

CHRIST'S WORLD OF LOVE AND THE WAY OF LOVE - THE PREACHING OF JONATHAN EDWARDS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 13 – BY DR. PHIL LAYTON¹

Introduction

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) is widely recognized as “the most influential American-born theologian of the 18th century.”² He has been called colonial America’s foremost revivalist.³ As a “spiritual giant” on the landscape of church history,⁴ no less than Martyn Lloyd-Jones said if he compared the Puritans to the Alps, and the Reformers to the Himalayas, he’d compare Edwards to “Mount Everest ... this great peak pointing up to heaven,” which made him studying Edwards feel like a weak “little climber”⁵ (much more so, this student writing this paper!). Edwards is also regarded as the foremost *philosopher* in early America, and his extensive writings have impacted both evangelical and neorthodox movements.⁶ Even those in a 21st century youth movement can be seen sporting a “Jonathan Edwards is my homeboy” T-shirt.⁷ The most recent encyclopedia at a public library describes him as “the leading intellectual figure in colonial America.”⁸ An earlier encyclopedia entry concludes: “Certainly the most able metaphysician and the most influential religious thinker of America, he must rank in theology ... with Calvin ...

¹ Pastor at Gold Country Baptist Church in Shingle Springs, CA (www.gcb.church).

² F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 536. For more on his theology, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

³ Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 120.

⁴ Michael Haykin, “Jonathan Edwards and His Legacy,” *Reformation and Revival* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 64.

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors. Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences, 1959–1978* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 354–55. For more on Lloyd-Jones’ appreciation to Edwards, see Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The First Forty Years 1899–1939* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 253–54.

⁶ Allen C. Guelzo, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 2:67. Notable neorthodox scholars who praise Edwards include Richard Niebhuur.

⁷ That T-shirt is the cover image of the book by Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). Hansen traces the revival of interest in Edwards and his tradition among the young. Compare “The Resolved Conference” for young adults based on the resolutions of Edwards as a young man (www.resolved.org) and the writings of Edwards popularized by Desiring God Ministries. See John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998). This student was heavily impacted by this and its “End for Which God Created the World.” Piper writes “For over thirty years I have been trying to see and savor this God-centered, soul-satisfying, sin-destroying vision” (xiii).

⁸ Mark Noll, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: World Book, Inc., 2007), 114. Warfield said he “stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 9:515.

[with] Hume as the great English philosophers of the eighteenth century, and with Hamilton and Franklin as the three American thinkers of the same century of importance.”⁹

In the last half century, scholars have literally written thousands of dissertations, theses, monographs, journal articles, book chapters, studies, and other works related to this 18th century Puritan, and “Dozens of conferences have been convened ... hundreds of papers [read on Edwards] at the meetings of scholarly societies. Newer Edwards study centers have been established in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Poland, and South Africa ...”¹⁰ But his international impact began with his descendants born after him in this nation:

From Edwards came a large and distinguished progeny: three hundred clergymen, missionaries, and theological professors; 120 college professors; 110 lawyers; more than sixty physicians ... thirty judges; fourteen presidents of universities; numerous [leaders] in American industry; eighty holders of major public office; three mayors of large cities; three governors of states; three U.S. senators ... and one vice president of the United States. It is hard to imagine that anyone else has contributed more vitally to the soul of this nation¹¹

While much can be said about his legacy in other areas,¹² “Edwards is one of the most significant names in the history of American preaching,”¹³ which is where this paper will focus. A Yale University professor specializing in this study asks: “Why is Jonathan Edwards universally regarded as America’s greatest Protestant preacher?” While most famous to school children for his picturesque sermon on hell and God’s wrath, “Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God,”¹⁴ this professor notes that actually and more consistently over time, “‘Heaven’ and ‘love’

⁹ Harry Norman Gardiner and Richard Webster, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 9:4. For more on him as a thinker, see Oliver D. Crisp and Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018). He was also the most prolific author of the colonial era, as no other writer, “not even Benjamin Franklin or George Washington, has generated the literature from dissertations to popular articles and treatments as Jonathan Edwards has,” according to Stephen Nichols, “Jonathan Edwards: His Life and Legacy,” in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 36.

¹⁰ Nathan A. Finn and Jeremy M. Kimble, *A Reader’s Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 20. They also note he has been called “America’s theologian” and they trace the rise of positive publications regarding Edwards after 1949, owing in large part to the efforts of Perry Miller.

¹¹ Steven J. Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 3. For more on the legacy of his family tree, see Elisabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 202–214.

¹² The tercentenary of his birth had conferences on Edwards in as diverse settings as the U.S. Library of Congress and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as noted by the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹³ Clyde E. Fant Jr., *A Treasury of Great Preaching* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), 3:45.

¹⁴ Often read in a negative light by American History classes. Note the caricature of this sermon even in Disney movies such as Pollyanna, where the town preacher who didn’t know how to preach God’s love, preached extensively from the manuscript of Edwards with anger and yelling and no gospel call at the end (unlike Edwards).

were the two most important words in Edwards's sermons and he struggled weekly to bring those realities into the consciousness of his hearers. Edwards was far more concerned that his congregation come to a saving knowledge of God through an awareness of the beauty of God's great and powerful redemptive love for them."¹⁵ These primary emphases of his come through Edwards' sermons on love in 1 Corinthians.¹⁶ This paper will analyze these sermons by 1) the audience and historical setting, 2) the argument, and 3) his application to Christ in conclusion.

The Audience and Historical Setting of this Sermon Series

In 1729 Edwards began pastoring the largest church in New England outside of Boston, the historic church in Northampton that had been pastored by his grandfather Solomon Stoddard. Contrary to some portrayals of him as a stern and angry preacher, "personally he was warm and affectionate. And that is important to notice: warm affections were crucial for Edwards."¹⁷ Some have criticized Edwards as reading his sermons dryly in monotone, without gesture or animation, notes close to his face, or staring at the church bell rope in the back. But that "cannot be substantiated by the records which are extant. No clear eye-witness account exists that supports this tradition ... Like other preachers used mightily in the First Great Awakening, [he] impacted lives, in part ... by speaking directly to the people—urging them to act upon the message which came from a Sovereign God."¹⁸ His legacy for preachers is not in *reading of sermons*, but in blood-earnest *pleading to sinners*, compelled by Christ's love (2 Cor. 5:14-21).

¹⁵ Ernie Klassen, *Revival Preaching: With 12 Lessons from the Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Publishing, 2016), 86, citing Harry S. Stout, Jonathan Edwards Professor of History at Yale University. Stout adds in that citation that heaven and love were more dominant meditations and sermon subjects for Edwards while "fire and brimstone ... was emphatically not the subject that preoccupied his thoughts ... Even a cursory scan of the titles of Edwards' sermons will make this point forcefully." Another writer noted "sweetness" has been called the favorite and most frequently recurring word in Edwards' writing, but arguably "beauty" was Edwards' most popular theme, according to Fant and Pinson, *A Treasury of Great Preaching*, 3:54.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1969). This is a reprint of the 1852 first edition which was edited by his grandson, Tyron Edwards, sometimes edited quite freely with omissions or additions, as documented in the Yale edition mentioned below. The 2-volume works of Edwards compiled in 1834 do not include this notable work that was not then available. These sermons were published posthumously, as he evidently intended before his untimely death, but not published till 124 years after he preached them. For analysis of differences between the 1852 edits and an argument that copies in the Andover Collection (from earlier in the century) used by Yale are more reliable and true to the original, see Paul Ramsey, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Ethical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 8:104-10.

¹⁷ This point was unpacked powerfully by Michael Reeves in a lecture to D. Min. students at The Master's Seminary in 2020. See also Reeves, *Theologians You Should Know: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).

¹⁸ Jim Ehrhard, "A Critical Analysis of the Tradition of Jonathan Edwards as a Manuscript Preacher," *Westminster Theological Journal* 60, no. 1 (1998): 83-84. Based on sermon notes, outlines, mnemonic aids in his manuscripts, and testimonies of those closest to him who heard him preach, Ehrhard concludes Edwards didn't read exclusively or even always rely on notes, and that he spoke powerfully, albeit quite differently than Whitefield. John Carrick, *The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008) also debunks that caricature. Likewise, Iain Murray lists several facts that bring into doubt the characterization of Edwards as motionless and monotone, or alleged minimal eye contact or little rapport with his congregation. See Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 188-89. Ehrard's position is also suggested by Edwards' scholar Wilson Kimnach in his introduction to the discourses and sermons of Edwards in the Yale Edition of his works, volume 10, contra Peter Marshall, Jr., Alan Heimart, Edward Collins, Lewis Drummond, John Gerstner, etc.

The first revival of what was later known as the Great Awakening forms part of the historical backdrop for *Charity and its Fruits*. Edwards believed that in a six-month span (1734-36), more than three hundred in his town were brought to Christ, and soon most of the town's adults were true Christians, as were many young people.¹⁹ In a community of 1400 residents, Edwards received about 100 new believers into membership before one communion service, and another 60 at another, and spiritual transformations began in surrounding communities as well.²⁰ As Edwards preached on the gospel themes of original sin, justification by faith, and the sovereignty of God, there was indeed a great awakening in many to see their need as sinners before a holy God, and a quickening to what he called "religious affections." In his own words:

The Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully work among us ... Presently ... a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world, became *universal* in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and of all ages. The noise among the drybones waxed louder and louder; all other talk but about spiritual and eternal things were soon thrown by ... The only thing in their view was to get the kingdom of heaven, and everyone appeared pressing into it. The engagedness of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid, it appeared in their very countenances. It was then a dreadful thing amongst us to lie out of Christ, of danger every day of dropping into hell ... and the work of *conversion* was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more. Souls did, as it were, come by flocks to Jesus Christ.²¹

Through 1736 the Northampton church experienced this season of revival and growth that required a new church building to accommodate their bulging congregation, and this was completed in 1737. But with that growth of so many new believers came growing pains within the church body,²² including a lack of charity that affected their unity and harmony. In 1738 from April to October, Edwards departed from his usual practice of topical or textual sermons to instead preach consecutively for several weeks through 1 Corinthians 13 in a series aimed in part

¹⁹ Ezra Hoyt Byington, "Jonathan Edwards, and the Great Awakening," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 55, no. 217 (1898): 123.

²⁰ John F. Thornbury, "Another Look at the 1st Great Awakening," *Reformation and Revival* 4, no. 3 (1995): 21. For more background, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1983).

²¹ Edwards, "A Narrative of Surprising Conversions," in *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: Levitt, Trow and Co., 1849), 4:134–35. Italics in original.

²² Stephen J. Nichols, "Heaven Is a World of Love, Congregations Can Be Full of Strife: The Life of Jonathan Edwards and Handling Conflict," *Reformation and Revival* 12, no. 3 (2003): 28-29. This is a very helpful article on the ideals of love that were not always achieved by the best of efforts in this best of preachers. Nichols rightly observes Edwards was not flawless in his handling of conflict, and suggests lessons we can learn from both while pursuing Edwards' vision of love. For more on the history, see Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 148–49, and his chapter on "Division and Discord" (201-30). For more on how Edwards saw the teaching of 1 Corinthians 13 in relation to the church, see Rhys Bezzant, "The Pilgrim Church in Charity and Its Fruits," in *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

to correct cold externalism.²³ This was the only time in his ministry he preached through a *chapter* verse-by-verse, much less did he ever preach through a biblical *book* that way,²⁴ but apparently he changed his pulpit approach in part as he didn't see his people changing.

By the late 1730s Edwards was facing the disconcerting reality that ... [despite the Great Awakening] many of his parishioners were returning to their old ways of greed and constant infighting ... In response, Edwards preached ... in attempts to correct the course his people were taking ... I Corinthians 13 seemed almost tailored for the town since its fourth and fifth verses ("charity envieth not," etc.) addressed the very vices that so conspicuously plagued the ingrown community. Departing from his usual practice of choosing texts widely to suit various sermon topics, Edwards followed the order of the verses in I Corinthians, spending five sermons working through each phrase of verses four and five. The spirit of love of the truly regenerate, he emphasized to the Northamptonites, was the opposite of (in a sermon for each) envy, pride, selfishness, anger, and censoriousness.²⁵

By God's grace this series on charity would bear fruit in their congregation, and another wave of revival would come, into the 1740's (and with it, his famed Enfield sermon and the preaching of Whitefield). Later in his ministry, Edwards faced much difficulty and opposition, but the love of 1 Corinthians sustained him to his farewell sermon in 1750, where after much personal injury and unkind opinions were shared of him, he kept preaching to them the themes of this chapter: "Never think you behave yourselves as becomes Christians, but when you sincerely, sensibly and fervently *love all men of whatever party or opinion, and whether friendly and unkind, just or injurious*, to you, or your friends, or to the cause and kingdom of Christ."²⁶

The Argument of Edwards in *Charity and Its Fruits*

²³ Matthew Raley, "A Rational And Spiritual Worship: Comparing J. S. Bach And Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 3 (2019): 587. Edwards may be one of the few or the only one of the Puritan era to write or preach an extended series through 1 Corinthians 13 (at least still in print). Compare later John Angell James, *Christian Charity Explained* (1829).

²⁴ John D. Hannah, "The Homiletical Skill of Jonathan Edwards," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 163 (2002): 101. Homiletical skill aside, Edwards' homiletical *style* of being usually selective and subject-based in choosing what to preach (with different texts all over the place from week to week) is an area Edwards is not a good model, in this student's judgment. One could wish God's blessing on the 1 Corinthians 13 series would have encouraged Edwards to do other verse-by-verse series, to bless the church today. Topical preaching is an area where many in the Puritan tradition unfortunately departed from Calvin's "consecutive approach—*lectio continua*—reflect[ing] the ancient Christian practice of preaching through entire books from beginning to end, guaranteeing that he address the whole counsel of God. In this disciplined manner, controversial subjects were unavoidable. Hard sayings were inescapable. Difficult doctrines could not be bypassed. Calvin chose to explain every truth of Scripture as it appeared in the text and to reveal its relevance to his listeners." Steven J. Lawson, "The Biblical Preaching Of John Calvin," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology Volume 13*, no. 4 (2009): 23.

²⁵ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Biography* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 189-91.

²⁶ "A Farewell Sermon," *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 238. Italics mine.

The argument of Edwards necessarily begins by defining both “fruits” and “charity” (from KJV of 1 Cor. 13). “Charity was a drumbeat everywhere in his work ... By charity, Edwards sometimes meant tolerance, a welcoming spirit, and a Christian [disposition] toward friend or foe regardless of opinion ... At other times he meant the kind of all-encompassing love (*agape*) that accompanies the experience of grace and binds congregations, communities ...”²⁷ *Charity and Its Fruits* refers to “charitable” speaking and thinking,²⁸ not the “charity” of giving alms to the poor, or a modern “charity” such as a non-profit organization. *The argument of Edwards is that charity in 1 Cor. 13 is a divine love, manifested in all believers by love for God and their fellow man.*²⁹ It’s love from Him, to Him, and through Him to others. Rather than a mere cross-stitch of verses for a home, or a moralistic good rule for mankind, he argues *agape* in 1 Cor. 13 is God’s love in Christ He produces in those He saves, as a proof they are saved. The importance of a right definition of love and Edwards’ contribution to it is needed today, as DeYoung notes:

love gets reduced to sentiment, sympathy, and Oprah-fied versions of acceptance and affirmation. By contrast, the love Edwards extols [in *Charity and Its Fruits*] is rich with theological reflection on the Trinity ... love that only makes sense in the world of thought shaped by the whole counsel of God. Cheap imitations of biblical love ... plunder the booty of traditional Christian vocabulary and employ [“love”] in such a way that everyone from Dolly Parton to the Dali Lama will nod in agreement. Edwards tells a different story, reminding us that heaven is a world where Trinitarian wrought, cross bought, sorrow easing, wrath appeasing, Christ-centered, church focused, overflowing, inexhaustible love wins.³⁰

Edwards doesn’t argue for love in sentimental or syrupy language, but nor does he explain love as an action of the will, rather than affections, or a choice rather than feeling. Affections and actions are linked to Edwards.³¹ He’s concerned in love’s “purity of Christian *feeling*” and argues that there must be this feeling of love in the heart to be a Christian.³² He later

²⁷ Ronald Story, “Charity,” in *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Adriaan C. Neele, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 84.

²⁸ Ken Sande, “Judge Charitably,” in *Journal of Biblical Counseling, Number 1, Fall 2002* 21 (2002): 14..

²⁹ *Italics in this student’s definition.* For the nuance of this love as “holy love,” and for more explanation of what Edwards means by this, see Bruce W. Davidson, “Not From Ourselves: Holy Love In The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 3 (2016): 575.

³⁰ Kevin DeYoung, “Heaven is a World of Love,” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-horrors-of-hell-and-a-heaven-of-love/> (accessed May 29, 2021).

³¹ He elsewhere described his preaching like this: “I should think myself in the way of *my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can*, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.” Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards - The Great Awakening*, Volume 4 edited C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 387. Italics added. For more on distinctions between affections, see Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961). To explore this further, see <http://edwards.yale.edu/research/browse> (accessed April 11, 2022).

³² *Works*, 8:251, 396: “There are no evidences of a title to heaven but in feeling that which is heavenly in the heart. ... heavenliness consists in love. Therefore the way to have clear evidences [assurance of heaven as your

infers in the same volume “in pure love to others (i.e. love not arising from self-love), there’s ... a disposition to *feel*, to desire, and to act as though others were one with ourselves.”³³ Edwards clarifies *agape* “properly signifies love, or that disposition or *affection* by which one is dear to another” and it’s a “sweet disposition and *affection* of the soul,” but this love does need to be accompanied with convictions, and it’s not the feigned affection he says one might read “in a romance.”³⁴ Keeping with Edwards’ argument that 1 Cor. 13 is about God’s love in Christ produced by salvation, and as a proof of it, his 3rd sermon (on v. 3) notes that men may make sacrificial choices, do charitable actions, and “great performances ... without sincere Christian love in the heart” and there must be saving “sincere love *to* God in the heart” or it’s in vain.³⁵

The introduction gives a scriptural summary of how charity is used in the book, as the Lord’s love that marks believers and makes them by grace to love the Lord and their neighbor.

Love is the first outgoing of the renewed soul to God, “We *love* him because he first loved us.” It is the sure evidence of a saving work of grace in the soul, “The fruit of the Spirit is *love*.” It lies at the very foundation of Christian character; we are “rooted and grounded in *love*.” It is the path in which all the true children of God are found; they “walk in *love*”; the bond of their mutual union, their hearts are “knit together in *love*”; their protection in the spiritual warfare, they are to put on “the breastplate of *love*”; the fullness and completeness of their Christian character, they are “made perfect in *love*”; the spirit through which they may fulfill all the divine requirements, for “*love* is the fulfilling of law”; that by which they may become like their Father in heaven, and fitted for his presence, for “God is *love*” and *Heaven is a world of Love*.³⁶

This divine love is Trinitarian in its source and sustaining power, as the chief biographer of Edwards sums up how this relates to his broader thinking and writing:

The *Charity* sermons, simple and practical, as they were, stood close to the heart of Edwards’ theological enterprise. The very essence of reality, he emphasized ... was the intertrinitarian love of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit ... to extend that love to other, imperfect beings ... they would partake in the fountain of love that overflowed from the perfect love of the triune divine persons, Father, Son,

own] is to live a life of love, and so seek the continual and lively exercises of such a spirit” – in other words to love as we ought, we must seek to cultivate and exercise the feeling of love where it’s lacking in our actions of love.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8:589.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8:129, 8:136, 8:336. Italics added to emphasize love is both Godward and manward in 1 Cor. 13.

³⁵ Sermon 3 of *Charity and Its Fruits*, doctrine I and II.

³⁶ Tyron Edwards, “Introduction,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 8:126. Italics in original and quotation marks designate phrases from scripture expounded in *Charity and Its Fruits*, and the final phrase is his final sermon.

and Holy Spirit, for each other ... It followed, then, that evidences of love (or their absence) were the best test [of] ... real Christian experience.”³⁷

By the “fruits” of charity, Edwards draws on this metaphor of nature to picture charity as “the stock on which all good fruit grows.”³⁸ He also appears to deliberately use Paul’s language in Galatians 5:22.³⁹ Edwards scholar Kyle Strobel notes in his introduction to these sermons on charity: “Any talk about charity and its fruits, therefore, will parallel a discussion concerning the fruit of the Spirit ... whether the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 is a menu of generally related items or an actual list of the ways the one fruit—love—plays itself out in the life of the believer (as joy, peace, patience, etc.).”⁴⁰ Edwards asserts “All the fruit of the Spirit, upon which we are to lay weight as evidential of grace, is summed up in charity or Christian love.”⁴¹

What persons very commonly mean and understand by charity in their common conversation is a disposition to hope and think the best of persons, and to put a good construction on their words or behavior ... But these things are only certain particular branches or fruits of that great virtue of charity ... that charity in the New Testament is the very same as Christian love ... by charity here we are doubtless to understand Christian love in the full extent of and with regard to all the objects of it, whether it be exercised towards God or our fellow creatures.⁴²

How Edwards Developed His Exegetical-Expositional⁴³ Series

³⁷ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, p. 190-91. Edwards himself will fill this image out in depth and beauty of imagery in sermon 15 of *Charity and Its Fruits*.

³⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 8:351.

³⁹ “But the fruit of the Spirit is *love ... patience, kindness ...*” (note the same Greek words in italics from 1 Corinthians 13:4, italics added). All scripture citations, unless otherwise note, are from the ESV.

⁴⁰ Kyle Strobel, “Introduction,” in *Charity and Its Fruits: Living in the Light of God’s Love*, edited by Kyle Strobel (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 23. This edition is based on the Andover text in the Yale edition, rather than the 1852 first publication edited by Tyron Edwards. Note the singular rather than plural “fruits” in Galatians 5:22, which leads this D. Min. student to think of love as the fruit that is further defined as patient, kind, gentle, self-controlled, etc. Edwards himself cites Galatians 5:22 on p. 23, 94, and 97 of the Crossway reprint above.

⁴¹ Paul Ramsey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 8:109, hereafter *Works*. This page notes that the Yale Edition’s earlier manuscript copy from the Andover text has the singular “fruit” whereas the 1852 edited text (published by Banner of Truth and others) has “fruits of the Spirit.” The “evidential of grace” language Edwards applied to charity/love in the above quote evokes his other works on “distinguishing marks” and “religious affections” that accompany saving grace, which he will develop in 1 Corinthians 13 as well.

⁴² Jonathan Edwards, “Charity and Its Fruits,” in *Works*, 8:129-30.

⁴³ On the exegesis of Edwards, see Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Robert E. Brown, “Biblical Exegesis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Sweeney and Jan Stievermann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Sweeney and David Barshinger, editors, *Jonathan Edwards: Biblical Exegesis in British North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and

The Northampton pastor begins in sermon 1 with charity/love as “the sum of all virtue,” and he asserts this doctrine “*All that virtue which is saving, and distinguishing of true Christians from others, is summed up in Christian or divine love.*” He then goes on to connect saving faith explicitly with love from Galatians 5 also (v. 6), where Paul states what counts to God is “faith working through love.” Edwards deduces (rightly in this student’s view) that love is the most essential and distinguishing ingredient in true saving faith, as opposed to demons who believe and tremble (as they don’t love the Lord as Savior).⁴⁴ As a recent summary of this classic work says, it “expounds true religion in its most practical expression. It brings us to the heart of God. It examines our heart.”⁴⁵ The argument of Edwards is indeed in keeping with Paul’s final chapter to the Corinthians exhorting such self-examination and application (2 Cor. 13:5, 11).

Edwards’ own exegetical-expositional outline of 1 Corinthians 13 he gives as follows:

- 1) SECTION ONE: Love is the most essential thing, v. 1-3 (sermons 1-3)
- 2) SECTION TWO: Love is the fountain of all good fruit, v. 4-7c (sermons 4-12)
- 3) SECTION THREE: Love is better than all other gifts because it’s eternal and perfect, v. 7d-13 (sermons 13-15)⁴⁶

On the 2nd section (v. 4-7), Ramsey provides “a summary of the tapestry of virtues Edwards has been weaving. Pride tends to selfishness; pride and selfishness (or lack of other-love) together tend to an angry spirit. So with judging uncharitable ... love in the heart mortifies censoriousness through this chain ... Humility—the opposite of pride—does so also.”⁴⁷ Edwards also in his tenth sermon provides his own summary of the preceding nine sermons on love, “as a plateau point to summarize what went before.” He introduces this sermon and second section as “an illustration of the main point of the first section, that love is the most essential thing. This is done with an eye to the third section, which illustrates why love is essential, owing to its perseverance into eternity.”⁴⁸

The Apostle having mentioned many good fruits of charity, and shown how it tends to an excellent behavior in many particulars in the two foregoing verses [v. 4-5], in this verse sums up those and all other good tendencies of charity: *It*

Stephen J. Stein, “Edwards as a Biblical Exegete,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 8:131, 139-40. Edwards doesn’t here cite these references but see James 2:19, John 13:34-35, 1 Cor. 16:22, etc. (cf. repeated statements in 1 John about loving brethren as a chief way to know eternal life is yours).

⁴⁵ Daniel Chamberlin, *Love and its Fruits: Jonathan Edwards’ “Charity and its Fruits” Summarized for the 21st Century* (self-published by Kindle Direct Publishing, 2020), 1.

⁴⁶ Points paraphrased by this student from the introduction to sermon 14 by Edwards, updating archaic language. Strobel, p. 20, paraphrases the 3rd section as “love, the divine gift that perseveres.” For a more detailed 2-page outline, see “Introductory Notes” at <https://www.bethanybiblechurch.net/lessondocs/20110907190000.pdf> or for a 20-page fuller outline and summary in modern English wording with study questions see “Love: Class Notes” at <https://www.westwoodcma.org/classes> (both links accessed June 1, 2021).

⁴⁷ Ramsey, 82–83.

⁴⁸ Strobel, 17.

*rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth ... in short charity is contrary to everything in life and practice which is bad, and tends to everything which is good ... in life, or all Christian and holy practices ...*⁴⁹

This same sermon clearly ties this love to saving grace and holiness of life in its doctrinal premise “Grace Tends to Holy Practice.” Edwards used the term “practice” for spiritual disciplines such as prayer and hospitality, and “practices” often as shorthand for the Puritan concept of the “means of grace.”⁵⁰ It’s notable that in section 2 of the sermons, there is more frequent use by Edwards of the term “grace” or “graces.”⁵¹ He also moves from examples of love of things (like money, honor, pleasures) that drive practice, to love of people, and now Edwards begins to speak of love *for God*, and how it’s exercised: having a high esteem of God, choosing God above all other things, desiring God, and delighting in God. Edwards is at his best as he speaks of God’s glory being enjoyed by holy affections, or the love that in v. 6 “rejoices in the truth” of God, which redounds to His glory.⁵² He returns to “Christian love to man” within the doctrinal heads of this one sermon, but he has already begun to move Godward in this section, appealing to the “beauty and pleasantness ... the loveliness of the ways of God.” He asks the reader if you hunger and thirst after, love and long for and live for this?⁵³

Sermon 11 (on “beareth all things” in v. 7a) continues to move love Godward. He argues this phrase is not about a “bearing all injuries *from men* ... [Paul] seems to proceed to something else of another nature ... The following words, ‘believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,’ all show that the Apostle has done with those fruits of charity *that immediately respect our neighbor*.” The bearing all things in v. 7, Edwards argues, is Christ-oriented suffering for Christ’s sake.⁵⁴ Sermon 12 then further argues “believeth all things, hopeth all things” isn’t toward man or about love primarily, but is about two of love’s “graces”:

⁴⁹ *Works*, 8:293.

⁵⁰ William C. Spohn, “Practices in Jonathan Edwards’s Charity and Its Fruits,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 31 no. 2 (2003), 257. See also Lawson, “The Practice of Love,” in *The Unwavering Resolve*, 123-38, with the sub-points of Charitable Acts, Patient Attitude, Gracious Words, Peacemaking Spirit, and Compassion Heart (drawn from other writings of Edwards and tracing several of his famous “Resolutions” in Lawson’s Appendix).

⁵¹ As pointed out by Ramsey’s introduction, 60.

⁵² Compare what Jonathan Edwards wrote in his “Miscellanies” (private notebook, a-500): “*God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in*. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it.” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Thomas Schafer, vol. 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 495, italics in original. This in turn inspired the memorable motto of Desiring God Ministries: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him” (and to which, Edwards might add in this sermon, “in His love”?). John Piper connects this with divine love in *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005) and chapter 4 on love in *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003) where he interacts with Edwards’ view on self-seeking love in 1 Cor. 13.

⁵³ *Charity and Its Fruits*, Strobel ed., 213-23. Strobel adds this from Edwards on p. 220: “Divine love, as it has God for its object, may thus be described: ‘tis the soul’s relish of the supreme excellence of the divine nature, inclining the heart to God as the chief good” (Edwards, “True Grace,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-58*, 173). Compare this rejoicing in the truth of God

these words are commonly understood the Apostle means that charity disposes men to believe the best and hope the best of our neighbor in all cases. But I would take leave to suppose that is not the Apostle's meaning in this place; but rather that charity is a grace which cherishes and promotes the exercise of other graces, as particularly those two graces of faith and hope ... the Apostle in this verse [7] proceeds to mention other fruits of charity, quite of another kind, and among others, that it believeth all things and hopeth all things; that is, charity tends to promote all manner of exercise of those other two great graces of the gospel: faith and hope.⁵⁵

Sermon 13 curiously splits the fourth parallel phrase in v. 7 into the separate last section of the book,⁵⁶ and even more curiously, Edwards sees “endureth all things” not as a reference to enduring *love*, but rather a statement on the perseverance of saving “*grace* never overthrown” (his sermon title). After Edwards introduces his subject, this sermon nowhere mentions “charity” or “love” except one sentence in a verse that speaks of the eternally secure love of God in Christ toward the *elect* (Rom. 8:38-39).⁵⁷ It seems Edwards has not only moved away from love toward others, he moved beyond love toward God, so that in this sermon he now moved almost exclusively to God's love toward those He saves. This student wonders if this emphasis might have been pastorally motivated, sensing comfort and assurance of the love of God was needed for some in his congregation after the convicting series on v. 4-6. But at any rate, this message seems to depart more from interpretation directly into application.

How Edwards Explained the Cessation of Miraculous Gifts

Sermon 14 on v. 8 (“Divine Love Alone Lasts Eternally”) returns to love as compared to the temporal sign gifts: prophecy (defined as those receiving direct revelation such as OT prophets): tongues (defined as a supernatural ability in “languages, which they never learned”), and knowledge (defined as the “particular, miraculous gift, which there was in the church of God

⁵⁴ Ibid., 224-25. Italics mine. Here the usually tight logic of Edwards is not clear to this student how “suffering for the cause of Christ and religion” (from men logically) is no longer concerning neighbor, but Edwards argues this way to be consistent with his view that v. 7 is not repeating or summarizing what he has said in v. 4-6. Future quotations from Edwards in the Strobel edition will hereafter be footnoted simply as *Charity and Its Fruits*, whereas Edwards quotes in the Yale edition and pagination will be footnoted simply as *Works*.

⁵⁵ *Works*, 8:326-27. Ramsey's editorial footnote: “The fruits of divine love in sermons following this tenth have respect more to God than to our neighbors, though one and the same principle of love in the heart goes out to both.” This student is not yet persuaded by Edwards view that v. 7 completely changes from love toward man to love toward God. For more on this student's view, see his exegetical and theological chapter 1 of his dissertation on 1 Corinthians 13. But in short, viewing v. 7 as believing and hoping the best of our fellow believers (rather than love to God) arguably fits better contextually with 1 Corinthians 4:5-6 about not assuming the worst of motives of others. Likewise the nearer context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 addresses lack of love toward the church (note the bookends of 12:31 and 14:1). Also the parallel statement in v. 7 “endures all things” (endures all about God?) doesn't fit the idea of “believes all things about God, hopes all things about God” (assuming his view that v. 7 shifts to Godward love).

⁵⁶ Section 3 in Strobel's edition, based on Edwards own outline at the start of chapter 10.

⁵⁷ *Works*, 8:339-45.

in those days”). These were given only “till the canon of the Scripture was completed” and “for an age, during the life of the Apostles, or till the death of the last of them ... the apostle John.”⁵⁸

[The] first century, was the age of miracles. But soon after that, the canon of the Scripture having been completed, when the apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, [[these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church]]. And so there being now completed an established written revelation of the mind and will of God, wherein he had so fully revealed his mind and will, a standing rule to his church in all ages; and ... the last dispensation of the church of God being established, then the miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased. And though they had been continued in the church for so many ages, yet then they failed, as being that for which there was no further occasion. And so, that in the text was fulfilled [Edwards then quotes v. 8]”⁵⁹

Edwards also uses language of a “maturity” view regarding the “perfect” in 1 Cor. 13:10. He explains the apostolic gifts “argue the imperfection of the state of the church, rather than the perfection ... if I may so say, to the church in a *state of infancy* ... But being once established ... the church is come, as it were, to the *stature of a man* ... working miracles [are v. 11’s] *childish things* in comparison with that nobler fruit of the Spirit, divine love.”⁶⁰ Sermon 15 explicitly equates the church’s “infant age” with the time before the canon was complete,⁶¹ likewise to the “imperfect” in Sermon 14. His primary argument relies on Scripture’s sufficiency and the finality of revelation in the closed canon as crucial in considering the revelatory gifts or any supposed new revelation (which some evidently were claiming in the colonial awakening times).

For it is impossible the canon of the Scripture should be added to without revelation, which is a miraculous gift. And it is requisite that revelation should be confirmed by miracles. But we have no need of another Scripture, or that this Scripture should be added to. We have a perfect rule already by which to walk.

Second. This should make persons exceedingly cautious how they give heed to anything which looks like revelation, or any extraordinary gift of the Spirit. If

⁵⁸ *Charity and Its Fruits*, 264-71.

⁵⁹ *Works*, 8:357. Bracketed text footnote states “No blank in copy. The copyist probably skipped a line. Insert from TE, p. 448.” (TE refers to Tyron Edwards’ 1852 edits for the first edition).

⁶⁰ *Works*, 8:362–363, quoting v. 11, italics added. He argues also that the church’s “infancy” was shortly after Pentecost, and its maturity came later in the book of Acts. Here the 1852 original publication expands on the infancy-maturity analogy with this comment edited by Tyron Edwards (p. 458): “They are adapted to the childish state of the church, while holy love is more to be expected in its full grown and manly state; and in themselves they are childish, in comparison with that holy love which will so abound in the church when it comes to its perfect stature in Christ Jesus [Eph. 4:13].” Ramsey notes Jonathan Edwards himself expands on this childhood-manhood more in a sermon preached 10 years later on 1 Cor. 13:8–13: “The extraordinary influences of the Spirit of God imparting immediate revelations to men were designed only for a temporary continuance while the church was in its minority, and never were intended to be stately upheld in the Christian church.” Ramsey states “The later sermon [in 1748] is actually a more forceful and lengthy assault upon claims to immediate revelation and ‘spiritualism’ among extremists in the aftermath of the Great Awakening” (Ramsey’s editorial footnote in *Works*, 8:363-64).

⁶¹ *Charity and Its Fruits*, 279.

any persons have any impression on their mind, as though something were immediately revealed to them which would come to pass ... or if they imagine they have immediate direction from heaven to go and do thus or thus ... these things, if they were from God's Spirit, would be of the nature of those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which the Apostle says do cease, fail, and are done away, and which long since failed; and which we have no reason to think God is about to restore ... after a considerable cessation.⁶²

Edwards earlier used language almost like another view (called "open but cautious" in modern times)⁶³ when he spoke of the miraculous gifts as "for a season, and their either have already ceased *or the time will come when they will cease*" (Prop. III, italics added). But perhaps this potential future language was not because he saw any evidence of charismatic gifts in post-NT history or in his present time of "Great Awakening." He may instead be acknowledging some in his day hoped for a glorious future era where there might be restoration of these gifts, based on some prophetic scriptures where the Spirit would be poured out in more excellent and abundant ways than ever before in latter days. His answer: "That may be, and yet there be no such extraordinary gifts bestowed. When the Spirit of God is poured out for the producing and promoting divine love, he is poured out in a more excellent way than when he is poured out in miraculous gifts, as the Apostle expressly teaches in the latter part [of 1 Cor. 13, i.e., v. 9-12]."⁶⁴

Not every nuance of modern debates is addressed by Edwards,⁶⁵ and regrettably he doesn't interact with the argument that v. 10 and 12 may refer to the second coming or eternal

⁶² Ibid. Compare this to those today who say "God told me," or "God showed me," etc.

⁶³ Robert L. Saucy, "An Open But Cautious View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* Edited by Wayne Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 95-148. An argument not presented by Edwards but persuasive to this student is the apostolic age view of Samuel E. Waldron, *To Be Continued? Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Calvary Press, 2007). This ties the miraculous sign gifts to the apostles within the Corinthian context (2 Cor. 12:12, cf. Acts 2:43, 5:12), which ceased when the apostles ceased after the church's foundation was complete (Eph. 2:20).

⁶⁴ Ramsey, 363-64. Edwards argues based on the superlative "excellent way" language of 1 Cor. 12:31: "Surely, the Scripture speaking of the future glorious state of the church as such an excellent state gives no reason to conclude that the Spirit of God will then be poured out in any other way than in the most excellent way. Doubtless the most excellent way of giving the Spirit is for the most excellent state of the church. The state of the church being so much more perfect than any which went before does not argue that than there shall be extraordinary gifts ... For surely it will not be more glorious than the heavenly state. But yet the Apostle teaches that in that state those gifts shall all be at an end, and the influence of the Spirit in divine love only remain." It seems clear Edwards saw there was a *cessation* of these gifts in the early church, but he addresses the question of some who thought there might be a future *restoration* after so many centuries before the *final cessation* of these gifts (maybe not just revivalists and enthusiasts, but some millennialists also might have seen this in end times prophecies like Joel 2, Revelation 11, etc). Edwards himself looked to a glorious future outpouring of God, but he saw even from revivals in his own day "this will be enough without revelations or miracles to produce all the effects which need to be produced in order to bring about the glorious times, as we may be convinced by the little which we have seen in the late outpouring of the Spirit of God in this and the neighboring towns" (Strobel ed., 276, speaking of the Great Awakening of 1734-36).

⁶⁵ For further reading on this beyond the scope of this paper's argument, see Philip A. Craig, "'And Prophecy Shall Cease': Jonathan Edwards on the Cessation of the Gift of Prophecy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 1 (2002): 163-84. See also John D. Hannah, "Jonathan Edwards, the Toronto Blessing, and the Spiritual Gifts," *Trinity Journal* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 167-189, see especially "Edwards and the Argument of the Cessation of the Miraculous Gifts" on p. 183-85.

state rather than the end of the apostolic age. But Edwards does connect Paul's argument about love to the eternal state *in heaven* in explaining his arguments on the close of the canon and the maturing of the early church: "The heavenly state is the most perfect of all. But yet the Apostle teaches that in that state those gifts shall all be at an end, and the influence of the Spirit in divine love only remain, as is plain in the by the text with the following verses [v. 9-12]."⁶⁶ This student wishes he had further explained that in relation to the church of *this age before heaven*, although Edwards was not then interacting with modern non-cessationist debates. Still, it's clear Edwards doesn't mean tongues and prophecy only cease "when we all get to heaven," since earlier he clarified miraculous gifts "God was *once* pleased to grant to his church in this world, But when *those saints who once had the enjoyment and use of those [miraculous] means of grace came to heaven*, those miraculous gifts as well as other means of grace ceased."⁶⁷

How Edwards Preached on Heaven as "a World of Love"

Sermon 15's discussion of abiding love in heaven is among the clearest and most compelling sermons this student has ever read, and it rejoiced and refreshed his soul. Entitled "Heaven is a World of Love,"⁶⁸ this finale is a climactic crescendo to the series, and a stirring encouragement to believers to continue in love to the end. His language soars as does the praise for this sermon by others, as Edwards here "reached the height of his preaching describing in powerful, biblical detail the incomparable majesty"⁶⁹ of this world to come. It's been called the "virtuoso performance" of Edward's masterworks, "the supreme example of Edwards' systematic massing of images about a theme," and "At his best ... the truly integrative imagination of the finest metaphysical poets."⁷⁰ This final message on heaven is "is perhaps the most beautiful in all Edwards's writings."⁷¹

This "world of love" is appealing in both the imagery of this world Edwards uses and the community of love he paints a picture of. In several ways this sermon on heaven is a contrast and complementary answer to his most famous message on hell and its vivid metaphors. In "Sinners

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁶⁷ *Works*, 8:355. Italics and brackets added to emphasize Edwards has in mind those in NT times who had those gifts, which ceased in history when *they* went to heaven, as he goes on to argue in the pages that follow.

⁶⁸ Edwards contemplated heaven since he was a youth, and wrote "Heaven appeared to me exceeding delightful as *a world of love* ... My mind was very much taken up with contemplations on heaven, and the enjoyments of those there ... my eternity in divine love." Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, vol. 16 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 796.

⁶⁹ John Gerstner, "Preface," in *Heaven a World of Love* (Lindenhurst, NY: Great Christian Books, 2010), 7. See also Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 9, 93; Owen Strachan and Douglas Allen Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Moody, 2010).

⁷⁰ Wilson H. Kinnach, "The Literary Techniques of Jonathan Edwards," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1971 [University Microfilms 71-26, 039], 320-21, 327. He argues the rhetorical power of this sermon on heaven is rivaled only by his most famous sermon on hell, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." He sees these as complementary messages and arguably among the best ever on both.

⁷¹ From back cover of Banner of Truth 1969 reprint of *Charity and Its Fruits*.

in the Hands of an Angry God” Edwards pictured using spiders over a fire by a slender thread, a powerful river held back by a dam, a bridge with rotten planks that are about to fall out, a slope where easy to slip and slide to death, a bow bent with arrows aimed, a boulder unable to be stopped by a web in the forest, a great furnace, a paper-thin rotting canvas over a wide pit, etc.⁷²

Now in his most famous sermon on heaven, he again uses nature’s metaphors. Glorious love is a splendor, sweetness, sufficiency: water (as a fountain, flood, spring, stream, river, ocean), light (sun, rays, beams, flame), sky, garden (plants, vine, trees), family, the body, musical sounds, etc. He presents heaven as a haven of rest “to arrive at after persons have gone through a world of storms” (sins of v. 4-5) and a land of Canaan flowing with abundance after wandering in sin’s wilderness. This “world of love” is infinitely beautiful and enjoyable in mutual love between (1) the persons of the Trinity (2) the believer and the members of the Trinity; and (3) among believers. This heavenly love is unpolluted, unending, from God’s “unchanging fountain of love.” Those who are going to heaven are those with this love in them on earth, who are also those who prefer heaven over happiness on earth.⁷³

No commentary or summary can improve on Edwards’ own words in this section. This quote is just a sampler or appetizer of the feast to come:

Heaven itself, the place of habitation, is a garden of pleasures, a heavenly paradise fitted in all respects for an abode of heavenly love... All things there, doubtless, remarkably show forth the beauty and loveliness of God and Christ, and have a luster of divine love upon them. The very light which shines in and fills that world is the light of love. It is beams of love; for it is the shining of the glory of the Lamb of God, that most wonderful influence of lamblike meekness and love which fills the heavenly Jerusalem with light ... this renders heaven a world of love; for God is the fountain of love, as the sun is the fountain of light. And therefore the glorious presence of God in heaven fills heaven with love, as the sun placed in the midst of the hemisphere in a clear day fills the world with light ... as the flowers on the earth in a pleasant spring day open their bosoms to the sun to be filled with his warmth and light, and to flourish in beauty and fragranciness by his rays. Every saint is as a flower in the garden of God, and holy love is the fragranciness and sweet odor which they all send forth, and with which they fill that paradise ... There this glorious God is manifested and shines forth in full glory, in beams of love; there the fountain overflows in streams and rivers of love and delight, enough for all to drink at, and to swim in, yea, so as to overflow

⁷² For a connection of this sermon with God’s love, see John F. MacArthur Jr., *The God Who Loves* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 2-4. In relation to God’s holiness (cf. “holy love” in Edwards), how it was love for his people that drove Edwards to preach this sermon on hell, and how we love this holy God by grace alone, see R. C. Sproul, “God in the Hand of Angry Sinners,” in *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 263-77. Even in “Heaven is a World of Love,” Edwards himself makes the contrast explicit when he writes “Hell is a world of hatred ... the world in which you are in danger every day of having your abode fixed; and if you are not greatly changed by God’s almighty power, in a short time you will inherit instead of a portion in that world of love.” *Charity and Its Fruits*, 300, 302.

⁷³ *Charity and Its Fruits*, 282-99.

the world as it were with a deluge of love ... There the Holy Spirit shall be poured forth with perfect sweetness, as a pure river.⁷⁴

His argument in this heaven sermon often connects in context to the earlier sermons from 1 Corinthians 13 and climaxes the argument. Those who “rejoice in the truth” now in v. 6 find “joy unspeakable” in the end. Believers on earth imperfectly strive to live out love that is kind (v. 4), but in heaven there will be no striving, only “perfectly amiable behavior, one towards another, as a fruit of their perfect love one to another.”⁷⁵ Strobel notes perceptively “Edwards is reversing all of the vices he develops throughout the book and explaining how their opposite virtues thrive in heaven.”⁷⁶ As Edwards notes “the joy of heavenly love shall never be damped or interrupted by jealousy ... no envy or malice, or revenge, or contempt, or selfishness shall enter there, but shall be kept as far off ... no separation wall, no misunderstandings or strangeness ... no division through different opinions or interests.”⁷⁷ This is a world of love.⁷⁸

Edwards began this series with love as “the *sum* of all virtues,” now he ends it with the *subtraction* of all vices in glory. “There shall be no string out of tune to cause any jar[ring] in the harmony of that world, no unpleasant note to cause any discord ... Every saint there is as a note in a concert of music which sweetly harmonizes with every other note ... such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of any this world to conceive.”⁷⁹ To Edwards being heavenly-minded is what makes men of earthly good in loving their neighbors:

Let what we have heard of the land of love excite us all to turn our faces towards that land, and bend our course ... do not give yourselves much concern about the friendship of the world; but seek heaven where is no such thing as contempt, where none are despised, all are highly esteemed and honored, and dearly loved by all. You who think you have met with many abuses, and much ill treatment from others, care not for it; do not hate them for it but set your heart in heaven, a world of love; press towards a better country. Do not let out your heart after the things of this

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Works*, 8:382, 386, 369–371. While most of the sermon is outstanding, there are outstanding questions in this student’s mind on some of his speculative comments, like some in heaven will be “most beloved of Christ” and others “more beloved by the saints than other saints of lower rank” (*Charity and Its Fruits*, 289).

⁷⁵ *Works*, 8:384.

⁷⁶ Strobel, editor’s note on p. 288.

⁷⁷ *Charity and Its Fruits*, 288-89, 295. Note the phrases in 1 Cor. 13:4-5, especially what love is NOT – these opposites of love are emphatically and wonderfully not present in this heavenly world of love.

⁷⁸ The phrase “world of love” is not original to Edwards. Earlier Puritan writer William Bates (born in 1628 in England) wrote: “*heaven is a world of love*, the law of love reigns there: faith and hope shall cease, but love shall reign in heaven: there the saints love God perfectly, and love one another with an invariable affection. There they have one heart, and one mind; and therefore how are they pleased with the happiness of one another, in the happiness every one enjoys?” *The Whole Works of the Rev. William Bates*, edited by W. Farmer (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1990 reprint), 3:35–36, italics added.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 283, 296.

world and indulge yourself in a pursuit of earthly things ... If you would seek heaven, your affections must be taken off from the pleasures of the world. You must not indulge in sensuality; you must take off your heart from the profits of the world, and not spend your time and strength only in heaping up the dust of the earth. You must mortify a desire of the honors and vainglory of this world ... You cannot earnestly and constantly seek heaven without having your thoughts much there ... and meditations towards that world of love, and that God of love ... you must live a life of love ... by living love in this world the saints partake of a like sort of inward peace and sweetness. It is in this way that you are to have the foretastes of heavenly pleasures and delights.⁸⁰

The vision of divine eternal love from this final sermon is sweetening and sustaining to the soul. This theme “overflows Edwards’ writings and sermons. It fueled his passionate preaching and it buoyed him during turbulent times. No mere ideal or ethereal vision, it was the standard by which he gauged his own life on earth and the standard which he held out for his congregations. It remained even when reality fell short of the goal.”⁸¹ Another writer adds moving words to exhort strugglers to read and heed this moving sermon: “If you find yourself struggling to endure, on the verge of emotional collapse, fearful [what] the future holds ... immerse yourself in the exalted and thoroughly biblical perspective that Jonathan Edwards brings to this living hope.”⁸²

The final two paragraphs of *Charity and Its Fruits* tie it all together with the overall argument that Paul is writing of God’s love in Christ and evidence of those who are truly saved by it: “There are no evidences of a title to heaven but in feeling that which is heavenly in the heart ... the way to have clear evidences [heaven is yours] is to live a life of love ... As heaven is a world of love, so the way to heaven is the way of love.” Lest readers misunderstand love as works that fallen man can do to climb up to heaven, the final sentence of the series reminds the reader that this love of 1 Cor. 13 is the essence of saving faith, not to be separated from it: “faith and love must be the wings that carry you there.”⁸³

How Edwards Preached Christ from 1 Corinthians 13

⁸⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey and John E. Smith, vol. 8, The Works of Jonathan Edwards (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989), 392–395. Even as a teenager Edwards meditated on this world of love and wanted it to impact his daily life: “17. Resolved, to live so at all times, as I think ... clearest notions of things in the gospel, *and another world* ... 55. Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven ...” Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve*, 159, 164. See also Stephen Nichols, *Heaven on Earth: Capturing Jonathan Edwards’s Vision of Living In Between* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).

⁸¹ Nichols, “Heaven Is a World of Love, Congregations Can Be Full of Strife,” 39.

⁸² Sam Storms, “Foreword,” in *Heaven is a World of Love*, The Crossway Short Classics Series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 19–20. For further exposition of Edwards’ view of heaven by this author, see also chapter 9 of Sam Storms, *One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God* (Rosshire, England: Christian Focus, 2004).

⁸³ *Charity and Its Fruits*, 306–7.

Edwards concludes “Heaven is a World of Love” with focusing on the loving “Christ, without which heaven is no heaven.” Christ can’t be left out of preaching, or even the pleasures of heaven, or what we ponder here on earth. Here’s how the Northampton preacher brings home the doctrine in his application as he nears the end and points his hearers to their chief end: “Therefore turn the currents and thoughts of meditations towards that world of love and that God of love who dwells there ... And be much in conversing with God and Christ ...”⁸⁴

Ramsey argues that the latter sermons in *Charity and Its Fruits*, in particular, have a “Christological-eschatological progression,”⁸⁵ and in the last sermon, the penultimate “direction” points to this ultimate aim of Edwards:

*In all your way let your eye be to Jesus who is gone to heaven as your Forerunner. Look to him; behold his glory there in heaven to stir you up the more earnestly to be there. Look to him, and observe his example. Consider how by patient continuance in well-doing, and in patient enduring of great sufferings, he went before to heaven. Look to him, and trust in his mediation, in his blood, with which he has entered into the holiest of all, as the price of heaven. Trust to his intercession in heaven before God. Trust to his strength by his Spirit sent from heaven to enable you to press on and surmount the difficulties which are in the way to heaven. Trust in his promises of heaven to those who love and follow him ...*⁸⁶

His applications were not moralistic or man-centered, but were moved by the gospel and grace of God in Christ throughout. The above quotation also shows his “God-Entranced Vision”⁸⁷ was not only of the Father, but was equally for the exaltation of the Son and by the empowerment of the Spirit. As the Banner of Truth editors write, “this moving exposition of 1 Corinthians 13 ... reveals Edwards’ insistence both that true Christian experience is ‘supernatural’- Spirit produced and Christ centered ...”⁸⁸ This is another way to say the love in this chapter must be applied in a Christ-centered and Spirit-produced way, and this conclusion will focus on how Edwards applies Christ throughout these sermons, as readers “look to him ... observe his example ... consider how he went before” and “love and follow him” (direction 4 from sermon 15).

It’s been said that these 15 sermons are a brilliant demonstration of the idea that “love in 1 Corinthians 13 is best expounded from the character of Jesus ... His life is the archetype of every virtue, spiritual and social, toward God and man.”⁸⁹ A central argument of this *Charity* is

⁸⁴ Ibid., 305.

⁸⁵ Ramsey, 66.

⁸⁶ *Works*, 8:395. Italics added by this student.

⁸⁷ This phrase credited to the aforementioned volume by that title edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor.

⁸⁸ Book Description accessed June 1, 2021, <https://banneroftruth.org/us/store/sermons-and-expositions/charity-its-fruits/>.

⁸⁹ Richard W. Daniels, *Puritan Reformed Journal* 5, no. 2 (2013): 56.

that true believers “should strive, in the manner of Jesus, to be devout, humble, meek, forgiving, peaceful, respectful, benevolent, and merciful ... Christ loves us even though we are ungrateful; we must do likewise...”⁹⁰ Strobel notes that in these 15 sermons Jesus “is the perfect example of what love to God and neighbor looks like.”⁹¹

In other words, it’s not just that *charity is long-suffering* (sermon 4 on v. 4a), *Christ is long-suffering* as the believer’s example and exhortation:

In an use of exhortation to this duty of meekly bearing injuries received from others ...*First*, Consider the example which Christ hath set. He was a meek spirit and of a meek, long-suffering behavior [and gentleness, 2 Cor. 10:1] ... He, though he was the Lord of glory, was among men as one set at nought, and esteemed of no value. Is. 53:3, “He was despised and rejected of men.” ... Christ meekly bore all those injuries from men, he reviled not again; with a lamblike quietness of spirit he passed through all ... no appearance of the calm of his mind being disturbed, or any desire of revenge. But he prayed for his crucifiers, that they might be forgiven, even when they were nailing him to the cross; yea, did not only pray, but pleaded; he pleaded that they knew not what they did.⁹²

Likewise, Edwards moves from “love is kind” to how the *Lord is kind*: “Let us consider how kind God and Christ have been to us ... his own Son ... all this have God and Christ done for us when we were not good, but evil; not friends, but enemies, and though very unthankful.” On the next sermon about love not envying, he cites “the example of Christ, both as God’s antidote to envy and as the supreme example of a life lived that uplifted others.”⁹³ But it’s not just the love of Christ, Edwards adds “love to Christ will dispose us to imitate him in that which is so contrary to envy ... and the examples he hath set us in the course of his life in this world.” Again, the next sermon on humble love extols Jesus in His humility as the ultimate example, and the sermon on unselfish love makes much of Christ’s unselfish love and call to love like Him.⁹⁴

But Edwards not only preaches Christ as *exemplary* of this love, He preaches Christ’s *sufficiency* for a life of love. Saving Christianity starts with “love to Christ” and will “incline the

⁹⁰ Ronald Story, “Charity,” in *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, 84.

⁹¹ Strobel, “Introduction,” 18. For a book length extended treatment of this concept of applying 1 Cor. 13 to Christ’s life and love phrase-by-phrase, see Philip Graham Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loves* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

⁹² *Works*, 8:197-98. True to his Trinitarian emphasis, Edwards uses the phrase “God and Christ” 33 times, and Father with Son another 14 times. Edwards doesn’t employ a Christocentric *interpretation* of each phrase, but this student sees his *application* as Christotelic (Christ as the *telos* or end), God-centered, and Spirit-dependent. See Abner Chou, “A Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 27 no. 2 (Fall 2016): 113-39.

⁹³ *Charity and Its Fruits*, 122, 132. Compare Paul’s appeal in the Corinthian context in 2 Cor. 10:1.

⁹⁴ *Works*, 8:226, 8:234, 8:266-68. Italics added. He cites Jn 13:34, 15:12, Mt 25:40, and Rom 15:3, and “enforces” his point with Christ loving us who were His enemies, counting us “dear to him, as the apple of his eye,” Christ spending Himself for us, and loving us knowing we would not requite His love (*Charity and Its Fruits*, 175).

heart to flow out in love to God's people [and] to all mankind. When persons have a true discovery of the sufficiency and excellency of Christ, this is the effect."⁹⁵ So rather than rejoice in evil, the believer rejoices in the truth (v. 6) of the love of God in Christ. This in turn helps him resist evil and rest in the joy of the Lord that is His strength to endure all things (v. 7):

So he that is convinced of the sufficiency of Christ to deliver him from all evil, and to bring him to the possession of all good which he needs, if he be truly convinced, it will have influence on his practice [of love] ... he is convinced that Christ is sufficient to deliver him. So he will not be afraid to forego other ways of seeking happiness, because he is convinced that Christ alone is sufficient to bestow all needed happiness ... the more a person has of an humble sense of his own insufficiency, the more will his heart be prepared to trust alone in God, and depend entirely on Christ...the only Savior, the glorious and all-sufficient Savior⁹⁶

Conclusion

The sufficiency and excellency of Christ helps the believer bear all things for the cause of Christ (sermon 11). But for this, believers need graces that cannot be overthrown and His eternal love (titles of sermons 12, 13, and 14). In conclusion, this student agrees with R. C. Sproul, who puts *Charity and Its Fruits* among the top books he recommends, as "one of the most demanding and humbling pieces on divine revelation we may ever encounter. Under Edwards' scrutiny, our failure to live the love we're called to is so clear that we are driven once more to cling to the cross."⁹⁷ By gospel grace, the prayer is that this study bears fruits of charity in ministry, in families, transforming lives by the way of love, and calling the hell-bound to the world of love.

⁹⁵ *Works*, 8:145-46.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8:300, 329-30, 336.

⁹⁷ Justin Taylor, "Reading *Charity and Its Fruits* Today: An Interview With Kyle Strobel," August 6, 2012, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/reading-charity-and-its-fruits-today-an-interview-with-kyle-strobel/>.