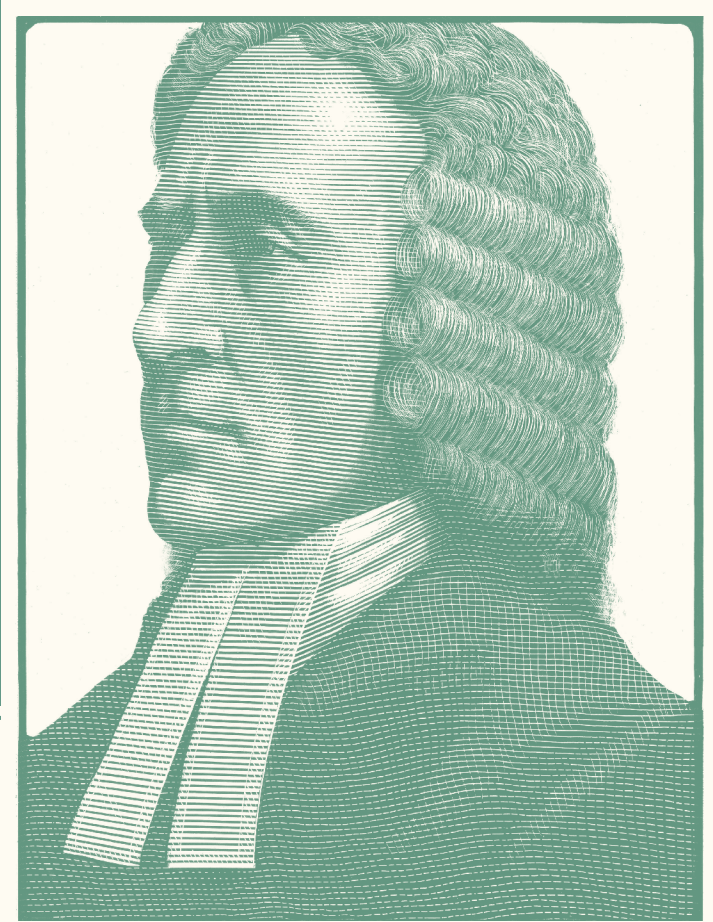


FOREWORD BY GEORGE M. MARSDEN
DANE C. ORTLUND



EDWARDS
on the Christian Life

ALIVE TO THE BEAUTY OF GOD

“In his theological concern for the beautiful and the beauty of God, Jonathan Edwards stands at the end of a long theological tradition that reaches back to Augustine and beyond, even to the Scriptures themselves. In the last two centuries, however, this area of theological inquiry seems to have dropped off the radar for Christian theologians and practitioners, which may explain why students of Edwards’s corpus of writings have not tackled the subject. Ortlund’s study nicely fills this lacuna, for he rightly shows, from a multitude of angles, that beauty is the fulcrum of Edwards’s thinking. A joy to read and to ponder!”

Michael A. G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality,
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“Jonathan Edwards is widely known as a hellfire-and-brimstone preacher. Serious students, like Dane Ortlund, have long known he was much more. In this book Ortlund puts his careful research to good purpose as he demonstrates convincingly that the center of Edwards’s concern was always and supremely beauty—in God, from God, and for God. Grateful readers will find this book highly informative on Edwards and deeply encouraging for the Christian life today.”

Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of
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“No one has taught me more about the dynamics of Christian living than has Jonathan Edwards. And no one has more clearly articulated the role of beauty in Edwards’s understanding of the Christian life than has Dane Ortlund. If you’re unfamiliar with Edwards, or if you wonder how beauty could possibly have any lasting effect in your growth as a Christian, this book is for you.”

Sam Storms, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“What a delight to see a book on Edwards’s conception of the Christian life. And how beautiful it is that it depicts the Christian life as ordered by and to the beauty of God. This book will help strengthen the fertilization of today’s churches by Edwards’s vision of God’s triune beauty.”

Gerald R. McDermott, Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion, Roanoke
College; coauthor, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*

“Edwards is profound, and this book breaks down the complexity into manageable portions around the theme of beauty, thus engaging readers in a fresh vision of the importance of Edwards’s theology to contemporary living.”

Josh Moody, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois; author,
Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent

“The supreme value of reading Edwards is that we are ushered into a universe brimming with beauty,’ writes Ortlund. I couldn’t agree more. And one would be hard-pressed to find a more engaging introduction to this universe for the church. Even the final chapter, on ways in which we should *not* follow Edwards, offers crucial Christian wisdom. Ortlund’s criticisms of Edwards hit the mark—and deserve consideration by Edwards’s growing number of fans. I plan to use them with my seminary students in years to come. Please peruse this beautiful book. It’s good for the soul.”

Douglas A. Sweeney, Professor of Church History, Director of the Jonathan Edwards Center, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

EDWARDS

on the Christian Life

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EDITED BY STEPHEN J. NICHOLS AND JUSTIN TAYLOR

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EDWARDS

on the Christian Life

ALIVE TO THE BEAUTY OF GOD

DANE C. ORTLUND

Foreword by George M. Marsden

 **CROSSWAY**
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To Granddad

*As much as anyone I've known,
you were—and are much more now—
alive to beauty.*

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SERIES PREFACE

Some might call us spoiled. We live in an era of significant and substantial resources for Christians on living the Christian life. We have ready access to books, DVD series, online material, seminars—all in the interest of encouraging us in our daily walk with Christ. The laity, the people in the pew, have access to more information than scholars dreamed of having in previous centuries.

Yet for all our abundance of resources, we also lack something. We tend to lack the perspectives from the past, perspectives from a different time and place than our own. To put the matter differently, we have so many riches in our current horizon that we tend not to look to the horizons of the past.

That is unfortunate, especially when it comes to learning about and practicing discipleship. It's like owning a mansion and choosing to live in only one room. This series invites you to explore the other rooms.

As we go exploring, we will visit places and times different from our own. We will see different models, approaches, and emphases. This series does not intend for these models to be copied uncritically, and it certainly does not intend to put these figures from the past high upon a pedestal like some race of super-Christians. This series intends, however, to help us in the present listen to the past. We believe there is wisdom in the past twenty centuries of the church, wisdom for living the Christian life.

Stephen J. Nichols and Justin Taylor

PREFACE

Thirty years after Jonathan Edwards died, Ezra Stiles, president of Yale, predicted that Edwards's books would soon enjoy "transient notice perhaps scarce above oblivion" and that "when posterity occasionally comes across them in the rubbish of libraries, the rare characters who may read and be pleased with them will be looked upon as singular and whimsical."¹

Ezra who?

To me—and, according to any decent library's section on Edwards, to many others—it is a small price to pay to be viewed as "singular and whimsical" when reading and enjoying the writings of Jonathan Edwards. The supreme value of reading Edwards—by which I have in mind reading not for the sake of academic cleverness but for the sake of one's soul—is not historical insight or doctrinal sharpening or moral improvement, though these things happen. The supreme value of reading Edwards is that we are ushered into a universe brimming with beauty. Edwards walks us through the wardrobe into Narnia. We are given glasses—not sunglasses, which dim everything, but their opposite: lenses that brighten everything.

Much has been written on Edwards in recent years. Do we really need another book on the man? And yet, surprisingly little has been said at a nontechnical level that connects his theology of Christian living with the current state of the church. Even if much *had* been written on his theology

¹ Ezra Stiles, *Literary Diary*, quoted in Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3. The original reference can be found in Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D. LL.D.*, 3 vols. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901), 3:275.

of the Christian life, those who have spent time with Edwards will agree that complaining about another Edwards book today is like complaining about another meal today. Regular nourishment doesn't get old.

The purpose of this book is to reflect on how a Massachusetts pastor three hundred years ago understood the Christian life and, upon this reflection, to be changed, so that we are slightly different people than we would otherwise be. Calmer, gentler, happier. A little brighter, to use Edwards's favorite metaphor. More beautiful. More *human*.

We are simply asking, then, under Jonathan Edwards's tutelage: What does it mean to live as a Christian? What is a Christian?

Edwards's answer exposes our misconceptions. To live as a Christian *at its core* is not to adhere to a set of morals, or to assent to right doctrine, or to champion a set of ethical causes, or to passively receive forgiveness of sins, or to attend church or give to the poor or say the right prayer or come from a godly family.

All these have value. But for Edwards, none of them is definitive of Christian living. The Christian life, he says, is to enjoy and reflect the beauty of God. Everything Edwards wrote on Christian living funnels down into this. All the obedience and giving and generosity and kindness and praying and Bible reading in the world, without a heart-sense of divine beauty, is empty. Even damning.

Our strategy will be to ask twelve questions about the Christian life and provide, from Edwards, corresponding answers. These will form the chapters of this book, with a final, thirteenth chapter diagnosing four weaknesses in Edwards's view of the Christian life. Twelve chapters identify what we can learn from Edwards; one chapter identifies what he could learn from us. In brief the twelve questions and answers are these:

1. What is the overarching, integrating theme to Edwards's theology of the Christian life?

Beauty.

2. How is this heart-sense of beauty ignited? How does it all get started? What must happen for anyone to first glimpse the beauty of God?

New birth.

3. Having begun, what then is the essence of the Christian life? What does seeing God's beauty create in us? What's the heart and soul of Christian living?

Love.

4. How does love fuel the Christian life? What's the nonnegotiable of all nonnegotiables that will keep us loving? What does divine beauty give us?

Joy.

5. And what uniquely marks such love and joy? What is the aroma of the Christian life? What in Edwards's portrait of the Christian life is most lacking in our own world today?

Gentleness.

6. Where do I go to get this love, joy, and gentleness? How can I find it? What, concretely, sustains this kind of life through all our ups and downs?

The Bible.

7. But as I go to the Bible, what do I do with it as I read? How do I own it, make it mine, turn it into this joy-fueled love?

Prayer.

8. What then is the overall flavor of the Christian life? What is the aura, the feel, of following Christ in a world of moral chaos and pain?

Pilgrimage.

9. As new birth, Bible, prayer, and all the rest go in, what comes out? What is the fruit of the Christian life?

Obedience.

10. Who is the great enemy of Christian living? Who wishes above all to prevent loving, joyful, gentle lives?

Satan.

11. What is the great concern of the Christian life? Toward what, supremely, should our efforts be directed as we walk with God?

The soul.

12. Finally, what does all this funnel into? When will we be permanently and fully and unfaithfully alive to beauty? What, above all else, is the great hope of the Christian life?

Heaven.

So we will learn from Jonathan Edwards about the Christian life.

Some might be skeptical. Understandably so. How does a man who never typed an e-mail or drove a car or swung a golf club or watched a Super Bowl or blogged or tweeted or Skyped help me live my twenty-first-century Christian life? Not much if what matters essentially in Christian living is what we do. A lot if what matters essentially in Christian living is what we are. The way to make a wilting rose bush as healthy as the lush cherry tree next door isn't to glue cherries onto it but to plant that rose bush in the same rich soil. The point of this book is not mainly to encourage us to imitate Edwards's life externally. The point is to encourage us all to draw nourishment from the same rich soil of divine beauty that made Edwards's own life so abundantly fruitful.

"There is a brightness and glory in a Christian life," preached Jonathan Edwards. There was in his. I want there to be in ours. Edwards helps get us there.

I am grateful to Justin Taylor and Steve Nichols for inviting me to contribute this volume to this strategic series. What dear brothers these two men are. And Thom Notaro's editing was outstanding.

During the writing of this book I was helped more than words can say in living the Christian life by the Fight Night men at Wheaton College: Erik, Wade, Ian, Tanner, Dave, Ben, Adam, Bobby, and the two Marks. You men make me want to live well. You help me see the beauty of God.

This book is dedicated to my grandfather, Ray Ortlund Sr. (1923–2007), because he was for me a flesh-and-blood incarnation of the radiant beauty to which Edwards summons us. I love you, Gramps, and miss you. What Edwards preached, you were.

Above all, you, Stacey, have been the greatest earthly encouragement to me. (How are you more cheerful than ever after twelve years of living with me?)

What fun it will be to sit with Jonathan Edwards in the new earth some day, just the two of us, and say to him, to God's glory, "May I tell you how you helped me to live the Christian life? . . ."

CHAPTER 3

LOVE

The Essence of the Christian Life

Augustine has been called “the theologian of love,”¹ and rightly so. But Jonathan Edwards could equally lay claim to that title. One scholar called Edwards the “theologian of the Great Commandment.”² If there is one mark of the Christian life to which Edwards returns more than any other, it is love.

Love, Edwards says, is “the life and soul of all religion.”³ It is definitive, not merely descriptive, of authentic Christianity. What is the essence of the Christian life? Tunneling down, drilling in, to the very heart and pulsating core of what it means to be a follower of Christ, what do we find? Edwards answers: love.

In this chapter we consider Edwards’s vision of love. We begin by reflecting on what he believed is the fountain of all true love—God’s own love among the persons of the Trinity. We then turn to our love, love that expresses itself both vertically (for God) and horizontally (for others). Because the focus of this book is Edwards’s view of the Christian life, we will spend the bulk of this chapter reflecting on love as exercised by the

¹ E.g., Heiko Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, trans. Andrew Colin Gow (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 82; Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2010), 56.

² Joseph G. Haroutunian, “Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Great Commandment,” *Theology Today* 1 (1944): 361–77. See also Conrad Cherry’s remarks on Edwards’s greater emphasis on love than Calvin and Luther (Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990], 77). George Marsden writes that the sermons of *Charity and Its Fruits*, “simple and practical as they were, stood close to the heart of Edwards’ theological enterprise” (George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004], 191).

³ *WJE*, 8:131.

believer, identifying seven elements of special importance to Edwards as he describes Christian love.

Divine Love in the Godhead: Love in Heaven

For Jonathan Edwards, the fountain for all Christian loving is the love of God himself. This love has existed within the Godhead from all eternity, ultimately spilling out in the divine act of creation, an act that filled no need on God's part but was simply the natural overflow of God's own joyous intratrinitarian refulgence.

The mutual rejoicing that takes place within the Godhead is expressed most clearly by Edwards in his famous essay on the Trinity. He opens by asserting that the tri-unity of God is not unbelievable but rather a sensible and even necessary conclusion if we are to take seriously the fact that God loves. Reflecting on the two places in 1 John where we are told that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), Edwards argues that this assertion "shows that there are more persons than one in the Deity: for it shows love to be essential and necessary to the Deity, so that his nature consists in it."⁴ Love is who God is. For God to love is for God to be God. "The very nature of God is love. If it should be enquired what God is, it might be answered that he is an infinite and incomprehensible fountain of love."⁵

In his famous *Discourse on the Trinity*, Edwards describes the Trinity precisely in terms of intratrinitarian love. Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is "God's idea of himself"⁶—the form, image, representation of the Father. Between these two, Father and Son, "there proceeds a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and Son: for their love and joy is mutual, in mutually loving and delighting in each other."⁷ Edwards then makes the striking claim that this holy energy of love between Father and Son is the Holy Spirit. Drawing on 1 John 4, he suggests that if God dwelling in believers produces love in them (1 John 4:12), and God dwells in believers by his Spirit (1 John 4:13), then this divine love in them must, quite simply, be the Holy Spirit. The Spirit "is God's infinite love to

⁴ *WJE*, 21:113–14; similarly, in a miscellany written when he was twenty years old, see *WJE*, 13:262, and the comments on this miscellany of Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 4–5.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "The Spirit of the True Saints Is a Spirit of Divine Love," in *The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Michael D. McMullen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 305.

⁶ *WJE*, 21:120.

⁷ *WJE*, 21:121.

himself and happiness in himself.”⁸ Edwards returns to this point repeatedly throughout this essay, speaking of the Trinity in terms of love in an effort to correct a perceived neglect of the Spirit in Trinitarian thought.⁹ For Edwards, “the very essence of God” is “divine love.” And this divine love is “the Holy Spirit, the spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, all flows out or is breathed forth in love.”¹⁰ This close identification of love with the Holy Spirit is the reason this book does not have a separate chapter on the Holy Spirit. A treatment of divine love is a treatment of the Spirit.

To say that “God is love,” then, for Edwards, is not a doctrinally anemic reduction of the full character of God, who, the Bible teaches, is not only “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger” but also one “who will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:6–7). Wrath and justice belong to the character of this full, biblical God no less than love. After all, the Bible tells us not only that “God is love” but also that “God is light” (1 John 1:5)—holy light; that is, light as opposed to (moral) darkness. Yet God’s love is more astonishing and wonderful, not less, when set against the full backdrop of the panorama of God’s diverse attributes.

When Edwards teaches what it means to say that “God is love,” then, he has in mind a doctrinally robust and non-reductionistic view of divine love. He has in mind the holy energy of mutual delight exercised within the Godhead himself: the Father and the Son rejoicing in and spotlighting one another, with a delight the energy of which is the Holy Spirit. This is the love of God.

And this love, for Edwards, impelled the creation of the world. The very nature of God’s intratrinitarian love means it must spill forth in outward expression. It resists being contained. In this sense God’s love is the most unstoppable force in the universe. For love by its very nature seeks the good of the other, rejoices in the other. Static love is self-contradictory. “The creation of the world,” says Edwards, “is to gratify divine love.”¹¹

Divine Love in His People: Love on Earth

As we transition from love in God to love in believers, the one who loves changes but the nature of love itself does not. For the love that dwells in the

⁸ *WJE*, 21:138.

⁹ “If we suppose no more than used to be supposed about the Holy Ghost, the concern of the Holy Ghost in the work of redemption is not equal with the Father’s and the Son’s, nor is there an equal part of the glory of this work [that] belongs to him” (*WJE*, 21:137).

¹⁰ *WJE*, 8:370.

¹¹ *WJE*, 21:142.

heart of believers is, according to Edwards, divine love. Christian love is the implantation of the very love of God. The creature is, as Lewis put it, caught up in the great dance.¹² The new birth incorporates a human creature into the mutually flowing, and overflowing, intratrinitarian love of God. When Edwards speaks of “divine love,” therefore, he is often referring not to God’s love as exercised by God but to God’s love as inhabiting and exercised by believers.

Before moving to divine love in Edwards’s theology of the Christian life, we should make two further clarifications.

First, Edwards speaks of love in terms of benevolence and also in terms of complacency. These were commonly used categories of eighteenth-century discussions of morality, though we don’t use the terms today. By love of *benevolence* he means delighting in the welfare of another. By love of *complacency* he means simply delighting in another.¹³ Benevolence wishes for good to be enjoyed *by* the beloved; complacency wishes to enjoy good *in* the beloved.¹⁴ And it is complacency, says Edwards, that is the more fundamental element in divine love and which he is describing in *Charity and Its Fruits*. Complacency will therefore be our focus as we discuss Edwards’s vision of love in the Christian life.

Second, Edwards is uncomfortable with any strong disjunction between Christian love for God and Christian love for others. The two can be distinguished but not separated. We see this in Edwards’s identification of divine love with the Holy Spirit. When God saves a human being and pours his Holy Spirit into that person, God is, to say the same thing a different way, pouring his love into that person. Edwards notes in a miscellany that this is exactly what one would expect from a close reading of the New Testament, which speaks not only of God “pouring out” his Holy Spirit into believers (Acts 2:17–18; Titus 3:6) but also of God “pouring out” his love into believers (Rom. 5:5).¹⁵ “Christian love to both God and men,” says Edwards, “is wrought in the heart by the same work of the Spirit. There are not two works of the Spirit of God, one to infuse a spirit of love to God and another a spirit of love to men.” Instead, “in doing one he doth the other.”¹⁶ The Holy Spirit establishes within God’s children a new outward-oriented impulse

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr., San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 175; cf. Lewis, *Perelandra* (1944; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 183–87.

¹³ *WJE*, 8:212–13.

¹⁴ See the editorial remarks in *WJE*, 8:73–74; cf. 8:143.

¹⁵ Miscellany no. 336, in *WJE*, 13:412.

¹⁶ *WJE*, 8:133.

that, while finding expression both vertically and horizontally, is a single impulse nonetheless. True love to God will always be accompanied by love to people; true love to people will always be accompanied by love to God. “The Spirit of God in the work of conversion renews the heart by giving it a divine temper. . . . And it is the same divine temper which is wrought in the heart that flows out in love both to God and men.”¹⁷

We move, then, to considering seven core axioms that draw out Edwards’s magnificent vision of love in the Christian life.

Love Sums Up the Entire Christian Life

In the first of these seven characteristics of love, we arrive at the heart of this chapter and, perhaps, the heart of this book on Jonathan Edwards’s teaching on the Christian life. The Christian life, if nothing else, is a life of love. Believers delight in the well-being and joy of others. It is who they are.

Love, says Edwards, is “the greatest and most essential thing, and indeed the sum of all that is essential, distinguishing and saving in Christianity, and . . . the very life and soul of all religion.”¹⁸ To be a Christian is to love. Love is neither optional nor peripheral. It is not required of only certain personality types. A Christian is one who has been welcomed into the great dance of mutual delight within the triune Godhead, having had the very love of this Godhead implanted in his own soul.

The supremacy of love in Christian living is especially clear in Edwards’s opening sermon of *Charity and Its Fruits*. The whole fifteen-sermon series is based on 1 Corinthians 13, and this first sermon has in mind the first three verses in particular, which read:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1–3)

Edwards observes that the Christian realities with which love is compared here—angelic tongues, prophetic powers, vast knowledge, mountain-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *WJE*, 8:185; see also 4:298–99; 25:91, 527. On love as the sum of the Christian life in Edwards’s theology, see Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 537–41.

moving faith—could not be higher or more lofty. Yet they are all rendered utterly worthless without love. “Let a man have what he will, and let him do what he will, it signifies nothing without charity.”¹⁹ For love “is the life and soul of all religion, without which other things . . . are empty and vain.”²⁰

While Paul can at times speak of love as one virtue among others (Gal. 5:22–23), Edwards would say that even when love appears in a list alongside other virtues, these others are all subsumed within, or are diverse manifestations of, love. Love is “a comprehension of all virtues.”²¹ This is why “divine love is the sum of all holiness.”²²

For a Christian, moreover, love is not a bonus to sound doctrine—a nice extra or add-on for some believers. No, love is the very point of sound doctrine. Sound doctrine without love is itself deeply self-contradictory—“a cold and hard-hearted Christian is the greatest absurdity and contradiction. It is as if one should speak of dark brightness, or a false truth!”²³ Accumulation of doctrinal knowledge nets out as loss, not gain, if such theological growth fails to foster benevolent, heartfelt goodwill toward others.

Doubtless there are many nowadays greatly to be reprov'd for this, that although they have been so long in the school of Christ, and under the teachings of the gospel, they yet remain, in a great measure, ignorant what kind of spirit a truly Christian spirit is, what spirit is proper for the followers of Christ and for the gospel dispensation under which we live.²⁴

Accumulated doctrinal knowledge does not offset the need for love. On the contrary, the greater one’s doctrinal sophistication, the greater the obligation to leverage such knowledge into love.

In centralizing love, Edwards stands in good company. He is simply echoing the teaching of Paul, who declared to a mightily gifted church that “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13); of John, who pronounced that “anyone who does not love does not know God” (1 John 4:8); of James, who equated love with fulfilling the whole law (James 2:8); of Peter, who ex-

¹⁹ WJE, 8:131. It should be clarified that when Edwards speaks of “charity,” he has in mind not acts of monetary generosity to the needy but, more broadly, “love”—as Edwards himself explains in the opening pages to this first sermon of *Charity and Its Fruits* (WJE, 8:129–30).

²⁰ WJE, 8:131.

²¹ WJE, 8:136.

²² WJE, 8:360.

²³ WJE, 8:147.

²⁴ WJE, 8:143.

horted his readers that they “above all, keep loving one another earnestly” (1 Pet. 4:8); and of Jesus himself, who proclaimed that the greatest commandment of all is that of love (Mark 12:28–31).

Christian Love Lies beneath Every Other Virtue

Divinely implanted love is not only the sum of all Christian living but also the “root and spring” of all Christian living.²⁵ Not only does love fulfill all that a Christian is called to do. It is also true that any given virtue is, when considered carefully, a specific manifestation of love. Love is “that from which all good dispositions and behavior do arise, the stock on which all good fruit grows, and the fountain in which all that is good is contained and from whence it flows.”²⁶

This becomes clear in reading through the middle sermons of *Charity and Its Fruits*, which expound Paul’s multifaceted description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 (remember that by “charity” Edwards simply refers to love). As Edwards begins in the fourth sermon to preach on the characteristics of love identified in verses 4–7, he speaks of these characteristics of love as “fruits” of charity.²⁷

Long-suffering, therefore, which Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:4, is simply a very specific manifestation of love. Edwards shows this in two ways—vertically and horizontally. Vertically, love to God breeds long-suffering through the gratitude evoked by considering God’s long-suffering shown *us*.²⁸ Love to God also cultivates long-suffering by putting believers out of reach from the ill will of others. “None can hurt those who are true lovers of God,” says Edwards. “The more men love God, the more they will place all their happiness in God; they will look on God as their all, and this happiness and portion is what men cannot touch.”²⁹ Supreme love to God gives Christians a kind of quiet invincibility, for no earthly pain can threaten their greatest love, which is God himself. Love, then, is itself the source of long-suffering. Put differently, long-suffering is what love does when under duress. Long-suffering is love afflicted. In this and subsequent sermons in *Charity and Its Fruits* Edwards goes on to make similar arguments about love lying beneath all the various virtues listed in 1 Corinthe-

²⁵ WJE, 8:136.

²⁶ WJE, 8:351; see also 2:106.

²⁷ WJE, 8:185.

²⁸ WJE, 8:194.

²⁹ WJE, 8:195.

ans 13:4–7. Love lies beneath kindness (sermon 4), not envying (sermon 5), not boasting (sermon 6), not being selfish (sermon 7), not being easily provoked (sermon 8), not being judgmental (sermon 9), rejoicing in the truth (sermon 10), and suffering for Christ (sermon 11).

The way all these are simply manifestations of love is further reinforced in sermon 12, in which Edwards proposes that all these virtues are, to use his word, “concatenated”—that is, “the graces of Christianity are all linked together or united one to another and within one another, as the links of a chain.”³⁰ And the fundamental link in this chain is love. After all, all the graces of Christianity are the fruit of the Holy Spirit, yet Edwards, we have seen, equates the Holy Spirit with the love that is planted in believers. As a result, “however many names we may give the different ways and manners of the exercise of grace; yet if we strictly examine them, they are all related to one.”³¹ That one, he says, is love.

Every particular evidence of grace emanating from a true believer, according to Edwards, is the fruit of love.³²

Love Is More “Excellent” than the Extraordinary Gifts

This is the point of the second sermon in *Charity and Its Fruits*. As the thesis statement of that sermon puts it, “The ordinary influence of God’s Spirit, working saving grace in the heart, is a more excellent blessing than any of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.”³³ By “excellent” Edwards means having spiritual harmony and beauty.

The question of Edwards’s cessationism need not come into play here, for Edwards’s point is rooted in what was true of the first century, when the supernatural gifts were, by any account, in action. By “extraordinary gifts” we have in mind here, as Edwards did, tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith.³⁴

Edwards was aware of how believers tend to exaggerate the spiritual significance of the more flashy signs of the Spirit while underplaying the spiritual significance of the quieter, less fantastic signs of the Spirit. Yet such prioritizing is backward. The (ordinary) fruit of the Spirit takes spiri-

³⁰ WJE, 8:327.

³¹ WJE, 8:333.

³² See also Stephen A. Wilson, *Virtue Reformed: Rereading Jonathan Edwards’s Ethics*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 117.

³³ WJE, 8:152.

³⁴ By the latter two, Edwards has in mind supernatural or special gifts of knowledge and faith, not the universal growth in knowledge and everyday exercise of faith that are to be displayed in all believers.

tual precedence over the (extraordinary) gifts. And the fruit of the Spirit is summed up, at its core, in love.³⁵

In all this Edwards does not want to let the pendulum swing too far in the other direction, trading in an unhealthy obsessing with the extraordinary for an unhealthy sidelining of the extraordinary. He spends a good portion of his sermon defending the great privilege of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit as described in the New Testament.³⁶

When God endows anyone with a spirit of prophecy and favors him with immediate inspiration, or when he gives any a power of working miracles, healing the sick, casting out devils, and the like, these are great privileges which God bestows on men; they are the highest kind of privileges which he bestows on men next to saving grace.³⁷

Edwards avoids being reactionary, then. In his eagerness to lift up the pre-eminence of love he does not treat the extraordinary gifts with unhealthy disdain or suspicion. Yet, as great a privilege as the extraordinary gifts are, “the ordinary influences of the Spirit of God working grace in the heart is a far greater privilege.”³⁸

What is so striking about this sermon, in particular, is the *penetration* Edwards applies to the relationship between the ordinary and extraordinary gifts. Consider how he reasons in this extended quote, noting especially how he connects the ordinary gifts with the very “nature” of a man:

This blessing of the saving grace of God is a quality inherent in the nature of him who is the subject of it. This gift of the Spirit of God, working a saving Christian temper and exciting gracious exercises, confers a blessing which has its seat in the heart; a blessing which makes a man's heart and nature excellent. Yea, the very excellency of the nature consists in it. Now it is not so with respect to those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. They are excellent things, but not properly the excellency of a man's nature; for they are not things which are inherent in the nature. . . . Extraordinary gifts are nothing properly inherent in the man. . . . Extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are, as it were, precious jewels, which a man carries about him. But true grace in the heart is, as it were, the preciousness of the heart,

³⁵ WJE, 8:169.

³⁶ WJE, 8:154–57.

³⁷ WJE, 8:154.

³⁸ WJE, 8:157.

by which it becomes precious or excellent; by which the very soul itself becomes a precious jewel.³⁹

The ordinary exercise of grace in the heart, in other words, supremely manifested in love, expresses who the believer is. Love is native to the believer. The extraordinary gifts are, so to speak, foreign to the believer. They are temporary expressions that do not emanate from the believer's very heart in the same way that love does. Edwards drives his point home with the poignant observation that the extraordinary gifts are not reserved for those closest to God, but have been manifested in the downright godless—Balaam, King Saul, Judas, and the followers of Christ who prophesied and cast out demons yet are rejected on the final day (Matt. 7:22–23).⁴⁰

Extraordinary grace is great grace. Ordinary grace, expressed supremely in Christian love, is the greatest grace.

Christian Love Cannot Sit Still

The main point of the tenth sermon in *Charity and Its Fruits* is that “all true Christian grace tends to [i.e., leads to] holy practice.” By “holy practice” Edwards means concrete godliness in daily living. Just as God's love had to spill out in creation, Christian love has to spill out in concrete action.

The need for godliness to work itself out in light of what God has done in the new birth is a recurrent theme throughout Edwards's writings. In *Religious Affections*, for example, the twelfth and final sign of authentic godliness that Edwards lists is this very thing. True godly affections *act*.⁴¹ Edwards gives this sign more space (about 80 pages) than any of the other eleven signs. We will return to the importance of “practice,” fruit-bearing obedience in Christian living, in chapter 7.

Here, specifically, we note the way Edwards roots Christian practice in love. Reflecting on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:6 that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth, Edwards interprets “wrongdoing” (or “iniquity” as his KJV put it) as “everything which is sinful in life and practice,” and “truth” as “everything which is good in life.”⁴² In short, then, Paul is teaching here that love rejoices in what is morally right and

³⁹ WJE, 8:157–58.

⁴⁰ WJE, 8:159–61.

⁴¹ WJE, 2:383–461.

⁴² WJE, 8:293.

acts accordingly. Love thus spurs us toward “walking in holy practice, or well-doing.”⁴³

Such well-doing, says Edwards, is not merely *descriptive* but *definitive* of love. Love *loves*. Love that sits still is not real love. “A principle of love is a principle whence flow acts of love.”⁴⁴ One cannot choose between divine love residing in the heart and a life of love toward others. It is both or neither. To lack one is to prove that one lacks the other. Though Edwards does not draw attention to this fact, every descriptor of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 is in verbal form. Thus “love is patient” is the Greek noun *love* with the Greek verb for “be patient.” “Love is kind” is the noun for love with the verb for “act kindly.” It is difficult to express such verbs in English, and our best option makes it look as if Paul is using adjectives. But such is not the case, reinforcing Edwards’s penetrating point about the necessary movement of true divine love in the heart of the Christian.

True Christian love, then, cannot sit still. This is not to say, however, that a life of love is robotic or effortless. “Labor to live a life of love,” he exhorts.⁴⁵ Nor is it to say that by “practice” Edwards has in mind only external, visible actions. That would be a reductionistic misunderstanding of Edwards at this point. By “practice” he has in mind not only observable acts of goodwill but also actions such as “desires after God,” “delighting in God and taking contentment in him.”⁴⁶ This too is love-induced Christian “practice,” even if such practice is invisible to the eyes of others. Indeed, Edwards knew well from observing revival up close that such invisibility was a safeguard against the incorrigible human proclivity to parade virtue, however subtly, for others to see.

And yet, on the flipside, Edwards’s theology of love was not ethereal and abstract. Time and again, for example, he preached on the Christian’s bound duty to assist the poor in tangible ways.⁴⁷ Edwards’s preaching ministry, taken as a whole, resists the disjunction one often sees today between caring for the soul and caring for the body.

Powerfully defending his assertion that love necessarily exercises itself, Edwards draws attention to the universally verifiable truth that we always act on what we truly love. Indeed, we cannot help but act out our true

⁴³ WJE, 8:294. Cf. John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 110–11.

⁴⁴ WJE, 8:298.

⁴⁵ Edwards, “Spirit of the True Saints,” 333.

⁴⁶ WJE, 8:303.

⁴⁷ E.g., WJE, 2:430; 8:174–75; 17:369–404.

loves. The professing Christian who says he loves Christ above all as he consistently bends the truth in an effort to cultivate a certain reputation does not love Christ's name above all, but loves his own name. "A man's actions are the most proper trial and evidence of his love."⁴⁸ Our actions show who, and what, we really love. Speaking of our idols as "creature objects," Edwards observes: "Love to creature objects, we see, does powerfully influence men in their actions and practice. Yea, what is it which chiefly keeps the world of mankind in action from day to day, and from year to year, but love of some kind or other."⁴⁹ He then gives examples of what he means:

He who loves money is influenced by his love of that enjoyment in his practice, and kept in continual pursuit of it. And he who loves honor is governed in his practice by that. His actions through the course of his life are regulated by such a principle. And so lovers of carnal pleasures; how they pursue after them in their practice! And so also he who truly loves God is influenced by that in his practice; he earnestly seeks God in the course of his life, seeks his favor and acceptance, and seeks his glory.⁵⁰

True love to God is restless. Like the kicking legs of an infant, the vitality that resides in love insists on expressing itself.⁵¹

Real Christian Love Is Always Linked with Truth

Here we connect love with another pervasive theme in Edwards—the union of light and heat, mind and heart, thinking and feeling. "The peculiarity of Edwards' theological work," wrote B. B. Warfield, "is due to the union in it of the richest religious sentiment with the highest intellectual powers."⁵² Here I wish only to point out, however, the way Edwards applies this wedding of thought and affection to Christian love.

Divine love in the soul of a Christian, for Edwards, can be exercised with spiritual health no further than such love is built on the solid foundation of truth. Truth kindles love. "When the truth of the glorious doctrines

⁴⁸ WJE, 8:302.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ WJE, 8:302–3.

⁵¹ Note Gerald R. McDermott's comments along these lines in his delineation of love as a public virtue in *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 108–9.

⁵² B. B. Warfield, "Edwards and the New England Theology," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1952), 527–28.

and promises of the gospel is seen, those doctrines and those promises are like so many bands, which take hold of the heart to draw it in love to God and Christ.”⁵³ Edwards says that love is “the life and soul of a practical faith. A truly practical and saving faith is light and heat together, or light and love. That which is only speculative, is only light without heat.”⁵⁴ Such a life is no different from the devils, Edwards goes on to say. Truth without love describes Satan himself. He is the best theologian in the universe. As Edwards puts it in a 1752 sermon, “The devil is orthodox in his faith; he believes the true scheme of doctrine; he is no Deist, Socinian, Arian, Pelagian, or antinomian; the articles of his faith are all sound.”⁵⁵ The Devil’s orthodoxy is not linked with *love*.

Truth is not only the kindling for love but also its test. Truth not only precedes love, fueling it, but also follows love, circumscribing it. When we think we are acting in love, we can test such experience with doctrinal truth as found in the Bible. If professing believers

seem to have an affectionate love towards God and Christ, they should inquire whether this be accompanied with a real conviction of the soul of the reality of Christ, of the truth of the gospel which reveals him, with a conviction that he is the Son of God, that he is the only Savior, the glorious and all-sufficient Savior. Herein is one great difference between false affections and true affections: false affections and a delusory saving love to God and Christ are not accompanied with this conviction; they do not withal see the truth and reality of divine things.⁵⁶

This statement, which comes in the course of Edwards’s twelfth sermon in *Charity and Its Fruits*, was reiterated a few years later in the fifth of his twelve signs of authentic spirituality in *Religious Affections*: “Truly gracious affections are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things.”⁵⁷ Authentic feeling and doctrinal fidelity rise and fall together. It is not surprising, then, that in Edwards’s delineation in *Distinguishing Marks* of the five positive signs that identify a work of the Spirit of God, the fourth is the

⁵³ WJE, 8:146.

⁵⁴ WJE, 8:139; see also 8:296–97.

⁵⁵ Edward Hickman, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (London, 1834; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:43.

⁵⁶ WJE, 8:336.

⁵⁷ WJE, 2:291. As John E. Smith puts it in an editorial comment, Edwards “did not, in his insistence that the seat of true virtue or of divine love was in the heart, so bifurcate men that the new sense of heart was without conviction concerning the truth” (WJE, 8:336n3).

upholding of truth, and the fifth is genuine love.⁵⁸ In all this we see that the emphasis on love in Edwards's theology of the Christian life does not find faithful descendants in the theologies of Schleiermacher and his heirs, who extract the subjective (experienced love) to the neglect of the objective (revealed truth).

Love without truth is rootless. Truth without love is lifeless. Neither is true Christianity. True divine love is never divorced from, but always founded on, God-revealed truth.

Divine Love Is the Sweetest Earthly Joy

The first two virtues listed by Paul in Galatians 5 as the "fruit of the Spirit" are love and joy. For Edwards, as for the apostle, the two belong naturally together. Though we will deal with Edwards's theology of joy more fully in the next chapter, here we briefly comment on joy's relationship to love.

Divine love in the heart of a Christian is the sweetest joy that can be experienced in this world. Genuine happiness is not something to be sought alongside love but something to be enjoyed in divine love. A life of love is the only life of solid joy. And in the case of both love and joy, the regenerate are experiencing the very life of the Trinity. The believer's joy is a vital participation in the joy that the persons of the triune God have been mutually enjoying in one another from eternity, and the believer's love is a vital participation in the love that the persons of the triune God have been mutually expressing in one another.

The connection between joy and love comes through especially clearly in a sermon on 1 John 4:16 entitled "The Spirit of the True Saints Is a Spirit of Divine Love."⁵⁹ In some ways this sermon may sum up the heart of Edwards's theology of the Christian life more than any other single extant sermon. Several distinctly Edwardsian emphases are here: the beauty of God, the new birth, satisfaction in God as our supreme happiness, the nature of hell and Satan, Christ as the supreme manifestation of God's mercy, humility, the Holy Spirit as the divine energy of delight between the Father and the Son, the labor involved in Christian living—and, of course, love.

What is especially noteworthy for our purposes is the way Edwards consistently intertwines joy and love in the Christian life. "They who love

⁵⁸ *WJE*, 4:254–59. See also Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 312.

⁵⁹ Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 297–344.

God set their hearts on the secret of happiness which will never fail them, and they will be happy to all eternity in spite of death and hell.”⁶⁰ How is it, though, that divine love can never fail us? “He who has divine love in him has a wellspring of true happiness that he carries about in his own breast, a fountain of sweetness, a spring of the water of life. There is a pleasant calmness and serenity and brightness in the soul that accompanies the exercises of this holy affection.”⁶¹ Whatever circumstances befall the Christian, nothing can steal such love as long as the believer delights in God above all.

The happiness that pervades lovers of God is so great, says Edwards, that it cannot be fully articulated.

The joy that a saint has in God and in a Redeemer is unspeakable. The unspeakableness of it seems to be a special property that belongs to it. There are no words to express that kind of sweetness or humble exultation that arises from the sensible presence of God to the soul that is filled with divine love.⁶²

The language of “sweetness” is deeply Edwardsian and expresses the exquisite pleasantness of divine love in the heart. “What more pleasant life can there be than a life of love?” he asks.⁶³

Other sermons reiterate the correlation between joy and love. The joy of heaven, says Edwards in the final sermon of *Charity and Its Fruits*, is the presence of divine love that will be perfectly enjoyed there. Believers “will live and . . . they will reign in love, and in that godlike joy which is the blessed fruit of it.”⁶⁴ In an earlier sermon in this series Edwards spoke of the way love produces joy on earth, too, when he called on believers “earnestly to seek the spirit of Christian love, that excellent spirit of divine charity which will lead us always to rejoice in the welfare of others and which will fill our own hearts with happiness.”⁶⁵

Divine love, flowing out to God and to men, is the sweetest, most pleasant earthly joy that can be experienced.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 304.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 310–11.

⁶⁴ *WJE*, 8:386.

⁶⁵ *WJE*, 8:231. See the comments of George M. Marsden, “Challenging the Presumptions of the Age: The Two Dissertations,” in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 112.

Christian Love Is Humble Love

With this seventh and final key mark of divine love we come to what is perhaps the most uniquely Edwardsian contribution to the historic church's understanding of what Christian love is. If there is only one characteristic of love to be identified in Edwards's theology of the Christian life, this is it. Real love is humble love. "He who has true divine love desires to be emptied of himself that God may fill him. He loves to renounce his own honor that God may have honor. . . . He loves to be low that God may be high."⁶⁶

This is the point of the sixth sermon of *Charity and Its Fruits*. "True divine love," says Edwards, "is an humble love. It is essential to true love that it be so that love that is not an humble love is not true divine love."⁶⁷ When a believer truly loves others, this love does not parade itself for the sake of being noticed. Such self-vaunting proves that it is not in fact love that is at work. Self-promoting acts of service may mimic the form but lack the essence of genuine love.

We should pause before moving on to be clear about what Edwards means by humility. Does he have in mind smarmy self-loathing? The groveling, misanthropic, psychological self-flagellation of those who refuse to think they might contribute anything valuable to the world? No—

True Christian humility of heart tends to make persons resigned to the will of God, patient and submissive to his holy hand under afflictions, full of awful reverence towards the Deity, ready to treat divine things with great respect, and of a meek behavior towards men, condescending to inferiors and respectful towards superiors, gentle, easy to be entreated, not self-willed, not envious, but contented with his own condition, of a peaceable and quiet spirit, not disposed bitterly to resent injuries, but apt to forgive.⁶⁸

Humility is not thinking poorly of oneself. It is rather thinking of oneself in harmonious proportion and appropriate relation to God.

If this is Edwards's description of humility, why is humility definitive of love? Edwards gives two answers.

First, when believers are born again, they are given a sense of the infinite loveliness of God as compared with us. Humility is generated not

⁶⁶ Edwards, "Spirit of the True Saints," 325.

⁶⁷ WJE, 8:243.

⁶⁸ WJE, 8:304–5. By "awful" Edwards means "awe-full."

simply in the new awareness that God is infinitely above us in greatness but also in the new awareness that he is infinitely above us in beauty. If all that were needed to generate humility were a sense of God's greatness, the demons would be the most humble beings in the universe, for they perceive God's infinitude more clearly than anyone else.⁶⁹

Second, the *gospel* results in humble love—"such kind of exercises of love as the gospel tends to draw forth do in a special manner tend to and imply humility." The reason for this is the humility God in Christ demonstrated in the provision of rescue and redemption for guilty sinners. "The gospel teaches how God . . . stooped so low as to take an infinitely gracious notice of poor vile worms of the dust, and to concern himself for their salvation, so as to send his only begotten Son to die for them that they might be honored and brought into eternal fellowship with him."⁷⁰ The gospel affects us not only with the astonishing condescension of God in the incarnation but also with the humility of Christ in his earthly life. "The gospel leads us to love Christ, as an humble person."⁷¹ And not only in his incarnation and life but also in his suffering and death we are led to humble love. "If we therefore behave ourselves as the followers of a crucified Jesus we shall walk humbly before God and men all the days of our lives."⁷² And finally, not only in his incarnation, life, and death, but also in his death *for our sins* we are brought to "humble exercises of love."⁷³

The unspeakable loveliness of God, then, and the humble sacrifice of Christ, unite to teach us that the love at the center of the Christian life is humble love. In short, that "divine love which is the sum of the Christian temper implies and tends to humility."⁷⁴

Before leaving this subject, consider once more the penetration that Edwards applies to the humility of divine love. When insisting that Christian love be flavored with humility, Edwards will not let his readers slip into a pattern of thinking well of their own humility—a thought pattern that is self-indicting, like a husband shouting at his wife, "I never shout at you!" or a former basketball star telling reporters, "I never like to mention the fact that I scored 42 points in my final game." As Conrad Cherry explains,

⁶⁹ WJE, 8:243–45. In *Religious Affections* Edwards unpacks his sixth sign of authentic Christianity (the one on humility) by speaking of no longer admiring one's own moral beauty but God's (WJE, 2:322–23).

⁷⁰ WJE, 8:247.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² WJE, 8:248.

⁷³ WJE, 8:249.

⁷⁴ WJE, 8:246.

“Genuine humility refuses to acknowledge as righteous *any* human experience, including humility itself. Humility is not a self-contained possession; it is not something one ‘has’ to which he can point. It is a relation.”⁷⁵

We see Edwards making this point most clearly in *Religious Affections* as he concludes his discussion of humility under the sixth sign of authentic affections. “Let not the reader lightly pass over these things in application to himself,” he says.

If you once have taken it in, that it is a bad sign for a person to be apt to think himself a better saint than others, there will arise a blinding prejudice in your own favor; and there will probably be need of a great strictness of self-examination, in order to determine whether it be so with you. If on the proposal of the question, you answer, “No, it seems to me, none are so bad as I.” Don’t let the matter pass off so; but examine again, whether or no you don’t think yourself better than others on this very account, because you imagine you think so meanly of yourself. Haven’t you an high opinion of this humility? And if you answer again, “No; I have not an high opinion of my humility; it seems to me I am as proud as the devil”; yet examine again, whether self-conceit don’t rise up under this cover; whether on this very account, that you think yourself as proud as the devil, you don’t think yourself to be very humble.⁷⁶

The very admission of pride, if given sustained self-reflection, naturally introduces pride. Looking at ourselves, even in sober acknowledgment of pride, tends toward pride, keeping true love beyond our reach. The only way out is to look at Christ. To look at our humility is to make it vanish; to look at the infinitely lovely God, supremely manifest in Christ, is to bring humility in the back door of the heart.

If anything distinguishes authentic love, it is humility. This is its surest test.⁷⁷ Love that lacks humility indicts itself, for love that is paraded for others to see is not divine love, from the Spirit, but self-love, from the flesh.

Conclusion

George Marsden insightfully observes that Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* stands in stark contrast to another book of the same time, Jonathan

⁷⁵ Cherry, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 81.

⁷⁶ WJE, 1:336.

⁷⁷ WJE, 4:257.

Edwards's *Life of David Brainerd*—Franklin portraying “the self-made man” and Brainerd “the self-renouncing man.”⁷⁸ Brainerd, the young missionary whom Edwards befriended, epitomized Edwards's theology of humble love.

In his poem “The Clod and the Pebble,” William Blake writes:

Love seeketh not itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.⁷⁹

This is Edwards's vision of the Christian life. The beautiful life is the life of love, of others-directed service and affection. With love, even circumstantial hell can be transformed into a taste of heaven.

A loveless Christian is not, for Jonathan Edwards, merely an unfortunate incompleteness; it is a profound contradiction. A Christian, by definition, is not someone who has taken up a new strategy for life, one element of which is love. A Christian—a true Christian—is someone whose inborn selfish tendencies have been decisively uprooted by the all-conquering love of God, love felt and made real through the Holy Spirit. Such a life has taken on an entirely new flavor. Sinful desires remain. The old man, though dying, is not yet dead. But a new impulse of tender goodwill now sits on the throne of the believer's heart. Selfishness still exists; but selfishness no longer reigns. As the final verse of Ephesians puts it, believers are those “who love our Lord Jesus Christ *with love incorruptible*” (Eph. 6:24).

At the end of the fourteenth sermon in *Charity and Its Fruits*, Edwards reflects on the eternal nature of divine love. His closing exhortation there leaves us with a poignant word on which to conclude this chapter.

This is the most excellent fruit of the Spirit. . . . Let us therefore earnestly seek this blessed fruit of the Spirit; and let us seek that it may abound in our hearts, that the love of God may more and more be shed abroad in our hearts, that we may love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and love one another as Christ hath loved us.⁸⁰

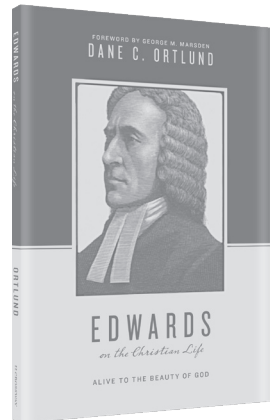
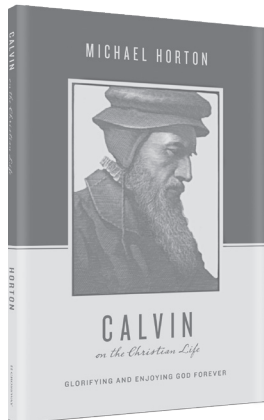
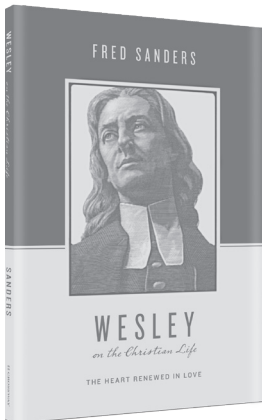
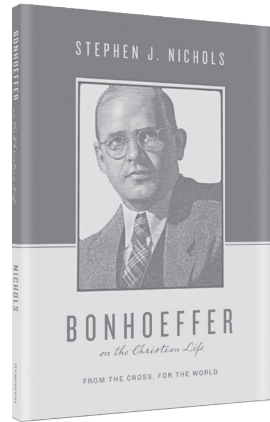
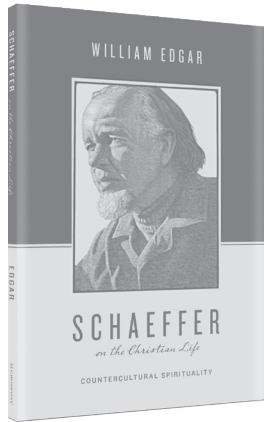
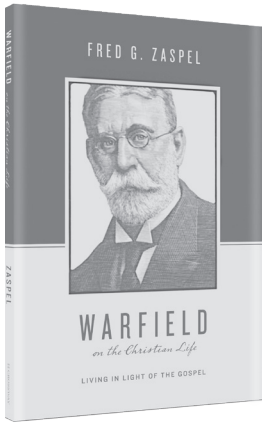
⁷⁸ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 333.

⁷⁹ William Blake, “The Clod and the Pebble,” in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 1979), 42.

⁸⁰ *WJE*, 8:365.

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