracious knowledge and understanding, if it isn't knowing more facts or having them given to you in a supernatural way?

- a. It is having your mind spiritually enlightened, to see something that you were blind to before.
 - (i) The meaning of the text doesn't change, only your perception of the truth it contains.
 - (ii) To understand the Scriptures spiritually is to have the eyes of your mind opened to the excellency of the truth they contained when they were written: to see how they reveal the infinite excellency of God, the sufficiency of Christ, the glory of God's way of salvation in Him and of His Laws and promises in Scripture.
 - (iii) It's a new sense in your heart of the infinite excellency of holiness, the moral goodness of God.

- b. It's different than the kind of pleasure you might have in knowing about other things.
 - (i) Certainly there are things in this world that you like to learn about for various reasons, such as art, music, science, history, sports, computers. You might enjoy these things and new things you discover about them.
 - (ii) Spiritual knowledge loves and enjoys God for something these other things can't have – His holiness – something that is more desirable than anything else.
 - (a) It helps you to see Him and all He does in a new way.
 - (b) You don't just see the power of His Creation and Providence, but His righteousness, faithfulness and goodness.
 - (c) You see the glory of having Christ as your Mediator, because He is the express image of God, because He is holy; something that unbeliever can't see.
 - (d) You see how precious His shed blood is, that it is His blood, the blood of the One who loved the Father so fervently, who kept His law so exactly.
 - (e) You also see the beauty of the Gospel which is salvation through this holy One who loved you and gave Himself up for you.
 - (f) You see the excellency of everything that has to do with God, His plan of salvation, and His worship.
 - (g) This is what makes His Word so desirable to you, as something far more valuable than the writings of men.
 - (iii) You not only see the beauty of holiness, but at the same time, you see the evil of sin, of everything contrary to what is good and holy.
 - (iv) When you see the beauty of holiness, you see it as the most important thing in the world – not just because without it you won't be saved – but because it is the most beautiful thing to you personally.
 - (v) Unless you see this, you don't see what is truly beautiful in the things of the Lord. That's why Scripture says that those who don't have this are blind, deaf and dead.
 - (a) It's the sight of these things that draws the heart out to God, that produces what Edwards calls religious affections.
 - (b) An unconverted person has no idea of what this beauty is, anymore than a blind man of color, a deaf man of music, or a man with no sense of taste can understand the sweetness of honey.
 - (c) Without it he can never desire heaven for what makes it truly beautiful: holiness. He just wants to go there because he doesn't want the alternative.
 - (d) That's why some can seem to receive the Gospel joyfully, only to abandon it when it begins to cost them too dearly.

B. Second, how is spiritual knowledge tied to the leading of God's Holy Spirit?

1. Edwards explains this in terms of what the Spirit does in your heart. "It consists in a person's being guided by a spiritual and distinguishing taste of that which has in it true moral beauty."
 - a. The love the Spirit gives you for holiness helps you to tell the difference between good and evil, holy and unholy, without necessarily having to reason it out.
 - (i) One who knows beauty recognizes it as soon as he sees it.

- (ii) One who knows music knows immediately whether what he is hearing is true harmony or not.
 - (iii) The one who has a taste for fine food knows whether the food is good as soon as he tastes it.
 - (iv) So it is when you have a taste for holiness:
 - (a) As soon as a holy word or commandment is spoken, you see its beauty and immediately desire to do it.
 - (b) If, on the other hand, it is unholy, you will see its ugliness and immediately reject it.
 - (c) “Thus a holy person is led by the Spirit, as he is instructed and led by his holy taste and disposition of heart; whereby, in the lively exercise of grace, he easily distinguishes good and evil, and knows at once what is a suitable amiable behavior towards God, and towards man, in this case and the other, and Judges what is right, as it were spontaneously, and of himself, without a particular deduction, by any other arguments than the beauty that is seen, and goodness that is tasted. Thus Christ blames the Pharisees, that they *did not, even of their own selves, judge what was right*, without needing miracles to prove it, Luke 12:57. The apostle seems plainly to have respect to this way of judging of spiritual beauty, in Rom. 12:2, ‘Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God.’”
- b. This is different than coming to a judgment about whether or not something is good based on the truths of God’s Word.
- (i) In this case, you form your judgment after you examine it in the light of certain principles.
 - (ii) Good taste forms a judgment about something as soon as you see it, that an odor smells good or bad, that music is soothing or harsh, that something is beautiful or ugly.
 - (iii) You might think about what you saw, or heard or smelled afterwards that will help you understand why you did or didn’t like it, but it was your taste that made the choice immediately.
 - (iv) The same is true of holy taste: it forms a judgment as soon as you are exposed to it.
- c. This is one of the main ways the Spirit guides us:
- (i) “A holy disposition and spiritual taste, where grace is strong and lively, will enable the soul to determine what actions are right and becoming Christians, not only more speedily, but far more exactly, than the greatest abilities without it. This may be illustrated by the manner in which some habits of mind, and dispositions of heart, of a nature inferior to true grace, will teach and guide a man in his actions. As for instance, if a man be a very good natured man, his good nature will teach him better how to act benevolently amongst mankind, and will direct him, on every occasion, to those speeches and actions, which are agreeable to rules of goodness, than the strongest reason will a man of a morose temper. So if a man’s heart be under the influence of an entire friendship, and most endeared

affection to another; though he be a man of an indifferent capacity, yet this habit of his mind will direct him, far more readily and exactly, to a speech and deportment, or manner of behavior, which shall in all respects be sweet and kind, and agreeable to a benevolent disposition of heart, than the greatest capacity without it. He has as it were a spirit within him, that guides him; the habit of his mind is attended with a taste, by which he immediately relishes that air and mien which is benevolent, and disrelishes the contrary, and causes him to distinguish between one and the other *in a moment*, more precisely, than the most accurate reasonings can find out *in many hours*. . . . So an eminently humble, or meek, or charitable disposition, will direct a person of mean capacity to such a behavior, as is agreeable to Christian rules of humility, meekness and charity far more readily and precisely than the most diligent study, and elaborate reasonings, of a man of the strongest faculties, who has not a Christian spirit within him. So also will a spirit of love to God, and holy fear and reverence towards God, and filial confidence in God, and a heavenly disposition, teach and guide a man in his behavior.”

- (ii) “It is an exceedingly difficult thing for a wicked man, destitute of Christian principles in his heart to guide him, to know how to demean himself like a Christian with the life and beauty, and heavenly sweetness of a truly holy, humble, Christ like behavior. He knows not how to put on these garments, neither do they fit him . . . Pro. 10:32, “The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable.” Chap. 15:2, “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” And Pro. 16:23, “The heart of the righteous teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.””
 - (iii) With this spiritual taste, you don’t necessarily need to find a particular passage of Scripture before you can judge whether something is right or wrong. You will know it instinctively.
 - (iv) This spiritual taste/leading of the Spirit will also help you in your study of God’s Word, to learn what it says by helping to focus your mind and by removing your prejudices, illumining the Word, and leading your thoughts down the right path. This love for God’s Word can bring the texts to mind that you need – texts that actually apply to your circumstances – even as your body seems to be able to tell you what you need to eat when you’re sick.
- d. This is quite a bit different from how churches today understand the leading of the Spirit – such as by speaking to you directly, giving you direct commands, forcing other meanings on the Scripture, by appearing to us in some visible form, impressing on our heart what’s going to happen in the future. These have nothing to do with the heart, but only with the head, and actually violate the truth that the canon of Scripture is closed.
 - e. You need to remember that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and deceives many. He certainly has the ability to work on our imaginations and suggest ideas. We must always be on our guard against him.
 - f. May the Lord use these things to help each of us understand something more of the leading of the Spirit and may He especially grant to us more of His Spirit that we might actually experience this gracious leading more intensely. Amen.