

Sermon XIV Jonathan Edwards
“Charity, or true grace, not to be overthrown by opposition”

1 Cor. 13: 7

“Charity ...endureth all things.” [KJ]

“Love ...always perseveres” [NIV]

DOCTRINE: “That charity, or true Christian grace, cannot be overthrown by anything that opposes it.”

What type of challenges or opposition do we find as we seek to live out the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13?

Prior verses in 1 Corinthians indicate that charity “suffereth long” and “beareth all things,” and Edwards reviews that the first has reference to bearing of injuries from others, and the second to a spirit willing to undergo suffering for Christ’s sake, and now shows that the context would lead us to understand that this is not a repetition of Paul’s meaning in either of those verses.

“It expresses 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 be meet with, or that may be brought against it...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. Whatever assaults may be made upon it, yet it still remains and endures, and does not cease, but bears up, and bears onward with constancy and perseverance and patience, notwithstanding them all.” p. 286

- I. There are many things that do greatly oppose the grace which is in the heart of the Christian

“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...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...so that the Christian, while he remains in this world, is represented as being in a state of warfare, and his business is that of the soldier...whose great duty it is to fight manfully the good fight of faith.” pp. 288-289

How would an increased awareness of our being in a state of warfare and our business being as that of a soldier affect how we perceive and interact with the world on a daily basis?

“Sometimes grace, in the midst of the most violent opposition of its enemies fighting against it with their united subtlety and strength, is like a spark of fire encompassed with swelling billows and raging waves, that appears as if they would swallow it up and extinguish it in a moment. Or it is like a flake of snow falling into the burning volcano; or rather like a rich jewel of gold in the midst of a fiery furnace, the raging heat of which is enough to consume

anything except the pure gold, which is of such a nature that it cannot be consumed by the fire.

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." p. 289

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." p. 290

What examples can we find in scripture of God's persevering his people through circumstances that appeared to be on the "very brink of utter ruin?"

"Thus, as the gates of hell can never prevail against the church of Christ, so neither can they prevail against grace in the heart of a Christian. The seed remaineth, and none can root it out. The fire is kept alive even in the midst of the floods of water; and though it often appears dim, or as if it were just going out, so that there is no flame, but only a little smoke, yet the smoking flax shall not be squelched.

And grace shall not only remain, but at last shall have the victory...its depressions do but prepare the way for its exaltation." pp. 291-292

A. There is much more in the nature of true grace that tends to perseverance than in false grace.

False Grace	True Grace
<i>"superficial...and not in any change of nature."</i>	<i>"reaches to the very bottom of the heart... consists in a new nature, and therefore it is lasting and enduring."</i>
<i>"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."</i>	<i>"really mortifies the sin in the heart... 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."</i>
<i>"...never dispossesses sin of the dominion of the soul"</i>	<i>"...of such nature that it is inconsistent with the reigning power of sin, and dispossesses the heart as it enters, and take the throne from it..."</i>
<i>"...may affect the heart, yet is not founded on any real conviction of the soul"</i>	<i>"...begins in real and thorough conviction"</i>
<i>"Not diligent in prayer"</i>	<i>"...prayerful, and thus lays hold on the divine strength to support it, and indeed becomes divine itself, so that the life of God is, as it were, imparted to it"</i>
<i>"Careless whether it perseveres to the end or not"</i>	<i>"...naturally causes earnest desires for perseverance, and leads to hungering and thirsting for it... makes men sensible of the dangers they are encompassed with, and has a tendency to excite them to watchfulness, and to care and diligence that they may persevere, and to look to God for help, and trust in him for preservation from the many enemies that oppose it."</i>

pp. 292-293

B. God will uphold true grace, when he has once implanted it in the heart, against all opposition.

"Though there may 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 Paul tells us (1 Peter 1:5), "by the power of God through faith." p. 293

1. How it is evident that God will uphold true grace in the heart

Psalms 37:23-24
Matthew 18:12-14*

John 4:13-14

John 6:37-39*
John 10:25-30

Romans 8:29-30, 35-37*

1 Corinthians 1:8
Jude 24*

Philippians 1:6

"And many other similar promises might be mentioned, all of which declare that God will uphold grace in the heart in which he has once implanted it, and that he will keep to the end those who put their trust in him." p. 295

2. Reasons why God will uphold the principle of grace, and keep it from being overthrown
 - a. *“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.”* p. 295
 - b. *“...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. The first covenant had no defect on the part of God who constructed it...but the result proved that on our part it was wanting, and needed something more in order to its being effectual....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...The first covenant had a head and surety that was liable to fail, even the father of our race; and therefore God has provided, as the head and surety of the new covenant, one that cannot fail, even Christ, with whom, as the head and representative of all his people, the new covenant is made, and ordered in all things and sure.”* p. 296
 - c. *“...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. It is a covenant of works, and not a covenant of grace, that suspends eternal life on that which is the fruit of a man’s own strength, to keep him from falling. If all is 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. As divine grace has commenced the work, it will finish it; and therefore we shall be kept to the end.”* pp. 296-297
 - d. *“...our second surety has already persevered, and done what our first surety failed in doing; and therefore we shall surely persevere...When Adam fell, he was condemned, and all his posterity was condemned with him, and fell with him...now that Christ, the second Adam, has stood and persevered, and is justified, and confirmed in life, all who are in Christ and represented by him, are also accepted and justified, and confirmed in him.”* p. 297

- e. *“...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. It is full acquittance from guilt and freedom from condemnation, and deliverance from hell, and acceptance to a full title to eternal life. And all this is plainly inconsistent with the idea that deliverance from hell, and the attainment of eternal life, are yet suspended on an uncertain perseverance.”* pp. 297-298
- f. *“...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.”* p. 298

Colossians 2:13-15*
Ephesians 2:4-10*

Galatians 2:20
Revelation 1:18

Romans 6:8-11*

- g. *“...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. The enemies of God and the soul used their utmost endeavours to prevent grace being implanted in the heart that possesses it. But God manifested his all-conquering and glorious power in introducing it there in spite of them all. And therefore he will not at last suffer himself to be conquered by their expelling what he by his might power has so triumphantly brought in.”* pp. 298-299

APPLICATION

1. 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 for ever converted, and thus for ever put beyond his reach, so that he can never overthrow and ruin them...This may shew us something of the reason of that violent opposition that persons who are under awakenings and convictions, and who are seeking conversion, meet with through the many and great temptations they are assailed with by the adversary....By many subtle temptations he endeavours to make them think it is in vain to seek salvation....he will deceive them with false hopes, and flatter them that they are in a safe estate...he knows the truth...that if ever grace be implanted in the soul, he can never overthrow it, and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.” p. 299-300

2. Those whose seeming grace fails, and is overthrown, may conclude that they never had any true grace.

2 Corinthians 5:17

“If the individual, after seeming conversion, turns back from God and Christ and spiritual things, and the heart again goes after vanity and the world, and the known duties of religion are neglected, and the person again returns to the ways of sin, and goes on gratifying the selfish or sensual appetites, and leading a carnal and careless life, then all the promise of his apparent conversion is deceptive...The grace that does not hold out and persevere, is not real grace.” p.

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3. 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.” pp. 301-302

4. The subject also affords matter of great encouragement to the saints in carrying on the warfare against the enemies of their souls

“It is the greatest of all disadvantages to a soldier to have to go forth to battle without the hope of being able to conquer, but with the prevailing expectation of being overcome... 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.” pp. 302-303

How does this type of assurance allow us to love differently?