

## CHARITY AND ITS FRUITS

JONATHAN EDWARDS

### LECTURE IX: CHARITY, OR TRUE GRACE, NOT TO BE OVERTHROWN BY OPPOSITION

- I. All True Grace in the Heart Summed up in Charity, or Love
- II. Charity or Love, More Excellent Than Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit
- III. All That Can be Done or Suffered in Vain Without Charity, or Love
- IV. Charity Meek in Bearing Evil and Injuries
- V. Charity Cheerful and Free in Doing Good
- VI. The Spirit of Charity the Opposite of an Envious Spirit
- VII. The Spirit of Charity an Humble Spirit
- VIII. The Spirit of Charity the Opposite of a Selfish Spirit
- IX. The Spirit of Charity the Opposite of an Angry or Wrathful Spirit
- X. The Spirit of Charity the Opposite of a Censorious Spirit
- XI. All True Grace in the Heart Tends to Holy Practice in the Life
- XII. Charity Willing to Undergo All Sufferings for Christ
- XIII. All the Christian Graces Connected and Mutually Dependent
  - XIV. Charity, or True Grace, Not to be Overthrown by Opposition
- XV. The Holy Spirit Forever to be Communicated to the Saints, in Charity, or Love
- XVI. Heaven, A World of Love

I Corinthians 13:7: Charity . . . endureth all things.

And this expression of the text, that charity "endureth all things," signifies . . . the lasting and abiding nature of the principle of charity, or true grace in the soul and declares that it will not fail, but will continue and endure, notwithstanding all the opposition it may meet with, or that may be brought against it. The two expressions, "beareth all things," and "endureth all things," as in our English translation, and as commonly used, are indeed very much of the same import. But the expression of the original, if literally translated, would be, "charity remains under all things;" that is, it still remains, or still remains constant and persevering under all opposition that may come against it.

Doctrine: THAT CHARITY, OR TRUE CHRISTIAN GRACE, CANNOT BE OVERTHROWN BY ANYTHING THAT OPPOSES IT.

Opening Discussion: What is your favorite action-adventure movie?

Many of such movies feature the recurring theme of the underdog hero fighting for a just cause against overwhelming odds and prevailing. Why is that theme so appealing to us?

In this lecture Edwards discusses the overwhelming opposition we can expect to face when we live a life of Christian love, yet we can be absolutely assured of victory over every opposing force because Christ has already secured the victory for us.

Observations

In speaking to this doctrine, I would, first, notice the fact that many things do oppose grace in the heart of the Christian; second, advert to the great truth, that it cannot be overthrown; and, third, state some reasons why it cannot be shaken, but remains firm under all opposition.

- I. There are many things that do greatly oppose the grace which is in the heart of the Christian. — This holy principle has innumerable enemies watching and warring against it. The child of God is encompassed with enemies on every side. He is a pilgrim and stranger passing through an enemy's country, and exposed to attack at any and every moment. . . . [T]he world is an enemy to this grace, because it abounds with persons and things that make opposition to it, and with various forms of allurements and temptation, to win or drive us from the path of duty. And the Christian has not only many enemies without, but multitudes within his own breast, that he carries about with him, and from which he cannot get free. Evil thoughts and sinful inclinations cling to him; and many corruptions that still hold their footing in his heart are the worst enemies that grace has, and have the greatest advantage of any in their warfare against it. . . . [T]he Christian, while he remains in this world, is represented as being in a state of warfare, and his business is that of the soldier, insomuch that he is often spoken of as a soldier of the cross, and as one whose great duty it is to fight manfully the good fight of faith. . . . It is with grace in the heart of a Christian, very much as it is with the church of God in the world. It is God's post; and it is but small, and great opposition is made against it by innumerable enemies. The powers of earth and hell are engaged against it, if possible to destroy it; and oftentimes they rise with such violence, and come with such great strength against it, that if we were to judge only by what appears, we should think it would be taken and destroyed immediately.

Discussion: What are some “enemies to grace” – whether external or internal – that you are facing?

- II. All the opposition that is or can be made against true grace in the heart, cannot overthrow it. — The enemies of grace may, in many respects, gain great advantages against it. They may exceedingly oppress and reduce it, and bring it into such circumstances that it may seem to be brought to the very brink of utter ruin. But yet it will live. The ruin that seemed impending shall be averted. Though the roaring lion sometimes comes with open mouth, and no visible refuge appears, yet the lamb shall escape and be safe. Yea, though it be in the very paw of the lion or the bear, yet it shall be rescued, and not devoured. . . . And grace shall not only remain, but at last shall have the victory. Though it may pass through a long time of sore conflicts, and may suffer many disadvantages and depressions, yet it shall live; and not only live, but it will finally prosper and prevail and triumph, and all its enemies shall be subdued under its feet. . . . And the reason of this may be seen in these two things:
  - a. That there is so much more in the nature of true grace that tends to perseverance than in false grace. — False grace is a superficial thing, consisting in mere outward show, or in superficial affections, and not in any change of nature. But true grace reaches to the very bottom of the heart. It consists in a new nature, and therefore it is lasting and enduring. Where there is nothing but counterfeit grace, corruption is unmortified; and whatever wounds may seem to be given it, they are but slight wounds, that do not at all reach its life, or diminish the strength of its principle, but leave sin in its full strength in the soul, so that it is no wonder that it ultimately prevails, and bears down all before it. But true grace really mortifies sin in the heart. It strikes at its vitals, and gives it a wound that is mortal, sending its stroke to the very heart. When it first enters the soul, it begins a never-ceasing conflict

with sin, and therefore it is no wonder that it keeps possession, and finally prevails over its enemy.

- b. God will uphold true grace, when he has once implanted it in the heart, against all opposition. — He will never suffer it to be overthrown by all the force that may be brought against it. Though there be much more in true grace that tends to perseverance than there is in counterfeit grace, yet nothing that is in the nature of grace, considered by itself and apart from God's purpose to uphold it, would be sufficient to make sure its continuance, or effectually to keep it from final overthrow. We are kept from falling, not by the inherent power of grace itself, but, as the apostle Peter tells us (1 Pet. 1:5), "by the power of God through faith."
  - i. First, I would show how it is evident that God will uphold true grace in the heart. And, in one word, it is evident from his promise.

Jeremiah 32:40: I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Matthew 18:14: So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

John 6:39: And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

John 10:28: I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Romans 8:29-30: For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- ii. Second, I would briefly show some reasons why God will uphold the principle of grace, and keep it from being overthrown.
  - 1. And, in the first place, unless the redemption provided by Christ secured our perseverance through all opposition, it would not be a complete redemption. Christ died to redeem us from the evil we were subject to under the law, and to bring us to glory. But if he brought us no further than the state we were in at first, and left us as liable to fall as before, then all his redemption might be made void, and come to nothing.
  - 2. In the second place, the covenant of grace was introduced to supply what was wanting in the first covenant, and a sure ground of perseverance was the main thing that was wanting in it. . . . All the ground we had under the first covenant was the freedom of our own will; and this was found not to be depended on; and therefore God has made another covenant. The first was liable to fail, and therefore another was ordained more enduring than the first, and that could not fail, and which therefore is called "an everlasting covenant."
  - 3. In the third place, it is not fit that, in a covenant of mercy and saving grace, the reward of life should be suspended on man's perseverance, as depending on the strength and steadfastness of his own will. . . . If all is of free and sovereign grace, then free grace has undertaken the matter to

complete and finish it, and has not left it to men themselves, and to the power of their own wills, as it was under the first covenant.

4. In the fourth place, our second surety has already persevered, and done what our first surety failed of doing; and therefore we shall surely persevere. Adam, our first surety, did not persevere, and so all fell with him. But if he had persevered, all would have stood with him, and never would have fallen. But our second surety has already persevered, and therefore all that have him for their surety will persevere with him.
5. In the fifth place, the believer is already actually justified, and thus entitled, through the promise of mercy, to eternal life, and therefore God will not suffer him to fail and come short of it. Justification is the actual acquittal of the sinner.
6. In the sixth place, the Scriptures teach us, that the believer's grace and spiritual life are a partaking of the life of Christ in his resurrection, which is an immortal and unfading life. . . . Our spiritual life being his life, as truly as the life of the branch is the life of the tree, cannot but continue.
7. In the seventh place, grace is that which God hath implanted in the heart against the great opposition of enemies, and therefore he will doubtless maintain it there against their continued and combined efforts to root it out.

#### Application

- I. We may learn one reason why the devil so exceedingly opposes the conversion of sinners. — It is because if they are once converted, they are forever converted, and thus forever put beyond his reach, so that he can never overthrow and ruin them. If there was such a thing as falling from grace, doubtless the devil would even then oppose our having grace; but more especially does he oppose it, since he knows that if once we have it, he can never expect to overthrow it, but that we, by its very possession, are finally lost to him, and forever out of the reach of his destroying power.
- II. We may see from this subject, that those whose seeming grace fails, and is overthrown, may conclude that they never had any true grace. — That is not true grace, which is like the morning cloud and the early dew, which passeth away. When persons seem for a while to be awakened and terrified, and have more or less of a sense of their sinfulness and vileness, and then afterwards seem much affected with the mercy of God, and appear to find comfort in him, and yet, after all, when the novelty is over, their impressions decline and pass away, so that there is no abiding change in the heart and life, then it is a sign that they have no true grace.
- III. The subject affords matter of great joy and comfort to all who have good evidence that they indeed have true grace in their hearts. — Those with whom it is thus are possessed of an inestimable jewel, which is worth more than all the jewels and precious stones, and all the crowns and costly treasures, in the universe. And this may be a matter of great comfort to them, that they never shall lose this jewel, but that he that gave it will keep it for them; and that, as he has brought them into a most happy state, so he will uphold them in it; and that his mighty power, by which he is able to subdue all things to himself, is on their side, and pledged for their protection, so that none of their enemies shall be able to destroy them.

IV. The subject also affords matter of great encouragement to the saints in carrying on the warfare against the enemies of their souls. — You that have good evidence that you have grace in your hearts, have, then, all that you can need to encourage you. The Captain of your salvation will assuredly conduct you to victory in the end. He who is able to uphold you has promised that you shall overcome, and his promise shall never fail. Resting on that promise, be faithful to your part, and ere long the song of victory shall be yours, and the crown of victory he will place, with his own hands, upon your head.

Discussion: Do we really believe this doctrine, that the grace of Christ cannot be overthrown by anything that opposes it?

What are some things that cause us to doubt it?

How might our lives look different if we completely trusted that grace will prevail over everything in our lives that opposes it?