

July 25, 2010 – 4 of 12 in Signs of Life

# Hear and Believe

1 Thessalonians 1:4–6

## INTRODUCTION

Look carefully at the first three words of this passage and tell me how this is not exactly what we're looking for! FOR WE KNOW...Yes! This is exactly what we want to know. We want to know things to look for, characteristics, signs that God has made us for real.

- SPIRITUAL CONVICTION BY THE WORD
- SPIRITUAL IMITATION THROUGH THE WORD
- SPIRITUAL ENJOYMENT OF THE WORD

The thing that unifies these three responses together is the content of the gospel. Paul says that he knows about them because OUR GOSPEL came to you with conviction, with imitation, with joy. So why is this a sure sign of life? One short way to say it is that it is not natural to really believe the gospel. That which excels nature is not a thing that could be perceived by nature; and that which is excellent in God excels all things that He has made.

**The Big Idea** is that true spiritual conviction gladly receives whatever God speaks with all of the 'senses of the soul.'

Now let's not press the metaphor too hard. The Bible talks about our receiving the word as sight, as hearing, and even as tasting—smelling and touching is a little bit more remote—but we're going to look at some passages that show this. For now, just notice that in this conviction, this imitation and this enjoyment, that the **Mind** (conviction), the **Will** (imitation) and the **Affections** (enjoyment) are all re-inclined toward God in anything and everything God says.

## DOCTRINE

### I. SPIRITUAL CONVICTION BY THE WORD

#### A) The Gospel in the Whole Word

1. This is the power of the Spirit in his Word through a preacher (v. 5a)
  - a. Hearing with new life is first and foremost an act of God

[2 Cor. 4:6] "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

[Jn. 6:63] “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

[1 Pet. 1:23–25, TURN] God makes new life by his word, which life is “imperishable” or “abiding” or “remains forever,” and this word that creates a believer is the gospel that is believed. **POWER POINT diagramming this!**

- b. Hearing and believing with new life are the same thing—simultaneous—but the important point is that it always comes through words (one way or another):

[Acts 16:14] “The Lord **opened her heart** to pay attention to **what was said** by Paul.”

“There is such a thing as a spiritual and divine light immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means...And it may be thus described: a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising. This spiritual light primarily consists in the former of these, viz., a real sense and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the word of God. A spiritual and saving conviction of the truth and reality of these things, arises from such a sight of their divine excellency and glory; so that this conviction of their truth is an effect and natural consequence of this sight of their divine glory. There is therefore in this spiritual light.”  
JONATHAN EDWARDS, *A Divine & Supernatural Light*

## 2. Implication: The good news (gospel) is what they are being assured of...

- a. Namely, that they are loved by God and chosen by God (inseparable) in verse 4.

[Eph. 1:4–5] “**In love** he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

[Jn. 5:39–40] “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness **about me**, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

## B) The Gospel in the Whole Soul

### 1. This is the power of the Spirit in the heart of the hearer (v. 5b)

- a. Hearing with faith – or, hearing with new ears supernaturally created by God

[Gal. 3:2] “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?”

[Rom. 10:17] “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

[Ps. 40:6] “you have given me an open ear.”

[Acts 11:18] “And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has **granted repentance** that leads to life.’”

- b. So, who acts in the new birth, God or you? Both! God begets; you believe! Believe!

[Jam. 1:18, 21] “Of his own will **he brought us forth** by the word of truth...**receive** with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

- c. Remember that this is NOT natural—that’s why it’s such a great sign!

[1 Cor. 2:14] “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is **not able** to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

[Mat. 16:17] “And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’”

- **BELIEVE! HEAR!** You Can’t. So Jesus creates what He commands. If it is truly happening, then Jesus has created it! There it is! It’s happening! Praise God!

“Paul...has it as his aim, that the Thessalonians, influenced by the same considerations, may entertain no doubt that they were elected by God. For it had been designed of God, in honoring Paul’s ministry, that he might manifest to them his adoption...that they might be fully persuaded that they were loved by God, and that their election was beyond all controversy.”  
 JOHN CALVIN, Commentary on 1 Thessalonians

\*\*\*So, remember the analogy of the child (from last week), wrestling to discover his parents love for him. Now, if God is a perfectly loving Father, what do you think He will do about this?

[1 Jn. 3:1] “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

## II. SPIRITUAL IMITATION THROUGH THE WORD

### A) Models of True Spirituality Will be...

#### 1. FOR your sake (5c)

- a. Philosophies of ministry are reflections of what we think will be good for people:

[2 Tim. 2:10] “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

[Titus 1:1–3] “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and **their knowledge** of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope **of eternal life**, which God, who never lies, **promised** before the ages began and at the proper time manifested **in his word** through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.”

- b. It's the same with things like fellowship and working out whether or not you believe: Nowadays we say “Belong—then believe!” but those who knew Jesus best knew that belief causes our belonging in the body.

[1 Jn. 1:3] “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, **so that** you too may have fellowship with us.”

## 2. WITH the gospel (6b > 5a)

### B) Models of True Spirituality Will be...

#### 1. Models of Christ himself (6a)

- a. Gospel character-modeling is careful to set Christ as the standard (not me)

[1 Cor. 11:1] “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

#### 2. Contagious! Gospel Enthusiasm is a fire that will catch to true kindling

[2 Cor. 9:2] “And **your zeal** has stirred up most of them.”

### III. SPIRITUAL ENJOYMENT OF THE WORD

#### A) This Joy in the Word is NOT Dependent on Earthly Circumstance

- 1. So Paul makes a point to say that this is received and felt in affliction.

- a. Why is joy **in** (the midst of—not about) affliction an ultimate proof of true belief?

[1 Pet. 3:15] “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a **reason for the hope** that is in you.”

## 2. It is not natural to rejoice in the midst of affliction—so what’s happening?

- a. God is calling out (or creating) from a group of people who would naturally not “jive” with this message:

[1 Cor. 1:22–24] “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the **power** of God and the **wisdom** of God.”

- b. In our old nature, the gospel makes no sense of suffering, or longing, or any other of our ultimate problems—out of nowhere, we see it as the very definition of wisdom and power: it’s amazing grace because now we see when once we were blind.

[2 Cor. 4:4] “In their case the god of this world has **blinded the minds** of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing **the light of the gospel** of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

- c. In other words, what we are enjoying is the same thing we are now believing—the **content** of the gospel. Let’s be clear that the difference between life and death here is that this new life sees the way that God saves us in Christ and (though we start simple and inarticulate) and we love it. We can’t get enough. We see how it works, how it solves all of our problems, how it is good news. Spiritual death stares at these things: squints its eyes and shakes its head and shrugs its shoulders.

## B) This Joy in the Word is OF the Holy Spirit

### 1. It is not merely from him, but it is the very joy He feels

[Jn. 15:11] “These things I have spoken to you, that **my joy** may be in you, and that **your joy** may be full.”

[Jn. 16:14] “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and **declare** it to you.”

- a. Translation: in the new birth, the Holy Spirit will declare (or impart by words) the joy of the Lord as your new joy—you will hear loud and clear and you will quickly learn to love everything you hear!

[1 Pet. 1:8] “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”

2. So moving deeper from Edwards second to his third sign.
  - a. There is a new spiritual sense (I)
  - b. This new sense is of divine excellency (II)
  - c. Especially the beauty of his holiness (III)
  - d. SO, this is not mere ‘spiritual impressions’

Spiritual impressions are a dime a dozen. They may be demonic. They may be the result of an active or troubled imagination. Many of us know someone well who speaks as those intoxicated with spirituality, and may even pepper their babble with a series of scriptures, yet they never get around to talking about the divinely excellent. They are unusually shy about the great things of God. Such drunken a-theologizing may even hover around a single text. Edwards speaks of the person who is quite sure they have heard from God because of the immediacy of the impression and the affect that a specific text had upon their mind. They fool themselves into the surety that they are captivated by the things of God.

On the contrary, they first imagine they are interested, and then are highly affected with that, and then can own these things to be excellent. So that the sudden and extraordinary way of the Scriptures coming to their mind, is plain[ly] the first foundation of the whole; which is a clear evidence of the wretched delusion they are under. EDWARDS

[Ps. 34:8] “Oh, **taste** and **see** that the LORD is good!”

[Lk. 24:32] “Did not **our hearts burn** within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

**Repeat Big Idea:** true spiritual conviction gladly receives whatever God speaks with all of the ‘senses of the soul.’

## APPLICATION

1. **Do you understand what it means to believe with the whole soul?** Paul moves in his ‘proof’ from being convicted with the mind, to imitation with the will, to the ultimate proof (which we’ll have more to say about later) joy in the midst of suffering. But do you see that hearing and belief are not quite the same thing if you don’t have a new heart? Anyone can hear with their physical ears, but Jesus says,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever **hears** my word and **believes** him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” [Jn. 5:24].

Hearing and believing means that you hear, understand, love everything you’re hearing, even though (because!) it’s changing everything! If a view that changes everything doesn’t sound appealing to you, might that be because you don’t want a change? Fair enough?

2. **How’s Your Hearing?** Good hearing doesn’t mean that one set of ears can hear everything going on in the world. It just means you can hear clearly when people who are speaking to you or around you. So this isn’t about “figuring it all out,” or being able “to make sense of it all.” What it does mean is exactly what Jesus said so clearly: “The sheep hear his voice...for they know his voice” [Jn. 10:3, 4], and “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” [Jn. 18:37].

[Ps. 119:18, 25] Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law...My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word