

Sermon XII- Jonathan Edwards

“Charity, or a Christian spirit, willing to undergo all sufferings in the way of duty”

1 Cor. 13: 7

“Charity ...beareth all things.” [KJ]

“Love bears all things” [ESV]

DOCTRINE: “That charity, or a truly Christian spirit, will make us willing, for Christ’s sake, to undergo all sufferings to which we may be exposed in the way of duty.”

Edwards begins by indicating that some understand this verse to refer to the “meek bearing of injuries from our fellow-men”, but states he believes it is better understood “in the cause of Christ and religion” for the following reasons – Paul has already mentioned love tending to the resisting of anger (“charity suffereth long” and “is not easily provoked”) and would not likely mention the same thing a third time; Paul seems to have summed up the fruits of charity of a more active nature, including our conduct towards our neighbor and seems to proceed to traits of another nature; Paul frequently mentions suffering in the cause of Christ as a fruit of Christian love, so it is unlikely it would have been omitted here; and in the context of the verse “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,” it appears Paul is not discussing fruits of charity in reference to other men.

What kind of suffering might a Christian in today’s American culture expect “in the cause of Christ and religion”?

Explaining the doctrine

1. That it implies that those that have the true spirit of charity, or Christian love, are willing not only to do, but also to suffer for Christ.
“Hypocrites may, and oftentimes do, make a great show of religion in profession, and in words that cost nothing,, and in actions that involve no great difficulty or suffering. But they have not a suffering spirit, or a spirit that inclines them to willingly suffer for Christ’s sake... But those that are truly Christians have a spirit to suffer for Christ; and they are willing to follow him on that condition which he himself has given: “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple”(Luke 14:27). pp. 253-254

2. It is also implied in our doctrine, that they have the spirit to undergo all the sufferings to which their duty in Christ may expose them.
 - a. They are willing to undergo all sufferings, *of all kinds*, that are in the way of duty

2 Corinthians 12:10*
Matthew 10:22, 39*
Philippians 3:8

2 Corinthians 6:4-5*

- b. They are willing to undergo all sufferings *of all degrees*, that are in the way of duty.

Luke 14:26*

Hebrews 11:32-38

Can you describe someone who made an impression on you related to their ability/willingness to undergo difficulty? Can you describe an example of a Christian who has demonstrated a willingness to suffer for Christ's sake?

Reason or proof of the doctrine

1. If we have not such a spirit, it is an evidence that we have never given ourselves unreservedly to Christ.

“It is necessary to our being Christians, or followers of Christ, that we should give ourselves to him unreservedly, to be his wholly, and his only, and his forever. And therefore the believer’s closing with Christ is often, in the Scriptures, compared to the act of a bride in giving herself in marriage to her husband... True believers are not their own, for they are bought with a price, and they consent to the full right that Christ has in them, and recognize it by their own act, giving themselves to him as a voluntary and living sacrifice, wholly devoted to him... To give ourselves wholly to Christ implies the sacrificing of our own temporal interest wholly to him... If God be truly loved, he is loved as God; and to love him as God, is to love him as the supreme good. But he that loves God as the supreme good, is ready to make all other good give place to that; or, which is the same thing, he is willing to suffer all for the sake of this good.” pp. 256-257

2. They that are truly Christians, so fear God, that his displeasure is far more terrible than all earthly afflictions and sufferings.

Luke 12:4-5

Isaiah 8:13

3. They that are truly Christians, have that faith whereby they see that which is more than sufficient to make up for the greatest sufferings they can endure in the cause of Christ.

“They see that excellency in God and Christ, whom they have chosen for their portion, which far outweighs all possible sufferings.” p. 258

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Hebrews 11:24-27

4. If we are not willing to close with religion, notwithstanding all the difficulties attending it, we shall be overwhelmed with same at last

Luke 14:28-33

“The sufferings that are in the way of our duty, are among the difficulties that attend religion. They are part of the cost of being religious. He, therefore, that is not willing to meet this cost, never complies with the terms of religion. He is like the man that wishes his house was built, but is not willing to meet the cost of building it; and so, in effect, refuses to build it... He that does not receive Christ with his cross as well as his crown, does not truly receive him at all. It is true that Christ invites us to come to him to find rest, and to buy wine and milk: but then he also invites us to come and take up the cross, and that daily, that we may follow him; and if we come only to accept the former, we do not in truth accept the offer of the gospel, for both go together, the rest and the yoke, the cross and the crown: and it will signify nothing, that, in accepting only the one, we accept what God never offered to us. They that receive only the easy part of Christianity, and not the difficult, at best are but almost Christians;

while they that are wholly Christians receive the whole of Christianity, and thus shall be accepted and honoured, and not cast out with shame at the last day.” pp. 258-259

5. Without this spirit which the text implies, we cannot be said to forsake all for Christ
“If there be any one kind or degree of temporal suffering that we have not a spirit to undergo for Christ, then there is something that we do not forsake for him For example, if we are not willing to suffer reproach for Christ, then we are not willing to forsake honour for him. And so if we are not willing to suffer poverty, pain and death for his sake, then we are not willing to forsake wealth, ease and life for him.” p. 259

Luke 14:26-27

What are the things that are difficult for us to give up or to suffer, even for Christ’s sake?

6. Without this spirit, we cannot be said to deny ourselves in the sense in which the Scriptures require us to do it.

Matthew 16:24-25

2 Timothy 2:12

Matthew 10:33

7. It is the character of all the true followers of Christ, that they follow him in all things.

Revelations 14:4

Matthew 8:19-22

2 Samuel 15:21

8. It is the character of true Christians, that they overcome the world
“ ‘Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world’ ” (1 John 5:4). But to overcome the world, implies that we overcome alike its flatteries and frowns, its sufferings and difficulties. These are the weapons of the world, by which it seeks to conquer us; and if there be any of these that we have not a spirit to encounter for Christ’s sake, then by such weapons the world will have us in subjection, and gain victory over us. But Christ gives his servants the victory over the world in all its forms. They are conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him that hath loved them.” pp. 261-262

Why is it difficult at times for Christians to see themselves as conquerors in and through Christ?

9. The sufferings in the way of duty are often, in the Bible, called temptations or trials, because by them God tries the sincerity of our character as Christians

1 Peter 1:6-7

1 Peter 4:12-19

Zechariah 13:9

APPLICATION

1. Leads those who think themselves Christians to examine themselves, whether or no they have the spirit to undergo all sufferings for Christ

“Though you never have had the trial of having such great and extreme sufferings laid in the way of your duty, as many others have had, yet you have had enough, in the course of God’s providence, to shew what your spirit is, and whether you are of a disposition to suffer, and to renounce your own comfort, and ease, and interest, rather than forsake Christ...Every true Christian has the spirit of a martyr. And if you have not the suffering spirit in the lesser trials or sufferings that God may have sent upon you, how will it be if he should expose you to bitter persecutions, such as the saints of old sometimes were called to endure?” p. 263-264

Jeremiah 12:5

How can what God has revealed to us about love change how we handle suffering in the “lesser trials”?

2. Exhorts all professors of religion to cherish a ready spirit, for Christ's sake, to undergo all sufferings that may be in the way of duty.
- a. How happy those persons are represented in the Scriptures to be, who have a spirit to suffer, and do actually suffer, for Christ.

Matthew 5:10-12*

1 Peter 3:14a

Luke 6:21-23*

Philippians 1:29

- b. What glorious rewards God has promised hereafter to bestow on those that do willingly suffer for Christ.

Matthew 19:28-30*

Romans 8:17*

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5

2 Timothy 2:11-12

Revelations 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28, 3:5, 12, 21

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God... He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. ... To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it. ... To whom who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star... He who overcomes will, like them be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels... Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of the heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name... To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

- c. How the Scriptures abound with blessed examples of those that have suffered for Christ's sake

Psalms 44:9-18

Daniel 3 and 6

Psalms 119:51, 157, 161

Hebrews 12:1-12*

Jeremiah 26:15

In what ways can we pray for one another and encourage one another that God might strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees?