



EVIDENCE OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

By Jonathan Edwards

This unreasonable to suppose, that God has provided for his people, no more than probable evidences of the truth of the gospel. He has with great care, abundantly provided, and given them, the most convicting, assuring, satisfying and manifold evidence of his faithfulness in the covenant of grace; and as David says, “made a covenant, ordered in all things and sure” (2 Sam. 23:5). Therefore it is rational to suppose, that at the same time, he would not fail of ordering the matter so, that there should not be wanting, as great, and clear evidence, that this is his covenant, and that these promises are his promises; or which is the same thing, that the Christian religion is true, and that the gospel is his Word. Otherwise in vain are those great assurances he has given of his faithfulness in his covenant, by confirming it with his oath, and so variously establishing it by seals and pledges. For the evidence that it is his covenant, is properly the foundation on which all the force and effect of those other assurances do stand. We may therefore undoubtedly suppose and conclude, that there is some sort of evidence which God has given, that this covenant, and these promises are his, beyond all mere probability; that there are some grounds of assurance of it held forth, which, if we were not blind to them, tend to give an higher persuasion, than any arguing from history, human tradition, etc. which the illiterate, and unacquainted with history, are capable of; yea, that which is good ground of the highest and most perfect assurance, that mankind have in any case whatsoever; agreeable to those high expressions which the Apostle uses, “Let us draw near in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). And: “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches, of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col. 2:2).

It is reasonable to suppose, that God would give the greatest evidence, of those things which are greatest, and the truth of which is of greatest importance to us: and that we therefore, if we are wise, and act rationally, shall have the greatest desire of having full, undoubting, and perfect assurance of. But it is certain, that such an assurance is not to be attained, by the greater part of them who live under the gospel, by arguments fetched from ancient traditions, histories, and monuments. . . .¹

The true martyrs of Jesus Christ, are not those who have only been strong in opinion that the gospel of Christ is true, but those that have seen the truth of it; as the very name of martyrs or witnesses (by which they are called in Scripture) implies. Those are very improperly called witnesses of the truth of any thing, who only declare they are very much of opinion that such a thing

¹ *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, ed. by John E. Smith, volume 2 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Perry Miller, gen. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 304-05.

is true. Those only are proper witnesses, who can, and do testify that they have seen the truth of the thing they assert; “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen” (John 3:11). “And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34). “And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son, to be the Saviour of the world” (I John 4:14). “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou should’st know his will, and see that just One, and should’st hear the voice of his mouth: for thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard” (Acts 22:14-15).

But the true martyrs of Jesus Christ are called his witnesses: and all the saints, who by their holy practice under great trials, declare that faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, are called witnesses (Heb. 11:1 and 12:1); because by their profession and practice, they declare their assurance of the truth and divinity of the gospel, having had the eyes of their minds enlightened, to see divinity in the gospel, or to behold that unparalleled, ineffably excellent, and truly divine glory shining in it, which is altogether distinguishing, evidential, and convincing: so that they may truly be said to have seen God in it, and to have seen that it is indeed divine: and so can speak in the style of witnesses; and not only say, that they think the gospel is divine, but say, that it is divine, giving it in as their testimony, because they have seen it to be so.

Doubtless Peter, James, and John, after they had seen that excellent glory of Christ in the mount, would have been ready, when they came down, to speak in the language of witnesses, and to say positively that Jesus is the Son of God; as Peter says, they were eye-witnesses (II Pet. 1:16). And so all nations will be ready positively to say this, when they shall behold his glory at the Day of Judgment; though what will be universally seen, will be only his natural glory, and not his moral and spiritual glory, which is much more distinguishing.

But yet, it must be noted, that among those who have a spiritual sight of the divine glory of the gospel, there is a great variety of degrees of strength of faith, as there is a vast variety of the degrees of clearness of views of this glory: but there is no true and saving faith, or spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the truth of the gospel, that has nothing in it, of this manifestation of its internal evidence, in some degree. The gospel of the blessed God don’t go abroad a begging for its evidence, so much as some think; it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself. Though great use may be made of external arguments, they are not to be neglected, but highly prized and valued; for they may be greatly serviceable to awaken unbelievers, and bring them to serious consideration, and to confirm the faith of true saints: yea they may be in some respect subservient to the begetting of a saving faith in men. Though what was said before remains true, that there is no spiritual conviction of the judgment, but what arises from an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things: for, as has been observed, this apprehension or view has a tendency to convince the mind of the truth of the gospel. . . .²

² *Religious Affections*, vol. 2 in *Works* (Yale), pp. 306-307. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 1. 5. “We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”