

JONATHAN EDWARDS ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE: AN ANALYSIS
OF HIS THOUGHT AND DEFENSE OF HIS ORTHODOXY

By

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will analyze the thought and writings of Jonathan Edwards on the doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone, and make a case in support of Edwards as a source of Reformed orthodoxy. Edwards was a strong defender of this historic Reformed doctrine, and he expounded one of the most powerful and convincing arguments in its support.

Jonathan Edwards' main teaching on this doctrine consists primarily in two public lectures delivered in November of 1734. These lectures were an immediate precursor to the spiritual awakening that took place in Northampton Massachusetts, which was itself a prelude to the Great Awakening of 1742-1745. His sermons on justification by faith alone were later published in 1738 as a part of his *Discourses on Various Important Subjects*.¹ Questions we will answer here include; what was Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of Justification? Was it in line with Reformed orthodoxy? And if so, on what points did he seek to preserve the historic understanding and expression of this doctrine?

It will be shown that his exposition of the doctrine is in full harmony with the historic reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. This will be accomplished by examining specific points of congruity between Edwards and his Reformed predecessors. However, it may be argued that Edwards' exposition contributes some ideas to the discussion that his predecessors did not see. His unique emphases echo John Calvin and the Puritans, but have a flavor and strength that only Jonathan Edwards could produce.

Therefore, Edwards' work on the subject is a powerful and important moment in the historical progression of clarifying and defending biblical doctrine. His is an exposition of such clarity that all succeeding generations of Christians need to be aware of and familiar with his argument. And if he indeed maintains the basic Puritan Reformed understanding of the doctrine, then he may be looked to for present theological reflection and formulation within the Reformed community of believers. As we will see, other Reformed scholars have recognized the usefulness of Edwards and have referenced him in outlining and defending their own conceptions of justification and related doctrines.

This topic is also important in light of the recent debates over justification related to the New Perspective on Paul.² Edwards proves helpful to this debate on the issues relating to the Apostle Paul's use of the phrase, "works of the law," and concerning how works flow from but do not grant justification. All of this will be demonstrated in the pages to follow.

Outline of the Process

Our process will begin with a short history of the doctrine of justification. This brief survey will focus primarily upon the 16th century formulations that accompanied the Protestant Reformation and the expressions that were birthed out of early protestant groups in the following generations. Our purpose here will be to show how Edwards echoes the expressions of justification formulated by these groups. Since our purpose

¹ This work is published separately as *Justification by Faith Alone*, ed. Don Kistler (Soli Deo Gloria, 2000) and in the Yale edition of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol.19, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2001), 143-242.

² Some of the keys scholars in the New perspective debates include E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, D. A. Carson, and Richard Gaffin. See Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said*, (Oxford, 1997), Carson, Peter O'Brien, and Mark Seifrid, eds, *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol.1: The*

does not include calculating the full historical development of the doctrine of justification, but rather Edwards' connection to the Reformed tradition, we will not discuss the developments in the ancient or medieval church (nor the Roman Catholic formulations) except by short mention.

Next it will be important to discuss and analyze Edwards' own expression of justification by faith alone. Edwards published only one work on the subject in his lifetime. As noted above, he published 2 lectures in 1738 that he had given four years earlier at the outbreak of a revival in his church. The later published version of those lectures was much more extensive and comprehensive. It included additional information taken from his "Miscellanies" notebooks, which brought clarification and more thorough exposition of the doctrine. The 1738 work seems intended to act as his comprehensive defense and exposition of the doctrine for all time, against all the current enemies of his time. The work was Edwards' fully formulated understanding of the doctrine and represented the position he would maintain throughout the course of his life. If one wants to know what Edwards' believed about justification by faith alone, one must go to this work and need go no further, except perhaps to see how he connects the doctrine to other key aspects of his thought.

Edwards had given his Master's *Quaestio* (i.e. Thesis) on the subject at Yale. This work introduces us to his early formulations and desire to preserve Reformed orthodoxy against Arminian versions of justification. Later in life, he began writing a rather extensive treatise on justification, mainly discussing the justification of Old Testament saints, in his "Controversies" notebook. These works will be referenced but not

Complexities of Second Temple Judaism (WUNT2.140; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck & Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

emphasized in our principle analysis. The larger treatise of 1738 will be our primary focus because it is Edwards' principle work on the subject and represents a comprehensive formulation of his thought.

As we analyze Edwards' doctrine we will pay careful attention to certain specific points at which he echoes Reformed orthodoxy. Specifically, we will see that Edwards affirms that justification is by faith *alone*. He will argue along similar lines as Luther and Calvin, while including some of his original thoughts, in support of the idea that no works may be added to faith as a means of becoming justified before God. Edwards also upholds the forensic nature of justification as a *declaration* of pardon and "positive" righteousness that God gives to believers through faith in Christ. Edwards asserts that "imputed righteousness" comes to the believer by virtue of their faith *union with Christ*, the Son of God. This theme of "union with Christ" was important both for the Reformers and for Edwards. Finally, the issue of *the place of obedience*, or good works, in the life of believers will be explained by Edwards in a manner comparable to the Reformers and Puritans as well. All of this will show that Edwards' doctrine of justification is strongly rooted in the tradition of Reformed orthodoxy.

While the above points are the principle purpose of this thesis, it will also be necessary to comment on Edwards' additional arguments in favor of justification by faith alone that seem to go "beyond" his predecessors. That is, he does argue for these points in some ways that others had not. That is not to say that he was changing the way the doctrine should be viewed or understood. Rather, he hoped to strengthen the historic arguments with other biblical exposition and theologically informed philosophical reasoning. The main contributions that Edwards makes here are his ideas and explanation

of “fitness” and non-causal conditions.

The next section will examine what other scholars have said about Edwards regarding his doctrine of justification by faith alone. Some scholars, such as John H. Gerstner³, Samuel T. Logan⁴, and Carl W. Bogue⁵ seek to hail Edwards for his theological genius and defend his orthodoxy. Others, such as Conrad Cherry⁶, and Patricia Wilson⁷ are not so concerned to come to Edwards’ aid against critics or offer polemics to commend him. Yet they too are willing to assert that Edwards’ theology complies with his Calvinistic and Puritan heritage. These scholars do not see any reason to suggest that Edwards was breaking with tradition. Rather, they see his tradition as a weighty force which shaped his understanding. In fact, nearly all scholars note this in addition to his strength of argument and depth of insight.

Some may feel that Thomas A. Schafer⁸ and Anri Morimoto⁹ represent a move in scholarship toward suggesting that Edwards was not so grounded in Reformed orthodoxy, and that he represented the beginnings of a movement away from it at certain points. However, it will be shown from their writings that they were also comfortable interpreting Edwards in light of the Puritan Reformed tradition. Rather, these two, as Edwards’ interpreters, see many things in Edwards’ view of justification that may be

³ John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1987), and *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 Vols, (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 1991-1993).

⁴ Samuel T. Logan, Jr. “The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (Spring 1984): 26-52.

⁵ Carl W. Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace*, (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing Company, 1975).

⁶ Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966; rep. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁷ Patricia Wilson, *The Theology of Grace in Jonathan Edwards*, The University of Iowa, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1973.

⁸ Thomas A. Schafer, “Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith.” *Church History* 20 (December 1951): 5-67.

⁹ Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

affirmed by both Protestants and Catholics. Morimoto, in particular, proposes to use Edwards as a doorway for Catholic-Protestant dialogue, but not to undermine the Reformed nature of Edwards' doctrine.

The most recent critic of Jonathan Edwards on justification, who argues that he was not sufficiently Reformed/ Calvinistic in his doctrine, is George Hunsinger.¹⁰ Essentially, Hunsinger argues that Edwards failed at what he attempted to accomplish in his writings on justification. Whereas Hunsinger acknowledges that Edwards sought to defend the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone, in the end, this was not accomplished. Rather, Hunsinger sees a new, more sophisticated, version of justification by works being developed.

Attempts will be made to more clearly discern how Edwards' argued for justification by faith alone and how he should be interpreted by exploring the writings of the above scholars. These will help us make connections between Edwards' work on Justification and his other works. They will also help us see that it is correct to find harmony between Edwards and his predecessors on the points of justification mentioned above.

Finally, this thesis will conclude by seeking to evaluate all that has been said concerning Edwards and this doctrine, to summarize our conclusions and make some general applications on the importance of the doctrine for contemporary scholarship and church life. It will be clear that Edwards continues to maintain the historic understanding of justification by faith alone and that he preserves much of the same forms of

¹⁰ George Hunsinger, "Dispositional Soteriology: Jonathan Edwards on Justification by Faith Alone," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 2004. Hunsinger's work is reflective of Sang Hyun Lee's argument regarding Edwards' "dispositional" view of reality. See Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

expression. This will commend him as a resource for Reformed orthodoxy, while at the same time giving us new forms of argumentation to strengthen our understanding and resolve on this central New Testament doctrine.

CHAPTER 2

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Early and Medieval Church Period

Articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae (“the doctrine by which the church stands or falls”) - so said Martin Luther regarding the doctrine of Justification by faith alone. John Calvin called this doctrine the “hinge” of the Reformation. John Gerstner points out that the Reformers “defined and refined the doctrine (Justification by Faith Alone) in the fires of controversy.”¹¹ It was during those years of trial and testing in the sixteenth century that the church was called upon to define its teaching on this subject more precisely. Beforehand, Justification by faith was taught more implicitly than explicitly. However, it was known and widely regarded that salvation was by faith alone.¹² Thomas C. Oden has recently demonstrated that Justification, defined in terms of pardon and acceptance through the righteousness of Christ, received by grace and faith alone, was largely affirmed and plainly taught by the early Church Fathers.¹³ The Protestant Reformation saw itself as a recovery of much of this early church theology.

The Augsburg Confession (1530) found solafideanism (justification by faith alone) in Augustine’s mentor and predecessor, Ambrose. Article VI reads: “The same [justification by faith] is also taught by the Fathers: For Ambrose says, ‘It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved freely receiving.’”¹⁴ Augustine himself asserted that man’s faith in Christ justifies him, that confession of Christ is efficacious for

¹¹John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*, (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), 69. Gerstner uses the shorthand phrase “solafideanism” to refer to justification-by-faith-aloneism throughout his writings on the subject.

¹²C.f., Louis Berkhof, *A History of Christian Doctrines*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 207.

¹³Thomas C. Oden, *The Justification Reader*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁴Quoted in Gerstner, *A Mini-Theology*, 70.

the remission of sins, that we are justified by the blood of Christ, and we have no merits which are not the gifts of God. He would also assert, echoing the Apostle Paul, that faith is active through love. But this does not mean that justification is on the basis of love.¹⁵

At times it was thought that Augustine intertwined justification and sanctification.

Gerstner argues that this is not the case. He states, “Though Augustine finds justification and sanctification inseparable, they are not indistinguishable. Augustinian justification leads to sanctification, but it is not confused with it.”¹⁶ This is important to understand since Luther had no problem referring to his own theology as Augustine’s.

This doctrine may also be found in the great early Scholastic theologian, Anselm.

He wrote a tract for the dying in which he stated:

Question. Dost thou believe that the Lord Jesus died for thee? Answer. I believe it. Qu. Dost thou thank him for his passion and death? Ans. I do thank him. Qu. Dost thou believe that thou canst not be saved except by his death? Ans. I believe it. (Then Anselm addresses the person) Come then, while life remaineth in thee: in his death alone place thy whole trust; in naught else place any trust; to his death commit thyself wholly, with this alone cover thyself wholly; and if the Lord thy God will judge thee, say, “Lord, between thy judgment and me I present the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; no otherwise can I contend with thee.” and if he shall say that thou art a sinner, say thou, “Lord, I interpose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my sins and thee.” If he say that thou hast deserved condemnation, say: “Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my evil deserts and thee, and his merits I offer for those which I ought to have and have not.” If he say that he is wroth with thee, say: “Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between thy wrath and me.” And when thou has completed this, say again: “Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between thee and me.”¹⁷

Gerstner believes that this quotation gives good evidence that many pious persons throughout the ages held to the New Testament’s teaching on justification by faith

¹⁵ Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, Vol. 1 (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 23ff. For more on Augustine’s view.

¹⁶ Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, 70.

¹⁷ Anselm, *Opera* (Migne), 1:686, 687. Quoted in A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Flemming H. Revell, 1907), 849.

implicitly and explicitly. In fact, it was not until the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that justification was officially confirmed as a process based on human merit derived through grace.¹⁸

The Protestant Reformation Period

Some time between 1513 and 1516, Martin Luther began to “discover” and teach the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He recounts his discovery in his *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings* (1545).¹⁹ As Luther studied and taught through the book of Romans, he began to have a breakthrough. He writes,

There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous live by gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the Gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “he who through faith is righteous shall live”. Here I felt that I was altogether born-again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.²⁰

Luther would go on to write about justification by faith alone in many writings. In *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), he wrote, “Faith alone, without works, justifies, frees, and, saves”. In his *Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation*, Number 25 asserts, “The one who does much ‘work’ is not the righteous one, but the one who, without ‘work’, has much faith in Christ.” And again in Number 26, “The law says: ‘Do this!’, and it is never done. Grace says: ‘Believe in this one!’, and forthwith everything is done.”²¹ Of course, Luther’s works brought the Reformation to all of Europe. In nearly all of his writings he sought to make reference to this doctrine in some form or fashion.

Two of his main expositions of the doctrine come simply in his commentaries on

¹⁸ Session VI, Canon 7 of the council of Trent. Referenced in Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, 72.

¹⁹ See *Luther’s Works*, volume 34, *Career of the Reformer: IV*, ed. and trans. by Lewis W. Spitz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 327-328. Reproduced in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 3-12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 500-503.

Galatians and Romans. For instance, in his *Commentary on Galatians*, he states matter-of-factly, “This is the true meaning of becoming a Christian, even to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the law.”²² And Luther would not concede to adding anything to faith as a condition for justification, for he believed it was “not by faith furnished with charity, but by faith only and alone.”²³ Luther believed that everything in Christian life and salvation depended upon faith. He once wrote, “Nothing makes a man good except faith, nor evil except unbelief.”²⁴ He wrote this in the context of arguing that a “person is justified and saved not by works nor by laws, but by the Word of God, that is, by the promise of his grace, and by faith, that the glory may remain God’s.”²⁵ He was saying that belief in the Gospel promises, which Christ both accomplished and promised, is the only basis for our being justified. In addition to teaching that faith alone justifies, and that one’s righteousness cannot be found in works, but rather in Christ- to whom we are united by faith, he also taught that good works would flow from true faith, though they could not produce true faith.²⁶

Luther’s theology would later be formulated by Melancthon into the Augsburg Confession (1530). It was a collection of Lutheran doctrine that shaped all later Reformation thought. It spoke of Justification thus:

Men cannot be justified in the sight of God by their own strengths, merits, or works, but...they are justified freely on account of Christ through faith, when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are remitted on account of Christ who made satisfaction for sins on our behalf by his death. God

²² Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, in Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 115.

²³ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Christian Liberty*, cited in Hugh T. Kerr’s, *A Compend of Luther’s Theology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁶ C.f., Luther’s *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in the *Works of Martin Luther, Vol. II*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982).

imputes this faith for righteousness in his own sight (Romans iii and iv).²⁷

In 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism was published out of the Lutheran and Reformed tradition. Luther's doctrine of Justification by faith alone is seen in it when it asserts,

Q. How are you right with God? A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart.²⁸

And to prevent anyone from thinking that their faith was a good work that earned them a share in Christ, the catechism follows with this question,

Q. Why do you say that by faith alone you are right with God? A. It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God. And I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.²⁹

Discussion on this doctrine continued to develop throughout the Reformation era as theologians built upon and responded to Luther's teaching.³⁰ Just the same, it was Luther who brought this doctrine back to the center of the church's life and thought. This was a crucial point in history for several reasons, not the least of which is that it brought the church back to one of the central themes of the New Testament.³¹ And it shaped all Reformed thinking to follow.

²⁷ The Augsburg Confession, 1530, "IV. Of Justification", cited in *Documents of the Christian Church*, Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds. (Oxford University Press, 1999), 233.

²⁸ *The Heidelberg Catechism*, (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), Question #60, 34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Question #61, 35

³⁰ For more on this, especially the contributions of other reformers to this great doctrine, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, From 1500 to the Present*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-53.

³¹ Joachim Jeremias considers the doctrine of Justification by faith to be one of the central themes of the New Testament. He also agrees with Luther's use of the phrase "faith alone" demonstrating that this is indeed the sense of the Apostle's words when he speaks of being "justified by faith". See Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 51-70.

Generally speaking, the Reformation understanding of salvation, and of justification in particular, is summed up in the five “solas”: *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Solus Christus* (through Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Sola Scriptura* (under the Scriptures alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (to the glory of God alone).

John Calvin teaches the doctrine of justification by faith alone in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (3:11,15,20,27), where he cites Augustine and Peter Lombard for support.³² Calvin’s unique emphasis was that he saw union with Christ preceding faith, whereas Luther saw it as following faith. However, both agreed on the importance and centrality of that point.

Chapter XI of Calvin’s *Institutes* deals with this subject most directly. Other chapters build upon it and discuss various aspects. In this chapter, Calvin defines and argues for Justification by faith alone.³³ He also argues against some of the contemporary objections by explaining his doctrine thus:

A man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.³⁴

Calvin connected justification with regeneration and acceptance, making it clear that justification was something that God alone performs. Calvin compared faith to a kind of vessel where the believer, being emptied of himself, comes to receive Christ and his benefits. And, establishing a tradition that would be followed by later Reformed

³² McGrath considers Calvin’s contributions to the development of this doctrine to be the most significant. See *Iustitia Dei*, 36ff. And for a good summary analysis of Calvin’s understanding of this doctrine and its influence, see pp. 36-53.

³³ For a good explanation on the issue of justification by faith “alone”, see Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), III.xi.19.

³⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xi.2, 38.

theologians, Calvin showed how the believer's union with Christ was the basis for everything in salvation. He writes, "When the Lord, therefore, admits (a believer) to union (with Christ), he is said to justify him, because he can neither receive him into favour, nor unite him to himself, without changing his condition from that of a sinner into that of a righteous man."³⁵ And later he explains, "You see that our righteousness is not in ourselves, but in Christ; that the only way in which we become possessors of it is by being made partakers with Christ, since with him we possess all riches."³⁶

The Puritan Period

Calvin's teaching shaped all subsequent Reformed theology, as it continues to today. His main theological descendants in England were the Puritans. The Puritans in general and Edwards specifically followed Calvin's understanding of justification by faith alone, and expounded upon it.³⁷ The most thorough and significant Puritan writing on Justification by faith came from John Owen (1616-1683).³⁸ Owen also emphasized the union with Christ as the basis for justification. His work, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ; Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated*, is a very thorough theological work that is also quite pastoral. His work expresses the common Puritan understanding of justification, and may have influenced Edwards, who was avowedly in step with the Puritan and Reformed traditions. Owen dealt with many of the same themes that Edwards would later. Owen saturated his work

³⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xi.21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, III.xi.23. In this section Calvin also asserts the imputation of Christ's righteousness and obedience.

³⁷ For a good summary analysis of the Puritan developments see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 111-121. For a good overview of the Puritan teaching on Justification by faith, see Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 376-399.

³⁸ John Owen, *Justification by Faith*, (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2002).

with Scriptural exposition while arguing for the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the nature of faith, the importance of the believer's union with Christ, - and all against Arminian opponents. Owen also sought to harmonize the writings of James and Paul. All of these themes are covered by Edwards as well.

Perhaps the most concise, yet comprehensive and influential, statement of Puritan Reformed orthodoxy is *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647). The Westminster assembly of divines, which was convened by the English Parliament in 1643, completed this confession of faith, as well as *The Shorter Catechism* and *The Larger Catechism*, by 1647. This document has served as the doctrinal standard for many Presbyterian and Reformed churches since it was written. It affirms that the elect are "freely justified" for Christ's sake alone by the imputation of His obedience and satisfaction for sins. This is received by faith, "which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God."³⁹ Faith is defined as "receiving and resting on Christ alone and his righteousness".⁴⁰ And faith is "the alone instrument of justification".⁴¹ This statement is qualified by asserting, "yet (faith) is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."⁴² The Confession goes on to assert that Christ, by his obedience and death, accomplished all that was necessary for our salvation, so that the believer may be justified by "free grace." This is brought to the believer by the Holy Spirit and applied to them for eternity, so that a believer "can never fall from the state of justification."⁴³ These ideas have been the standard manner of Reformed expression for over 350 years, and have been reaffirmed by succeeding generations of

³⁹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, XI.I., (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XI.II.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

Reformed Christians.

In all of this we see how the Protestant Reformers and their theological heirs taught that justification was by faith *alone*. It is something that God declares to be true of the believer (“forensic”), not because of any moral goodness in the person, but by virtue of their faith *union with Christ*, the unrighteous are given Christ’s righteousness. They also argue that good works flow from genuine faith, as the Holy Spirit cannot live within a person without true effect. These works from faith do not grant righteousness to the believer, but come out of a heart that has true belief and *imputed righteousness* already. All of these central tenets of justification would be echoed and affirmed by Jonathan Edwards in the 18th century.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) helped restore a declining New England Puritanism. His preaching and writing brought back into the mainstream many Puritan themes that were beginning to be ignored or rejected.⁴⁴ Edwards had been raised and educated under Puritan influence. From a young age he showed much theological acumen, gave himself to theological study, and would go on to be a vital part of the beginnings and spread of the Great Awakening in New England (1740’s).⁴⁵ He began to deal with the subject of justification by faith for his congregation in 1734 as the result of a growing Arminian theology. This theology was bringing back a note of human merit into the doctrine by advocating a justification by “sincere obedience”, and by suggesting a new, milder law to obey. Conversely, he wished to refute an increasing sense of antinomianism, or the idea that obedience to the law of God was not necessary. These

⁴³ Ibid., XI.III-V.

⁴⁴ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 119-121.

twin perversions of the gospel propelled Edwards into his study and up to his pulpit. And since he had written his Master's *Quaestio* on justification by faith at Yale, he was no stranger to the subject.⁴⁶

As we will see, Edwards had no problem affirming the historical Reformed expressions of justification by faith alone. He indeed did affirm them as he took on the Arminian opponents of his day. He argued against them as a conscious Calvinist. This is not to say that Edwards always depended upon Calvin for his theology. He once wrote, "I shall not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believe the doctrines which I hold, because he believed them; and cannot justly be charged with believing everything just as he taught."⁴⁷ Even if Edwards claimed to be somewhat independent, theologically speaking, he still belonged solidly in the school of thought that is associated with Reformed Calvinistic Theology. And he argued forcefully against the Arminian positions that sought to undermine a Reformed understanding of the Gospel.

Additionally, Edwards brought philosophical speculation into his theological discussions. This caused him to express some things differently than his predecessors, and even to suggest some new ways of arguing for justification by faith alone. But these were meant to strengthen the case for the doctrine, not detract from it. This will be shown

⁴⁵ For an excellent and thorough biography of Edwards and his role in the revivals of the 1730's and 1740's see George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). See also Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, (New York: Harper, 1957).

⁴⁶ *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 14, *Quaestio*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 60-66. This short work is Edwards' earliest expression of the historic doctrine of justification by faith alone. He wrote it directly against the Arminian suggestion that "sincere obedience" was the only condition of justification. Edwards was seeking to defend the Reformed doctrine against this Arminian idea. This makes it important for our present study. In addition, this *Quaestio* closely parallels several "Miscellanies", notably nos. 2, 27b, 36, 41, and 44. See Editors introduction in *Works*, 47-52.

⁴⁷ C.f., Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will in Works of Jonathan Edwards: Vol. I*, ed. Paul Ramsey (Yale, 1957), 12, 131.

below.

CHAPTER 3

JONATHAN EDWARDS ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

The Master's Quaestio

Many of the themes expounded by Edwards in the 1738 treatise were developments of themes briefly discussed in various “Miscellanies”, and in his 1723 Master’s *Quaestio* delivered at the Yale College Commencement. Though not published in his lifetime, this is the first work on Justification by faith that we have from Edwards. It is significant for understanding Edwards because in it he chose to defend the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone against the Arminian views of free will and self-determination. As in his later sermons and writings, he believed that the Arminian theology undermined the most “assuredly central doctrine of the Scriptures and the Christian faith”. In this early defense he did not rely on Scripture proofs as much. Rather, he argued exclusively from the “mutual consistency of God’s attributes” and the logical laws of non-contradiction.

His argument revolved around defining justification as divine forgiveness and approval rooted in the active and passive obedience of Christ. As he always would assert, justification was rooted in the righteousness of Christ being regarded as belonging to the believer by faith *only* and *alone*. He argued against the Arminian idea of *neonomism*, or a new law, which they asserted to be established by Christ so that God may accept us for our sincere, though imperfect, obedience. To Edwards, given the nature of a holy God, this idea would result in an imperfect justification and make Christ only a partial savior. He plainly demonstrated that the Arminian position was logically fallible, to its own discredit. Edwards reveals his Reformed orthodoxy by concluding,

Therefore, we now fearlessly assert that as the truth of the Reformed religion is certain, as the first foundation of the gospel is certain, as the mutual consistency of God's attributes is certain, as the incapacity of what is false to be strictly and absolutely demonstrated is certain, and as it is certain that both parts of a contradiction cannot be true, so it is certain that a sinner is not justified in the sight of God except through the righteousness of Christ obtained by faith.⁴⁸

The Master's *Quaestio* is a helpful introduction to Edwards' understanding and theological framework. It provides us with the opportunity to see Edwards argue for Reformed orthodoxy from the angle of combined logic and theological philosophy. These would be integrated into his later more extensive and biblically based expositions of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The Principle Work- *Justification by Faith Alone* (1738)

When Jonathan Edwards delivered two public lectures on justification by faith alone in November 1734, he must have had no idea of the impact they would make. An extended version of these lectures would be published four years later in 1738- somewhat as a tribute to what God had done as a result of his preaching on this doctrine. At the time of the original lectures (and continuing at the time of their publication) Edwards was responding to an encroaching Arminianism⁴⁹ in Northampton, Connecticut, as well as an abiding antinomianism. These lectures, not only clarified and thoroughly articulated the historic Reformed doctrine, they also sparked the beginning of a great awakening and revival of religion. Therefore, both from the response it brought forth and from the clarity of his exposition, Jonathan Edwards teaching on justification by faith alone begs to be

⁴⁸ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 14, *Quaestio*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1997), 64.

⁴⁹ For an overview of the Arminian doctrine of justification, see Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation*, (University park, Penn: Pennsylvania University press, 1995), 74-78.

analyzed and understood. In this analysis, we will look primarily at Edwards' published lectures (1738), since the written form is more thorough than his first sermons.⁵⁰ We will also mention his other writings on the subject where pertinent.⁵¹

The Nature of Justification: Faith Alone, Imputed Righteousness, Union with Christ

The primary biblical text for Edwards teaching in his sermons from 1734, and thus the treatise published in 1738, is Romans 4:5. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Edwards begins his argument by introducing the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He then seeks to clarify his meaning of the doctrine, which is followed by a sound proof for the doctrine built upon four solid arguments. Next, Edwards deals with the place of obedience in the life of a believer. This is followed by answers to six common objections. He concludes by discussing the doctrine's importance. And the importance of this doctrine remains a vital and necessary part of Christian theology today. It will be necessary to explore this text to determine just how Edwards understands and articulates the doctrine of justification by faith. As we analyze his thought, we will pay careful attention to the historic Reformed themes of faith alone, imputed righteousness- including forensic justification, and the believer's union with Christ.

Introducing the Doctrine

In the beginning of his work, Edwards makes four primary observations from

⁵⁰ *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 19, *Justification by Faith Alone*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2001), 143-242.

⁵¹ Such as the "Miscellanies" and the "Controversies" notebook- which may be found in the Yale Edition of Jonathan Edwards' Works.

Romans 4:5. The first is that justification regards man to be ungodly. This is seen where the passage states that God justifies the ungodly. This can mean nothing other than that there is nothing in a person, such as godliness or goodness, that should cause God to justify the sinner. Jonathan Edwards does not believe that there is any goodness in a person which makes for the grounds of justification. He writes, “we might as well suppose, when it says that Christ gave sight to the blind, that sight was prior to and the ground of that act of mercy in Christ.”⁵²

Edwards’ second point is that since the text says this happens to him that does not work, it is evident that gospel grace is a reward given without works. He states that gospel grace consists in a man’s being justified, while ungodly.⁵³ And for Edwards, these works do not simply mean the ceremonial law, but also include any works of morality or godliness. Therefore, Edwards’ third point is that the faith spoken of here cannot mean the same thing as a course of obedience or righteousness. In fact, faith is equated with believing on him that justifies the ungodly. Here, Edwards wants to point out that “believing on God as a justifier certainly is a different thing from submitting to God as a law giver.”⁵⁴

The fourth point in Edwards’s introduction is that faith is counted for, or imputed to, the believer for righteousness. In other words, “God, in his sovereign grace, is pleased, in his dealings with the sinner, so to regard one, who has no righteousness that the consequence shall be the same as if he had.”⁵⁵ Here Edwards points out that the apostle Paul is stressing that the grace of God is free. In fact, this is what makes

⁵² Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, ed. Don Kistler (Soli Deo Gloria, 2000,) 1. This will be the version/publication of JFBA referenced for the rest of this writing.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

justification truly gracious: that something is counted for righteousness, which has no righteousness in itself. In the book of Romans, Paul uses Abraham as an example. Abraham believed God's promises. Therefore, righteousness was counted, or imputed, to him.⁵⁶ Paul even cites the Psalms of David, where he describes the blessedness of a person to whom God has imputed righteousness without works. In these passages, who is it that is counted for righteous, but a sinner?

This introduction establishes Edwards' statement of his doctrine, which is as follows: "*we are justified only by faith in Christ, not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own.*"⁵⁷ Edwards then will move on to clarify his meaning. Already we see the historic expressions of this doctrine shaping Edwards' own. He has affirmed the notion of justification being an act of God given to a sinner by faith only, and that it is through the mystical union with Christ that believers are counted righteous.

The Meaning of the Doctrine

Explaining what this doctrine means includes outlining the issues of the meaning of faith, how justification is by faith alone, and how faith unites one to Christ. In Edwards' work he seeks to answer two pressing questions. First, what is meant by being justified? Second, what does it mean that it is by faith alone? Edwards' answer to the first question is, "a person is said to be justified when he is approved by God as free from the guilt of sin and its deserved punishment, and as having that righteousness belonging

⁵⁵Ibid, 3.

⁵⁶ See also Edwards' "Notes on the Bible", *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Reprint of 1834 edition from Great Britain), 798. Here Edwards notes that Paul, in Romans 4:3-4, lays stress upon the word "counted" or "imputed". He adds, "If he (Abraham) had a righteousness, that is, of his own...it would not have been expressed in this manner."

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 4.

to him that entitles him to the reward of life.”⁵⁸ To clarify, he means that the judge accepts the person as having both a negative and a positive righteousness. Therefore, the person is free from any obligation or punishment, that he is just and righteous, and that he is entitled to a positive reward. Edwards argues that this is both the natural meaning of the word and the force of Scripture. Justification is not the mere remission of sins, it is actually being declared as righteous in judgment. Edwards wants to show that since the law of God is the standard for judgment, justification must mean more than not having guilt for sin. There must be some fulfillment or obedience to the law for there to rightly be a judgment of justification. He writes,

If Adam had finished his course of perfect obedience, he would have been justified. And certainly his justification would have implied something more than what is merely negative; he would have been approved as having fulfilled the righteousness of the law, and accordingly, would have been entitled to the reward of it. So Christ, our second surety (in whose justification all, whose surety he is are virtually justified), was not justified till he had done the work the father had appointed for him, and the Father’s Commandments through all his trials – and then, in his resurrection, he was justified.⁵⁹

This is a powerful affirmation of the Reformers understanding of justification. And yet, it clarifies this aspect of their teaching. Edwards is saying that Christ exaltation was a reward for his obedience. The reason this is important is because a believer is only justified because they are admitted to communion with Christ. He was the surety of all believers in that he did not suffer for his own sins but for his people’s. Therefore, when he was resurrected and justified, he was such not as a private person, but as a surety and representative for all who would believe in him. Here, Romans 4:25 (“*who was delivered for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*”) and 8:34 (“*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right*

⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”) are referenced for support.

Therefore, a believer’s justification has two parts. One, there is remission of sins and removal of wrath. Secondly, there is an admittance to glory as a reward for righteousness. Romans 5:1-2 (*“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*) place both of these together. They are both obtained by faith in Christ.

Edwards then moves to show that justification is by faith only, and not “by any virtue or goodness of our own.” First, he shows how justification is by faith. Then, he shows how it is by faith *alone* (“*sola fide*”). Here Edwards provides a very sophisticated argument.⁶⁰ It seems to be an ambiguous way of speaking, to say that faith is the condition of justification. This is so because “in one sense, Christ alone performs the condition of our justification and salvation; in still another sense, faith is the condition of justification; in another sense, other qualifications and acts are conditions of salvation and justification too. There seems to be a great deal of ambiguity in such expressions as they are commonly used, such as “condition of salvation.”⁶¹ Edwards wants to point out, before he gets into an explanation of faith, that according to the common understanding of the word “condition,” “faith is not the thing in us that is the condition of justification.”⁶² Edwards acknowledges that there are conditional propositions in Scripture. Many of these things appear to be conditions for justification and salvation. Such conditions include love for God, love for others, for giving sins, and many other

⁵⁹ Ibid., 6-7.

⁶⁰ See also Edwards’ Miscellany no. 416.

⁶¹ Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 9.

⁶² Ibid., 9.

good actions. But Edwards argues that these conditions are not meant in the same sense that faith is spoken of as being the means, or condition, of justification.

Some have solved this problem by calling faith the “instrument” of justification. However, Edwards does not like this expression. He believes it is subject to misunderstanding, and that it is an obscure way of speaking. Rather than being an instrument of receiving, Edwards prefers to speak of faith as the reception or acceptance itself. Besides, justification itself is not the object of our faith. Rather, it is a benefit arising indirectly from our faith in Christ, “the mediator by whom and by whose righteousness we are justified.”⁶³ In other words, the mediator purchased justification. Therefore, faith in the mediator is what makes a believer fit for receiving justification. Ultimately, it is about Christ and his work, not about the human and his or her faith. To strengthen this point, Edwards states, “if Christ had not come into the world and died to purchase justification, no qualification whatsoever in us could render it a meet or fit thing that we should be justified.”⁶⁴ Although Edwards does not say it, one might say that Edwards’ doctrine, in line with the historic reformed doctrine, is justification by Christ alone, not so much by human faith alone, apart from Christ’s work. This is an example of Edwards affirming the Reformed way of speaking of justification while at the same time making clarifications for his own age and pressing the arguments deeper and further. This is naturally the case when later generations are able to reflect upon doctrines that were forged in earlier fires of controversy- as this doctrine was during the Protestant Reformation.

It may be noted as an aside that Edwards is not concerned to discuss the origin of

⁶³Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴Ibid., 11.

faith – as being derived from God or found within humans. His main point is simply to show that faith in a person is the only thing that God looks upon and which makes a person approved by God as a proper subject of pardon, with a right to eternal life. He writes, “Faith is that by which we are rendered approvable.”⁶⁵ Although faith is inseparably connected with justification, Edwards plainly wants to show that faith is not a “condition” of justification in the common sense of the word. However, one should understand that “nothing in us, but faith renders it fitting that we should have justification assigned to us.”⁶⁶

Even though Edwards does not discuss the origin of faith, it would be impossible, after reading his argument, to think that Edwards believes that faith is a work of human goodness. For he writes,

It is not out of respect to the excellence or goodness of any qualifications or acts in us whatsoever that God judges it proper that this benefit of Christ should be ours; and it is not in any way, on account of any excellence or value present in faith, that it appears in the sight of God as a proper thing that he who believes should have this benefit of Christ assigned to him, but purely from the relation faith has to the person whom this benefit is to be had, or as it unites to that mediator in and by whom we are justified.⁶⁷

To properly explain this, Edwards makes three propositions. The first proposition is that there is a union of the people of Christ and Christ himself. This is reflected in Scripture when it says that believers are in Christ, or members of Christ, or spoken of as the bride of Christ. This means that “there is a peculiar relation between true Christians and Christ, which there is not between him and others.”⁶⁸ His second proposition is that it is this very union with Christ, which acts as the whole basis and grounds for the

⁶⁵Ibid., 12.

⁶⁶Ibid., 12

⁶⁷Ibid., 13-14.

⁶⁸Ibid., 14.

believers' access to Christ's benefits. For support Edwards sites 1 John 5:12, 1 Corinthians 1:30, and Ephesians 1:6. This means that the believer's union with Christ is the only reason that person gets anything from God except condemnation.

Edwards' point is that faith is what God looks on in a person that renders it appropriate that they should have Christ's satisfaction and righteousness belonging to them. Faith is what unites a person to Christ. Therefore, it is a person's being in Christ "that is the ground of having his satisfaction with and his merits belonging to him, and a right to the benefits procured thereby."⁶⁹

Jonathan Edwards echoes John Calvin by emphasizing the union with Christ as the whole basis for receiving the benefits of salvation purchased by Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection. Even though the connection was there before him, Edwards articulates it more clearly and emphasizes it more uniformly.

It must be acknowledged that there is a somewhat difficult part in Edwards teaching here. He calls faith a uniting act that is done on the Christian's part. In other words, the true Christian has an active part whereby he or she comes into the union, or relationship, with Christ. However, once again, Edwards's goal is not to discuss the origin of faith, but rather to say that "justifying faith is that by which the soul, which before was separated and alienated from Christ, unites itself to him... (faith) is that by which the soul comes to Christ and receives him."⁷⁰ It would be easy here to accuse Edwards of thinking that faith is some good deed that a human performs to earn salvation. But Edwards will not allow you to think that. For he also says, "God does not give those who believe a union with or an interest in the Savior as a reward for faith, but

⁶⁹Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰Ibid., 16.

only because faith is the soul's active uniting with Christ, or is itself the very act of union on their part. At times, Edwards, argument appears very sophisticated and hard to follow. He does not say where faith comes from. However, in other sermons, such as "A Divine and Supernatural Light,"⁷¹ he does show that humans must be acted upon by God to be awakened to regeneration and eternal life.

There are times when it appears that Edwards is saying that God holds out the final step of coming to Christ and leaves it with the person's own decision. But Edwards says such things with solid Puritan and Calvinistic assumptions on the nature of God, humanity, and salvation in mind. Again, his main point here is to show that "it is by faith that we have a title to eternal life, because it is by faith that we have a son of God, by whom life is."⁷²

So, it is the presence of faith in the believer that, in the sight of God, makes them be looked upon both as being in Christ and as having his merits. Edwards wants to point out that this is very different from any "merit of congruity."⁷³ In fact, he rejects the idea of any moral congruity in humans at all. This is where Edwards begins to bring philosophical reasoning into his theological defense of the doctrine and begins going beyond earlier theologians to explain how the doctrine is actually applied.

Edwards distinguishes between two types of "fitness." One, he calls *moral fitness*, and the other he calls *natural fitness*. He goes on to argue that humans have no moral fitness by which they may be saved. However, by virtue of the believer's union with Christ, he or she does have a natural fitness. It may be understood as a new natural

⁷¹ *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, eds. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 105-124 for Edwards' sermon, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*.

⁷² Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 18-19.

fitness. This fitness is seen in the one whose heart sincerely unites itself to Christ as his Savior. The suitability that there is in faith is very different from any moral suitability that a person could have. Therefore, the natural fitness comes from our faith union with Christ. “God will neither look to Christ’s merit as ours, nor grant his benefits to us till we are in Christ; nor will he look upon us as being in him without an active union of our hearts and souls to him”.⁷⁴

God is not regarding the act of faith in a human as the beautiful thing, but God is regarding “the beauty of the order there is in uniting those things that have a natural agreement, congruity, and union one with the other.”⁷⁵

To conclude his explanation of the doctrine, Edwards points out that faith does not justify as a work or a righteousness. The apostle Paul repeatedly shows that we are not justified by works. This is the reason that all boasting is excluded. Therefore, faith may not be regarded as something that a person may boast in. Faith is “the condition of justification in a manner peculiar to it, and so that nothing else has a parallel influence with it – because faith includes the whole act of union with Christ as a savior.”⁷⁶ And “faith” for Edwards is the “entire active uniting of the soul, or the whole of what is called coming to Christ and receiving him.”⁷⁷

Many have found Edwards’ argument to be confusing, and have thus misunderstood his point. He is not arguing that conversion, or “closing with Christ,” is ultimately up to human decision. In fact, he has sought to argue that the role faith plays in justification is unique, unlike anything else in all the world. In one sense it is a

⁷³ That is, a reward for faith that is obligatory because it has moral merit.

⁷⁴Ibid., 20.

⁷⁵Ibid., 21.

⁷⁶Ibid., 22

condition, but this condition is of a unique kind. At the same time, Edwards' main point is that faith, and *faith alone*, justifies. This is so, because it is faith and *faith alone that unites one with Christ*. In fact, faith, for Edwards, is defined as the act of coming to or receiving Christ as the Savior. Ultimately, Edwards is not in disagreement with any of the historic Reformed confessions of faith. His language and argument may appear to go about things differently. However, he ultimately arrives at the same place. More than that, he strengthens the argument for the doctrine of justification by faith alone because of the direction he takes.

Edwards' Proof for the Doctrine

In his writings, Edwards outlines four arguments to prove, or demonstrate, his understanding of the doctrine. The arguments revolve around demonstrating that humans cannot make themselves fit for a savior, that this doctrine is taught in Scripture, that any contrary doctrine takes away from gospel grace, and to suppose otherwise takes away from the glory of Christ, the mediator.

In his first argument, Edwards seeks to prove that neither faith, nor anything else in a person, makes them suitable to have an interest in the Savior. He writes, "it is not suitable that God should give fallen man an interest in Christ and his merits as a testimony of his respect to anything whatsoever as a loveliness in him. This is not suitable because, until a sinner is actually justified, there is nothing that can be considered "as any excellence or amiableness of his person".⁷⁷ He says that there are two reasons for this. The first reason is that the nature of things will not allow it. More specifically,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 23.

sinner bear an infinite guilt. They have this guilt because sin is utterly heinous. And just in case someone would like to object to the heinousness of sin, Edwards will seek to prove it. Here, Edwards lays out a logical argument that sin is great because it is against a great Being. Since our sin is against a great Being, we have lost all opportunity to impress God or serve him rightly. Therefore, we need to be justified before we may be accepted. And sense we have an infinite guilt that comes from sin against an infinite being, “we needed a person of infinite dignity to obey for us”.⁷⁹ In fact, Edwards demonstrates that we needed one whose greatness and worthiness matched our unworthiness. This person was Jesus Christ. Therefore, “it is not suitable that God should give the sinner an interest in Christ merits, and so a title to his benefits, from regard to any qualification, action, or course of actions in him,... but only as they unite him to Christ.”⁸⁰ in all of this, Edwards is reiterating his point, that a person cannot be justified by anything within themselves, but only as they are joined, or united to, Christ may they be justified, and then be accepted. To press the point further, Edwards demonstrates that when God beholds a man as separate from Christ, that man is infinitely guilty, and therefore has nothing good to commend him to God. That is why the text says that we must believe in him “that justifies the ungodly”.

To conclude this point, Edwards states that there is nothing good in a person that will be accepted by God until after justification. He says that even faith cannot be regarded as any goodness or loveliness in a person until after justification. This removes any doubt as to whether Edwards believes that faith is a human work of goodness.

Edwards’ second reason why a person can in no way earn favor or interest in the

⁷⁹Ibid., 25.

⁸⁰Ibid., 27.

Savior is that a divine law stands in the way. Man is under this law and he is a violator of this law. Man stands condemned by this law. His point is to show that if we remain under this condemnation, we cannot do anything to be granted an award by God. He writes, “it is inconsistent with the honor of the Majesty of the King of Heaven and Earth to accept anything from a condemned malefactor, condemned by the justice of his own holy law, till that condemnation is removed.”⁸¹

Edwards argues here specifically against the Arminian view of justification. Their contrary view more or less abolishes the law of God. Instead they believe and teach that we are put under a new law which requires no more than imperfect, sincere obedience. They believe this is so because humans are affected by the fall, and thus unable to perform the perfect obedience that the law of God requires. In effect, the Arminians taught that Christ died to satisfy the imperfections of our own obedience so that our imperfect obedience would be accepted by God instead of a perfect obedience.

Edwards believes that this changes the gospel entirely. It is like saying that humans are saved by their own merits with the help of Christ. But Edwards goes to great lengths to point out the inconsistency of their view. Ultimately, if there is such a law in Christianity that does not require perfect obedience, there really is no sin. And if there is no sin, there is no need for a Savior. The Arminians reject the holiness of God, and thus make the atoning work of Christ of no true value. Edwards reasons, “what need is there of Christ dying to enable our imperfect obedience to be accepted when, according to their scheme, it would be unjust in itself that anything other than imperfect obedience should be required?”⁸² In essence, Edwards logically destroys their position by showing that it

⁸¹ Ibid., 30.
Ibid., 32.

drains the cross of any significant meaning, and certainly of necessity. This argument builds upon his earlier convictions expressed in his Master's degree work noted above.

Another of Edwards' arguments seeks to thoroughly demonstrate that this doctrine is taught in the Holy Scriptures. He focuses primarily on the Apostle Paul and his letters, but in the process also surveys themes from the Old Testament. Edwards believes that justification by faith alone apart from any works is Paul's main doctrine. He completely refutes any idea that Paul has in mind only the ceremonial law when he speaks of believers not being justified by keeping the law. In fact, Edwards argues with force that Paul has primarily the moral law in mind when he speaks of our justification without works. Once again, Edwards responds directly to the Arminian interpretation of Paul's writings. They teach that one is saved by persevering obedience, which keeps a person in a continued state of justification. Edwards feels that this is conditional salvation and pardon. If God's promise of salvation is based upon future conditions that follow justification then there is no reason for the apostle to make such an issue of justification by faith alone. In fact, the phrase itself makes no sense. Therefore, Edwards will argue that Paul includes the moral law in all of his exclusions of works of law for justification.

Edwards acknowledges that many of the Judaizing Christians in Paul's day had an affinity for circumcision and other ceremonies of the law which they insisted that all Gentile Christians also keep. However, Paul's response to them demonstrates that he is not only excluding circumcision and the ceremonies of the law, but any work whatsoever. Edwards argues, "Where is the absurdity of supposing that the apostle might take occasion from seeing some people trust in a certain work as a work of righteousness to write to them against persons trusting in any work of righteousness at all, and that it was

a very proper occasion too?”⁸³

Edwards feels that the Jews in Paul’s time misinterpreted the meaning of the Ten Commandments. They look upon it as a law and rule for justification rather than as a moral law given to instruct those belonging to God. He points out how the covenant of grace was established long before the 10 Commandments, and that it was made with Abraham for him and his offspring.⁸⁴

To demonstrate that Paul intended the whole law, not just the ceremonial, in his exclusions of works from justification, Edwards outlines several fine points of argument. For one, there are times when Paul uses only a general word – “works”. For instance, Romans 4:6, 11:6; and Ephesians 2:8-9 only speak of works in general, not even works of the law. In this case, Edwards asks, “What warrant does anyone have to confine it to works of a particular law or institution, excluding others?”⁸⁵ He cites several passages from Romans to show that our guilt is against the moral law most specifically, and not against ceremonial instructions. If people are guilty of breaches of the moral law, they certainly cannot be justified by performing deeds of the ceremonial law. Again, the apostle demonstrates that man is completely guilty and in need of a Savior. The apostle Paul shows that it is the moral law and not the ceremonial that is written in the hearts of people. And if people are condemned by this law, they certainly cannot be justified by works of this law by which they already stand guilty. Paul believes that the law is how we come to a knowledge of sin. It is not the ceremonial law that reveals sins of immorality.

⁸³Ibid., 36.

⁸⁴ This argument still has validity even though some recent scholarship has argued that 1st Century Palestinian Jews knew that they were saved from God’s wrath by grace alone. Rather, they viewed the Law as a way of maintaining relationship with God. Scholars, such as James D. G. Dunn, and E. P. Sanders (see *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977)), argue that the real issue the early church faced, and that Paul addressed was on what basis Gentiles could enter the Kingdom of God. Paul, of course, argued that both Jew and gentile were brought in only by grace through faith.

So when Paul speaks of justification apart from works of the law, he is using the term consistently to refer to the moral aspects of the law.

Another important point that Edwards makes is that Paul goes to great lengths to show that “we have righteousness and a title to the privilege of God’s children: not by the law, but by faith”.⁸⁵ Romans 4:13-16 demonstrates this. Paul wants to exalt grace, not simply reject the ceremonial law as binding for Christians. Otherwise, Paul would not speak of excluding our own boasting. A person might boast of their moral uprightness if they maintain favor by it, or by any other means. But the apostle will not allow it. The Pharisees often boasted of their moral works (see Luke 18). Edwards feels that this was because they trusted in these works for justification. But Jesus himself, in Luke 18, taught that it is those who renounce their own righteousness that will be justified. Edwards wants to point out that all boasting can only be excluded if all goodness or excellence of our own account is excluded.

Just like a Paul, Edwards points out from Galatians 3 that Abraham was justified by faith and not by any law. This is the kind of faith that Paul compares the faith of the Christian. The apostles used the concepts of performing works of law and establishing one’s own righteousness as if they are the same thing. And they will not allow that this brings true righteousness. The force of his argument is that a person cannot establish their own righteousness. Therefore, they cannot be justified by any works of the law whereby their righteousness might be established. And since Paul has established throughout his writings that no one is ceremonially or morally righteous, then there is no hope of establishing personal righteousness apart from Christ.

⁸⁵Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 38.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 43.

For support, Edwards looks to Deuteronomy and the Gospels to show that God does not act on our behalf in justification or salvation because of a righteousness established by the person. He argues, “Let it be in obedience to the ceremonial law, or a gospel obedience, or what it will, if it is a righteousness of our own doing it is excluded by the apostle in this affair.”⁸⁷

To add strength to this argument, he expounds upon Titus 3:5. Edwards feels that this verse taken alone would exclude any idea that works, either of the law or our own righteousness, could save us. He finds the doctrine to be totally explicit in this passage.

To take this argument directly to the Arminians, Edwards shows how foolish their idea of a lesser law that requires only sincere, imperfect obedience, is. The Arminian may argue that Paul does not really mean what he says, and that a type of work in humans is still necessary, whether it be a work of faith or any accompanying obedience. Edwards compares this to foolishly reasoning that a merchant who claims his treasures cannot be bought with money means only that they cannot be bought with brass money. Or, who would understand such a merchant to be claiming only that his treasures cannot be bought by counterfeit money? If he claims that his treasures cannot be bought with money, only a fool would think that he meant something else. Edwards forcefully argues this point to show that the Arminians abuse the Scriptures. For he writes, “What Scripture will stand before men and if they take liberty to manage Scripture thus? Or what one text is there in the Bible that may not at this rate be explained away, and perverted to any sense men please?”⁸⁸ This was not only a timely critique for his own

⁸⁷Ibid., 49.

⁸⁸Ibid., 52.

day, it has proven to be a prophetic statement for our own day.

He goes on to show through more Scripture citations that humans are justified freely by the grace of God and not by any righteousness in themselves. To strengthen this argument, Edwards shows that Old Testament saints also were not justified, not even in part, by obedience to the ceremonial law. He points to Paul's use of David and Psalm 32. Here it is plain that David speaks of justification without works. In fact, David describes the blessedness of the person who receives righteousness imputed to himself by the Lord apart from any works.

Edwards spent a great deal more energy on this point later in his life. He wrote a treatise-sized entry in his "Controversies" notebook (late 1740s-early 1750s) on the very subject of justification in the Old Testament. He also penned a lengthy miscellany on the subject (no. 1354). Like Augustine and Peter Lombard before him, he relied heavily upon typology and argued that Christ was known to ancient Israel by other names. He also argued against Arminians like John Taylor that personal righteousness in the Old Testament should not be equated with salvation, or justifying righteousness. Edwards' conclusion is that the saints of old were justified through belief in Christ just as New Testament believers are.⁸⁹

Therefore, it is evident, according to Edwards, that neither David nor any other Old Testament saint was justified by keeping the ceremonial law. And if this is so, then no keeping of the ceremonial law is required for the justification of the New Testament believer. To suppose otherwise is simply contrary to Scripture. It is especially contrary to the direct teachings and force of the apostle Paul in his epistles.

Another significant point Edwards makes is that it derogates from gospel grace to suppose that we could be justified by our own sincere obedience or by anything else in us. In fact, Edwards believes that “it is the declared design of God in the gospel to exalt the freedom and riches of his grace, in that method of justifying sinners and that way of admitting them to his favor.”⁹⁰ Edwards believes that Romans 4:16 demonstrates that God is especially interested in magnifying free grace in giving justification and salvation to sinners. He writes, “it shows a more abundant goodness in the giver when he shows kindness without any excellence in our persons or actions that should move the giver to love and beneficence.”⁹¹ This is a logically consistent argument. In fact, Edwards shows that one has a much greater goodness and a more abundant kindness when there is less to draw forth such things from him. This goodness is even more amazing when the person has to overlook, or overcome, a great repulsion toward the object of his kindness. This is how God loves the sinner. Such kindness in a giver enhances the obligation of gratitude in the receiver. In essence, the giver is worthy of greater respect and admiration. Therefore, Edwards believes that it more highly exalts the free grace of God in justification that he gives it to people who have no obedience or manner of goodness or virtue or beauty or excellence by which they are entitled to such gifts. The point here is to see that Edwards would have no one but God receive glory for the act of justification. This echoes the Reformation dogma of *Soli Deo Gloria*.

We also see Edwards affirm the Reformation understanding of *Solus Christus* in the following statement: “to suppose a man is justified by his own virtue or obedience

⁸⁹ C.f., Editor’s Introduction, “*Controversies*” Notebook: *Justification*”, *Works* (Yale), 328-331 for a good overview explanation. And see Edwards’ “Miscellanies” no. 1354 in *Miscellanies*, nos 1153-1360, in *Works* (Yale), 506-543.

⁹⁰ Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 58.

derogates from the honor of the mediator, and ascribes that to man's virtue that which belongs only to the righteousness of Christ. It puts man in Christ's stead and makes him his own Savior in a respect in which Christ only is his Savior."⁹² Edwards believes this is the opposite of the true Gospel, which seeks to abase man and ascribe all the glory in our salvation to Christ the Redeemer. To elaborate on this point, Edwards explains what is meant by the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Imputation and Christ's Active and Passive Obedience

Edwards claims that there are two senses in which Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers. The larger sense claims that all Christ did and suffered for our redemption is imputed to us whereby we are freed from guilt and stand as righteous in the sight of God. It implies that both Christ's death, or satisfaction, and Christ's obedience are imputed to the believer. Edwards focuses on the stricter sense of having the righteousness and moral goodness of Christ's obedience imputed to us. More specifically, he argues that "Christ's perfect obedience shall be reckoned to our account so that we shall have the benefit of it, as though we had performed it ourselves. And so we suppose that a title to eternal life is given us as the reward of this righteousness."⁹³ This is a rather unique way of expressing the idea, but biblically and historically accurate nonetheless. Edwards shows that the word "impute" is used in Scripture to mean reckoning something that belongs to one person to another person's account. Philemon 18 demonstrates this use of the word. This sense of the word is also used in Romans 4:6 and 5:13, speaking of righteousness and sin.

⁹¹Ibid., 60.

⁹²Ibid., 62.

Edwards answers those who would object to God imputing Christ's obedience to us as an absurdity by stating "why is there any more absurdity in supposing that Christ obedience is imputed to us than that his satisfaction is imputed?"⁹⁴ His point is that God imputes the righteousness and moral goodness of Christ's obedience to the believer in the scheme of justification, and that this is not an absurd thought, but a very logical and biblically consistent thought.

In his writings, Edwards is also concerned not just to define imputation but to prove that the righteousness of Christ is thus imputed. He argues that *there is just as much need for Christ to obey the law in our place in order for us to obtain the reward as there is for his suffering the penalty of the law for our sake in order to escape the penalty.*⁹⁵ He refers to Adam and his state of innocence before the fall. Humans need more than just their guilt removed. This only restores innocence – freedom from guilt. In other words, the atonement, or satisfaction, of Christ rescues from hell. But more is needed than merely being rescued from hell. Heaven must be purchased. And it may only be purchased by perfect obedience to the law of God. Thus, the law, and the honor of the law giver, are exalted and vindicated. Humans are condemned by having broken this law. Thus, Edwards point is that we have eternal life both because Christ took the punishment and because Christ actively obeyed God's command. Both of these are imputed to the believer. If a person merely has their guilt removed, this does not in itself constitute righteousness. But a person cannot be justified without righteousness. There must be some form of *positive righteousness* to be given a verdict of righteousness from a just judge: "So that our judge cannot justify us unless he sees a perfect righteousness, in

⁹³ Ibid., 63.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 63-64.

some way belonging to us, either performed by ourselves or by another, and justly and duly reckoned to our account.”⁹⁶ Edwards argues that in justification, God pronounces a man to be perfectly righteous. If not, and he is only pardoned of his guilt, there would be the need for a further justification, after he has been justified, that he would gain by some positive obedience to the law. But this is not the case, in that a believer is so united with Christ that they are accepted as *one* by the supreme Judge. Therefore, the righteousness that belongs to the one is reckoned to the other’s account. Here again, the Reformed notion of union with Christ is strongly affirmed and expounded.

He strengthens the Reformed argument by explaining, from Romans 4:25, Hebrews 6:20, and Ephesians 2:6, that Christ’s resurrection and exaltation were given to him as rewards for his obedience. And believers, as soon as they believe, are granted to partake with Christ in his own justification. This justification was the result of Christ’s perfect obedience. Therefore, if the believer is to share in the justification and benefits of Christ, this can only be due to having received Christ’s own righteousness. The debt that we owe to God is not simply the result of breaking the law, but also of not keeping it. Christ makes up for our not keeping it by keeping it for us. And Christ pays the debt we owe for breaking the law by taking the punishment on himself. Both of these facts are necessary aspects of the true Christian gospel. Only this can rightly be regarded as good news. Otherwise, it might be more accurate to call the gospel “good instruction,” since it would only bring us back to a place of innocence, and not to a place of positive righteousness. Christ is no partial savior, but rather the all-sufficient one who delivers from Hell and purchases Heaven for God’s people (Cf. Eph 1:14). He both makes

⁹⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 69.

atonement for our sins in his sufferings and purchases heaven for us by his obedience (Cf. Romans 5:18-19). This is why the lamb is praised in Revelation 5:9-10.

Edwards feels that it is important to answer a certain objection that views the text (Romans 5) as meaning only that we are justified by Christ's passive obedience; that the text is not about Christ's life of active obedience. Edwards acknowledges that such distinctions between active and passive righteousness might be theologically convenient, but they are a modern invention not found in Scripture. In fact, Edwards feels that the active obedience of Christ includes his passive obedience of enduring the cross because he willingly submits himself to it. He argues that Christ's voluntary submission and yielding of himself to the sufferings in obedience to the father's command is part, the principal part, of his positive righteousness and moral goodness.⁹⁷ Jesus Christ underwent death in obedience to the command of the father. Edwards cites Psalm 40:6-8 and a John 10:17-18; 18:11 to show that Christ's death was as much a part of his active obedience as anything else that Christ did. And this is the principal part of Christ's obedience by which we are justified.

Edwards also answers another objection which states that the obedience of Christ in his sufferings and death are not obedience to the same commands that humans were guilty of breaking. Therefore, this obedience of Christ is not making up for the human failure to keep the law of God. Edwards refutes this by simply pointing out that we did not break the same commandment that Adam did in the garden either. There is no such command to God's people that we not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, we are nonetheless condemned and broken because of Adam's

⁹⁷ For more of Edwards' comments on the unnecessary distinction between active and passive obedience, see Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 75- 76.

disobedience. Therefore, the passage in Romans 5:18-19 shows that, to use Edwards's words, "the thing required was perfect obedience. It is no matter whether the positive precepts were the same, if they were equivalent."⁹⁸ Just the same, the Scriptures indicate that Jesus also perfectly obeyed all other precepts of the laws given in Scripture. The great general rule of the law, according to Edwards, is that we should obey God and be subject to him in whatsoever he pleases to command us. And it is Jesus, not Adam or us, that fulfills and accomplishes such an obedience. Other passages that refer to Christ giving himself over to suffering and death as his principal active obedience include Philippians 2:7-8 and Hebrews 5:8. Edwards uses these passages to show that,

We are as much saved by the death of Christ because his yielding himself to die was an active obedience as we are saved because it was a propitiation for our sins; for as it was not only the act of obedience that carried merit (he having performed meritorious acts of obedience through the whole course of his life), so neither was it the only suffering that was propitiatory. All his sufferings through the whole course of his life were propitiatory, just as every active obedience was meritorious. Indeed, this was his principal suffering, and it was as much his principal act of obedience.⁹⁹

All of this is argued to support the point that if acceptance into God's favor depends on Christ and his obedience, it is not given to us as a reward for our own obedience. Once again, it is as if Edwards simply cannot say this enough. This point is one of the most prevalent in this whole treatise and cannot be overlooked or missed. By way of summarizing this point a final time, Edwards states, "indeed, neither salvation itself nor Christ the Savior is given as a reward for anything in man; they are not given as a reward for faith, nor for anything else of ours. We are not united to Christ as a reward for our faith, but have union with him by faith only as faith is the very act of uniting or

⁹⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 81.

closing on our part.”¹⁰⁰ Here again, the Reformed doctrine is affirmed and deepened.

To illustrate the above point Edwards refers to the analogy of marriage. In marriage, a man does not give himself to his bride as a reward for her receiving him in marriage. Her receiving of him is not considered a *worthy deed* by which he rewards her with himself. And this reiterates the point that faith itself cannot be regarded as the work of human achievement by which we receive the merits of Christ. For Edwards, *faith is the very act of receiving or accepting or closing with Christ* in the same way a bride receives her husband in marriage. Thus, for Edwards, the doctrine of justification by faith alone stands proven.

The Place of Obedience According to Edwards

The 1738 treatise also includes a section wherein Edwards expounds his understanding of the proper place, or view, of obedience and good works in relation to justification by faith alone. The view expounded in that section was one Edwards would hold to throughout his life. In fact, his other works on Christian life, such as *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, *Freedom of the Will*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*,¹⁰¹ support and expound the view found there. It also better prepares a reader to understand the other works if one is familiar with Edwards’ exposition of the place of good works found in this treatise.

Edwards’ view may be summarized by stating that *No human works can do anything towards achieving a goodness that can answer to the rule of judgment, which is*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰¹ For introductions and edited forms of these works, see *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, eds. Smith, Stout, and Minkema (New Haven: Yale, 1995), 137-171; 192-222; 244-265 (respectively). See also,

*the law of God.*¹⁰² In fact, he says that the acts of a Christian cannot be concerned in the affair of justification by faith alone. Rather they are the *expression of faith*. But before Edwards will deal with this he first wants to resolve another point: “whether any other act of faith besides the first act has any concern in our justification, or how far perseverance in faith, or the continued and renewed acts of faith, have influence in this affair.”¹⁰³

Jonathan Edwards believes that the sinner is actually and finally justified as soon as they have performed one act of faith; “and faith in its first act virtually, at least, depends on God for perseverance, and entitles one to this among other benefits.”¹⁰⁴ This means that no other acts are required, at least not those works that would be considered separate from the initial act of faith. Rather, they are a part of that original saving faith.

He calls this faith an act, but he means that in a unique sense. He does not get into it here, but Edwards certainly does not believe that faith is a human action of goodness. It is a unique thing altogether. Again, Edwards will define faith as “the qualification on which the congruity of an interest in the righteousness of Christ depends, or wherein such a fitness consists.”¹⁰⁵ He does not use the word “qualification” in the normal sense of the word, as has already been demonstrated. His point is that faith is what brings the soul into a union or oneness with Christ. And Edwards believes that this is an abiding union. Therefore, he writes, “if it should be begun without remaining, the beginning would be in vain.”¹⁰⁶ He references Romans 8:1, Philippians 3:9, and 1 John 2:28 to show that an abiding union is necessary for final justification. Revelation 14:13

Edwards, *A Treatise on Grace*, published as *Standing in Grace*, ed. by Don Kistler (Soli Deo Gloria, 2002) for more on Edwards' view of saving grace.

¹⁰² Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 87-97.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

would imply that it is necessary to die in union with the Lord. But this is no problem for Edwards, since he believes that perseverance and final justification are contained in God's one act upon a believer's first faith. He writes,

So although the sinner is actually and finally justified on the first acts of faith, yet the perseverance of faith even then comes into consideration as one thing on which the fitness of acceptance to life depends. God, in the act of justification which is passed on the sinner's first believing, has respect to the perseverance, as being virtually contained in that first act of faith; and it is looked upon, and taken by him who justifies, as being, as it were, a property in that faith.¹⁰⁷

In other words, God sees a persevering faith as though it already were in existence because, according to Edwards, "by divine establishment it shall follow."¹⁰⁸

Edwards contends that justification is decisive and final. Now, the Bible plainly shows that there is a sense in which forgiveness follows repentance in the order of time, and by nature. But God's act of justification is removed from the time and order categories. Edwards makes the point that future faith and repentance are also contained in the first act of faith and repentance, and that they will necessarily follow as a result of genuine saving faith. The hope, however, is not in a person keeping up with constant faith and repentance. No, the assurance of continued perseverance is founded upon God's promise in justification, that one be declared righteous in Christ by virtue of their faith union. This means that all future sins are included in God's decree of forgiveness. Therefore, continued repentance and faith are "necessary" parts of the Christian life. But they flow from a justifying faith. This is why the Scriptures will speak of those, like the apostle Paul, who continued to earnestly seek after justification by faith after their conversion. This demonstrates the principle that this pursuit *flows* from faith. This

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 90.

qualification of future acts of faith are beheld by God, and assured by God in his own promise.

Ultimately, perseverance is given by God. So Edwards argues that final justification does “depend” upon perseverance, but he says this meaning that perseverance is contained and promised in the first act of faith. So that, if faith and repentance are not observed in the heart of the professing believer, one should have cause to doubt their own conversion. But, Edwards notes that much assurance is given to one’s conscience the more these ongoing acts of faith and repentance are present. To sum up, Edwards believes that the only difference between the first act of faith and later acts is “an accidental difference arising from the circumstance of time, or its being first in order of time, and not from any peculiar respect that God has for it, or any influence it has in the peculiar nature in the affair of our salvation.”¹⁰⁹ So, in one sense, initial faith and persevering faith are really only one, just separated in time.

To conclude this section, Edwards reiterates his point that Christian obedience has no concern in justification in that God has no regard for any virtue or excellence in them by themselves. In fact, he will actually say that faith and other acts of Christian obedience are all works in one sense. However, “as we say that faith does not justify as a work, so we say of all these effective expressions of faith.”¹¹⁰ So the point remains, that obedience does not bring justification, rather, it is an expression of faith. To put it another way, obedience is “but an expression of the soul’s believing union with Christ.”¹¹¹ Although Edwards may seem to argue this in a very strange way, a way that would confuse many modern readers with our current issues and debate, Edwards demonstrates

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 97.

that future acts of faith and obedience are necessarily contained in the first, by which there is an abiding union with Christ. Or else we could ignore the Scriptures call to ongoing repentance, believing, and obedience. Thus, Edwards plainly demonstrates how a Christian ought to think of their own continuing obedience, perseverance, and the commands of Scripture. In all of this, he affirms the historic Reformed way of understanding the connection between justification by faith alone and Christian obedience.¹¹²

Edwards perhaps says more on this than many moderns would allow, but this is because he is able to see finer distinctions than most, and he is capable of more precise language in his discussion of the connections between faith and works. This makes him a truly valuable resource for understanding this great historic doctrine. One finds Edwards to be both an astute, highly capable expositor of justification by faith alone as well as a strong and able advocate of the pursuit of holiness in the Christian life. And, more capable than most, he is able to explain why both of these things are of such critical importance.

Final Comments on the 1738 Treatise

Edwards' 1738 treatise also dealt with the common objections of his day. Being written well into his ministry career, Edwards sought to compose a comprehensive

¹¹¹ Ibid., 96.

¹¹² Such as "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love." *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XI.ii.

defense against all detractors from the Reformed understanding, that is, the biblical understanding according to Edwards, of justification by faith alone. For the most part, Edwards viewed all objections to his doctrine as misunderstandings of certain biblical truths or as the result of philosophical fallacy.

He also elaborates on the connection of works to faith and reward and defines repentance as an aspect of saving faith. He seeks to answer the supposed contradictory positions of Paul and James on this doctrine by articulating their variant use of the word “justify”. This is another place where Edwards affirms forensic justification- or “declarative justification” as the intended doctrine of the New Testament. This section goes beyond our present thesis, but strengthens the argument in favor of Edwards as a source for Reformed orthodoxy.

Other writings on Justification

The Treatise that we have just examined was the only work on justification that Edwards published during his lifetime. It was his definitive, but not his last writing on the subject. Throughout his life Edwards continued to revisit the subject in his “Miscellanies” as well as his “Controversies” notebook. Neither of these contains thoughts that would contradict what he had written and defended earlier. Rather, in these, Edwards explores other related themes and clarifies certain points. Edwards seemed to be always thinking and writing about doctrine and philosophy in these notebooks. The writings on justification in the “Controversies” notebook date from about the late 1740s to the late 1750s (about the time of his death).¹¹³

¹¹³ C.f., Editor’s Introduction, “*Controversies*” Notebook: *Justification*”, *Works* (Yale), 328-331 for a good overview explanation.

The writings on justification in the “Controversies” notebook represent his most thorough and comprehensive writings on the subject aside from the 1738 treatise. They contain nearly three complete essays on aspects of justification, as well as other supplementary materials at the beginning and end. These essays do not re-work his earlier ideas. Rather, they expound upon them. For instance, one of the major topics discussed is the definition of “Righteous” and “Righteousness” in the Old Testament. As before, Edwards is interested in taking on the Arminian opponents to justification in their varied forms. Some of his chief opponents in these writings include Jonathan Mayhew and John Taylor. Edwards sought to point out the mistake that Taylor and others had made in equating personal righteousness in the Old Testament sense with salvation. Another related topic that Edwards dealt with was the differences and similarities between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, all to show how the acceptance of Christ is the only basis for obtaining righteousness. This led to Edwards’ lengthy and comprehensive work on how Old Testament saints were justified through belief in Christ.¹¹⁴

In all of these writings Edwards looked for supporting evidence from some of his favorite authors. He notes John Owen, Matthew Poole, John Brine, Philip Doddridge, and Johan Stapfer, many of which reveal Edwards’ commitment to the Reformed and Puritan traditions. Again, while these writings reveal more of Edwards’ thoughts on this and related doctrines, these writings were never published during Edwards’ lifetime.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ C.f., Edwards’ “Miscellanies” no. 1354 in *“Miscellanies,” nos 1153-1360*, 506-543.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, Jr. prepared some of these writings for later publication. One must keep in mind that Edwards may have planned to publish some of these writings, as well as some of his “Miscellanies”. But one should also allow Edwards a certain amount of intellectual freedom of inquiry since these are private thoughts being worked out in his own mind- through his pen. It is the judgment of this writer that it is best to deal mainly with Edwards’ published writings and sermons on certain topics. These will articulate what Edwards was actually willing to be responsible for.

The “Miscellanies” on justification, and related topics, are too numerous to deal with. Most are short thoughts composed to clarify some point on the doctrine he had made previously. In fact, many of the clarifications and arguments written in these miscellanies are inserted into the 1738 published version of Edwards’ work. Some of the most important ones include entry numbers 245, 507, 568, 637, 663, 669, 687, 712, 714, 725, 729, 797, 812, 829, 856, 877, 996, 1042, 1093, 1250, 1260a, 1279-80, 1346, and 1354. Some of these are on the nature of justification. Others are on the nature of faith.¹¹⁶ Still others further elucidate his concepts of “fitness” and the believer’s crucial union with Christ. They are all important for how they clarify and expound the issues related to justification. But as noted above, they do not add anything significant to our present discussion. We have already been given Edwards’ basic doctrine, with its emphases and contributions. Edwards never moves away from these affirmations and he remains in harmony with the historic Reformed confessions and the Puritan tradition.

As it stands, this chapter has shown how Edwards defined justification by faith alone, and that he did so in terms that echoed and maintained the teaching of the Protestant Reformers and the Puritan tradition that he was a part of. The points of continuity that we have seen included the affirmation that justification is by faith, and faith alone, that the active and passive obedience of Christ are imputed to the believer by virtue of their faith union with Christ, and that obedience flows from justification but does not lead to it. We will now conclude with a brief explanation of why this doctrine was so important and central for Edwards.

The Importance of This Doctrine for Edwards

¹¹⁶ Edwards also kept a notebook just on the subject of faith (Folder XXVI), which is printed in

Much like Luther, Calvin, and Owen before him, Edwards believed the doctrine of justification by faith alone to be a central teaching of the New Testament, and that it must be properly understood and appreciated by each generation of Christians. In his writings he comments on why he feels that this doctrine is so important. He is willing to point out that it is not absolutely necessary that everyone understand and be agreed upon all the distinctions needed to explain and defend this doctrine. However, Edwards has a passion that all Christians strive to increase in their understanding of it. He writes,

We should believe in general, according to the clear and abundant revelations of God's Word, that it is none of our own excellence, virtue, or righteousness that is the ground of our being received from a state of condemnation into a state of acceptance in God's sight, but only Jesus Christ and his righteousness and worthiness received by faith.¹¹⁷

Of first importance, Edwards believes that the Scriptures treat this doctrine as central. He feels that the apostle Paul argues for it quite strenuously and with much zeal. Any other way of understanding justification is “another gospel” for Paul (see Galatians 1:6-9). It is a safe bet to let our emphasis match that of the apostles, and to make our language echo theirs.

Another reason this is important is that the adverse doctrine lays a different foundation for man's salvation than what God has laid. Edwards feels that the true gospel is a gracious doctrine, while the other is a legal doctrine. Along with that, this doctrine is the main difference between the first covenant and the covenant of grace. Therefore, Scriptures such as Romans 4:16; Romans 3:20, 24; Romans 11:6; and Galatians 5:4 reveal that the covenant of grace is quite different from the first covenant made with Adam. So Edwards concludes, “certainly that doctrine wherein consists the greatest and

Works, vol. 7, 536ff.

¹¹⁷ Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, 145.

most essential difference between the covenant of grace and the first covenant must be a doctrine of great importance.”¹¹⁸

Another point which one must consider is that man's greatest need in divine revelation was to know how a sinner may be accepted by God. To Edwards, this requires something beyond what natural revelation can bring. It was God's good purpose, even in revealing the Trinity, to show that all man's dependence in salvation must be upon God, that all sufficiency is found in Christ and not in ourselves. For this he references 1 Corinthians 1:29-31, “that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that, according as it is written, ‘he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.’”

This doctrine is also of great importance because a contrary doctrine takes away from the honor of God and of the mediator, Jesus Christ. Pointing to Galatians 5:4 and 2:21, Edwards feels that if justification comes to man by any other means, then all the glory of the great things accomplished in Christ's work of redemption are overthrown. He says, “It diminishes the glory of the grace of God and the Redeemer, and proportionally magnifies man.”¹¹⁹

The final reason that Edwards believes this doctrine is so important is that the opposite scheme leads man to trust in his own righteousness for justification. He references Romans 9:31-32, Romans 10:3, and Luke 18:14 to show that those who seek to establish their own righteousness cannot do so. Rather, in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-collector, it is the one who denies his own righteousness that he goes home

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 150.

“justified.”

To conclude, Edwards allows that there are probably many people who disagree with perhaps only one minor point here or there. In fact, he feels that there are those who would immediately embrace this doctrine if it were clearly explained to them. Therefore, some of his opponents could come into entire agreement with him if certain points were expressed more clearly or precisely. He is rather congenial about this, even stating, “I am fully persuaded that great allowances should be made in innumerable instances.”¹²⁰ At the same time, there are those who do not disagree merely on one point here or there, but who blindly teach a doctrine contrary to Scripture. This he believes is a “pernicious and fatal tendency.”¹²¹ In the end, one is left with a feeling that Edwards views this as a necessary and a vital doctrine for every Christian to understand. He's willing to allow that some may disagree on certain minor points. For these, he wants to thoroughly explain the doctrine, and thus win them over. But for those who plainly teach the Arminian doctrine of justification, Edwards seeks to show plainly that they are wrong, that they take away the glory of the Savior and the grace of the gospel, and that they injure the believer.

CHAPTER 4

SCHOLARLY LITERATURE AND ANALYSIS

¹²⁰ Ibid., 154.

¹²¹ Ibid., 154.

This section will give a representative review of what other scholars have written on Edwards and his doctrine of justification. Some authors seek to defend Edwards' orthodoxy and usefulness. Others, in analyzing other aspects of Edwards, have found it pertinent to note his alignment with Calvinistic and Puritan tradition. A few recent scholars have sought to call Edwards' orthodoxy into question, or to suggest that Edwards broke from his traditional bounds in his exposition of justification. We will examine what scholars have perceived to be the historical context of Edwards' teaching and writing on justification by faith. Then we will look at what these scholars have to say about the points we have considered in this thesis. Those points have been that Edwards argued, like the Reformers, for justification by faith "alone", that he understood this as a forensic/ declarative act of God toward a sinner, that the union with Christ which faith embraced was the basis of justification, and that works of obedience flow from, but do not lead to justification. Since each of these themes are closely related and interconnected, it will be necessary to deal with them together, rather than separately, as we have done above.

Background and Context for Edwards' Teaching on Justification

Logan establishes, through reference to Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* and *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, that Jonathan Edwards preaching on justification by faith sought to deal with two equally important oppositions to the doctrine; Arminianism and antinomianism. He highlights how it was becoming a

custom, largely through the influence of Edwards's grandfather and predecessor Solomon Stoddard, to minimize the visibility of God's saving work and thus relax the criteria for admission to the Lord's Supper. In effect, the visible connection between justification and sanctification was being severed.¹²² The Half-way Covenant, championed by Edwards' influential grandfather minimized the importance of a holy life as necessary evidence of conversion by allowing unregenerate persons to partake of the Lord's Supper. When Edwards took over for his grandfather in 1729, he began moving back to a more consistent Puritan practice of stressing the need for visible sanctification. This would mean a direct assault on the growing antinomianism.

Just the same, there was the growing threat of Arminianism washing up on the shores of the colonies. Schafer notes that Arminianism was not widespread at the time, but it was beginning to have an influence. Pastors and theologians were beginning to change their emphases to reflect the "conditional" nature of God's promises and the burden of man's role in salvation.

Edwards' preaching reflects a desire to combat the notion of human merit as well as to exhort believers to a loving obedience. Thus, Edwards determined to preach on how justification takes place, and what role God's sovereign grace, human faith, and evangelical obedience play in this process. "Edwards sought to walk the razor's edge of biblical truth while avoiding the illusory appeal of both Arminianism and antinomianism."¹²³

¹²² Samuel T. Logan, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 46 (1984), 26-30.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Like many other historians, Schafer¹²⁴ notes the central influence of the revival in Northampton in 1734 upon the larger Great Awakening of 1740, which occurred throughout the colonies. As noted above, the outpouring of the Spirit in Edwards' church coincided with his two lectures on justification by faith alone. Edwards did not think it was by mistake. When he published these lectures in 1738, Edwards had experienced four years of revival in his church to confirm his teaching on justification. He had also established his place among the great expositors of the doctrine. And though he may not have meant to, he made this doctrine the centerpiece of evangelism. He notes this in the beginning of his published version of *Justification by Faith Alone*. He writes,

The following discourse of justification, that was preached (though not so fully as it is here printed) at two public lectures, seemed to be remarkably blessed, not only to establish the judgments of many in this truth, but to engage their hearts in a more earnest pursuit of justification, in that way that had been explained and defended; and at that time, when I was greatly reproached for defending this doctrine in the pulpit, and just upon my suffering a very open abuse for it, God's work wonderfully brake forth amongst us, and souls began to flock to Christ, as the savior in whose righteousness alone they hope to be justified. So that this was the doctrine on which this work in its beginning was founded, as it evidently was in the whole progress of it.¹²⁵

Historically and theologically speaking, Gerstner feels that Jonathan Edwards made many contributions to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He continued to make this the central doctrine of Christianity in general, and American Protestantism in particular. Edwards affirmed this doctrine in his famous sermon *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* (1731). He proved the doctrine in *Justification by Faith* (1734). He established the doctrine's metaphysical foundations in his *Freedom of the Will* (1754).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Thomas A. Schafer, "Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith", *Church History*, 20 (Dec. 1951), 57.

¹²⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000. Reprint from 1834), 620-621. Referenced by Gerstner in his, *Mini-Theology*, 83.

¹²⁶ Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: Mini-Theology*, 82-83.

Edwards also connected this doctrine with the covenant of grace, demonstrating that Arminianism specifically was a false gospel which exalted human works and denied a purely gracious salvation.

So, in the face of much controversy Edwards brought his gifted mind to bear on this important subject. He did it to defend the historic gospel and dispel its enemies. Scholars agree that the religious climate was somewhat volatile, and that Edwards brought much light and help to the situation. He may provide the same in our own day.

Authors Who Defend or Affirm Edwards' Reformed Orthodoxy

Gerstner, Logan, and Bogue represent those who defend Edwards' Reformed orthodoxy concerning this doctrine. Others, such as Cherry and Wilson, have affirmed his grounding in the Calvinist/Puritan tradition though their purpose is not to argue in favor of Edwards or defend him against critics. Just the same, even some of Edwards' critics are willing to label and affirm him as a representative of Reformational and Puritan thinking.

Gerstner examines Edwards' teaching on justification by faith in his *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*. He summarizes Edwards' definition of "justification" by saying that he means "being free of guilt and having a righteousness entitling to eternal life."¹²⁷ Gerstner discusses the nature of justification by highlighting Edwards' discussion of the concept of "pardon." In a comment on Romans 8:29, Edwards had defined justification as "the pardon of sins through Christ's satisfaction and being accepted through his obedience."¹²⁸ Cross-examining Miscellany 812, Gerstner shows

¹²⁷Ibid., 75.

¹²⁸C.f., Edwards' Contribution Lecture, December 7, 1739. Ref. in Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, 76.

how Edwards does not think that justification consists completely in pardon, and that he defines “pardon” differently than it is commonly used. “Justification consists in imputing righteousness.”¹²⁹ A believer who is united with Christ by faith has such a righteousness accounted to him. The redeemed sinner is therefore pardoned in one sense and justified in another.

In a sermon on Romans 4:16, Edwards discussed a “twofold righteousness” which belongs to Christ alone. The first aspect of his righteousness is freedom from guilt- which Adam enjoyed for a time. The second aspect is an actual fulfillment of the law- which only Jesus achieved. Since the believer is united with Christ by faith, not with Adam- which he is by nature, all that Christ has belongs to the believer. Therefore, a Christian possesses, in Christ, both aspects of righteousness. Gerstner points out how important this is since Edwards sees no possible way of justification without righteousness. Gerstner finds Edwards’ basis for justification in the union with Christ. Both John Calvin and John Owen had previously made this connection, but Gerstner feels that Edwards was more precise than they were on this point.

Gerstner also deals with Edwards’ conception of how one comes into union with Christ. Or, what is the means of justification (i.e. coming into union with Christ and thus having his imputed righteousness)? Edwards makes clear in his sermons that the means to justification is faith- faith alone. In a sermon on Romans 4:16 he says, “That the grace of God in the new covenant eminently appears is this, that it proposes justification by faith.”¹³⁰ Gerstner is quick to point out that Edwards does not mean that faith is a condition. Rather, Christ alone is the ultimate condition. Plus, there are other

¹²⁹Edwards, M 812- quoted in Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, 76.

¹³⁰See Edwards’ sermon on Romans 4:16- cited by Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, 79.

“conditions” that scripture speaks of as the outworking of genuine faith. Faith, alone, is what unites us to Christ so that we may be looked upon as having Christ’s righteousness. He defines faith as “the soul’s acquiescing in the divine sufficiency, specifically the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.”¹³¹ This is to ensure that Edwards is interpreted as in line with the Reformers.

Others have noted Edwards’ definition of faith as that which unites a person to Christ, or the actual reception of the relationship with Christ. Bogue provides an excellent survey of Edwards’ works to show how much he emphasized faith *as* coming into union with Christ. This was not a new doctrine for Reformed theology, but it was an “increased emphasis”. Bogue understands Edwards to argue that “Faith then is our nonmeritorious uniting with Christ.”¹³² And he notes that for Edwards “absolute dependence” is the essence of faith. This must rid us of the fatal error of trusting in our own righteousness in any degree. For Edwards, “Faith by definition is without merit”¹³³ because it rejects all personal goodness as non-existent before God. But when a believer comes into this faith union, Bogue concludes that, for Edwards, “The blessing of the covenant of grace, analogous to the marriage covenant, is that all our sin and unrighteousness is Christ’s, and all His blessings and righteousness are ours.”¹³⁴

Wilson too saw the connection in Edwards between faith and union with Christ.¹³⁵

She understands Edwards to be changing the paradigm with which one should think

¹³¹This is Gerstner’s wording taken from Edwards’ sermon on Habakkuk 2:4,40, which was a very early sermon preached sometime before 1733. Quoted from Gerstner, *Mini-Theology*, 80-81. Other discussions of faith alone as the means to justification can be found in Edwards’ *Miscellanies* 1280, 831, 877, 1250, and 1354.

¹³² Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace*, 241.

¹³³ Bogue, 231.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25

¹³⁵ Patricia Wilson, *The Theology of Grace in Jonathan Edwards*, The University of Iowa, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1973.

about faith and justification. These are not really two separate acts. For Edwards, they are two parts of one divine action which a person receives. Edwards, like his Puritan predecessors, argued that no human action could be rightly regarded as the cause of justification. Therefore, faith must be understood as God moving one's soul toward receiving Christ, or coming into union with Him.

In 1966 Conrad Cherry published an important appraisal of Jonathan Edwards' theology. In his analysis of Edwards's teaching on justification by faith, Cherry focused primarily on the contributions Edwards made to understanding the connection between faith, as a human act, to the receiving of Christ's righteousness.

Cherry shows how Edwards builds upon the teachings of Luther and Calvin maintaining the "gift" character of salvation and the necessary link with the imputed righteousness of Christ. Both of the above reformers were eager to do away with any notion that humans made even the smallest contribution to their salvation. Therefore, faith could never be regarded as a work of merit. For Luther and Calvin, faith was simply the acceptance of the gospel promises, or as Calvin called it, the "empty vessel" which receives salvation but does not contribute to it.

Cherry offers an excellent discussion of Edwards' view of the relationship of faith to justification. He finds two trains of thought in Edwards' writings. The first one explains this potential problem (that of calling faith a human work or condition- which sounds very Arminian) by simply stating that faith is itself a gift of God. Therefore, God provides for his own condition in justifying a person. A person will receive this qualifying gift if they are among the elect. Edwards explains how Christ purchased both what he calls the "objective" and the "inherent" good for the elect. This means the Christ

purchased all the inherent qualifications necessary for the elect to enjoy salvation. By this definition, Edwards preserves the gift nature of salvation as well as the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Cherry explains it by stating, “when the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner, then the sinner is availed of the advantages of both Christ's sufferings and his obedience.”¹³⁶

Cherry, like the others, feels that the unique and groundbreaking contribution that Edwards is making to the conversation here is that he focuses on faith as the actual relationship or union with Christ. This relationship brings with it, all as part of the same divine grace, the imputation of Christ's righteousness as man's own. And God declares man to be just, not out of respect for the man's faith, but rather out of respect for the union that man shares with the object of his faith, Christ the mediator. He expresses Edwards point clearly; “Faith is the *bond* between the soul and Christ and Christ's righteousness and *is the actual reception* of Christ's righteousness. It is not something apart from justification which is *used for* the reception of justification.”¹³⁷

Cherry feels that Edwards’ definition of faith relieves us of having to speak of faith preceding justification or of justification preceding faith. Rather, these are inseparably connected. And he helps us understand what is meant by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. “Edwards does not desire to claim that man is made holy-in-himself through imputation. Man is not given a self-contained righteousness on the basis of which he has been counted righteous.”¹³⁸

Cherry believes that Edwards’ second explanation for how faith is involved in

¹³⁶ Conrad Cherry, *The theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, (Indianapolis, IA; Indiana University press, 1966), 93.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

justification “transcends the limitations of the first approach.”¹³⁹ This is where Edwards developed the idea of a “natural fitness” existing between the human soul and justification. Here, Edwards will greatly modify the conditional language found in the other explanation. Edwards explains that a sinful man stands in relationship with Christ and his righteousness, and the act of faith, as well as the justification by God, must be understood as two inseparable aspects of the same gift of grace found in this relationship. Edwards is saying that faith is a naturally fit relationship rather than a morally fit relationship. This is to say that Christ and faith belong inseparably together by virtue of a natural concord or agreeableness. And since God has a love for order, Cherry explains, “he sees to it that Christ's righteousness flows to man through the union that man has with Christ through faith.”¹⁴⁰

Logan also seeks to explain Edwards’ development of fitness as an answer to the relationship between faith and union with Christ. And he does so in effort to preserve Edwards’ orthodoxy. He summarizes the question and Edwards’ answer thus,

What exactly is the relationship between our faith and our being united to Christ? And what is the relationship between our union with Christ and our justification? Does our faith *cause* union with Christ, and does our union with Christ *cause* our justification? ‘No, on both accounts,’ asserts Edwards, still deeply concerned to eliminate all human merit (even divinely accomplished human merit) from possible consideration as a cause of justification. Edwards explains the connections he sees between faith and union with Christ and between union with Christ and justification in terms of what he calls “fitness”.¹⁴¹

And again, he writes,

So faith does not merit union with Christ and union with Christ does not merit justification; instead, these are naturally *fit* or *appropriate* or *suitable* or *meet* relations..... (Edwards) sees these relationships as being ontologically grounded. God so constructed reality that, in the natural order of things, union

¹³⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴¹ Logan, 36.

with Christ belongs with faith and justification belongs with being in Christ. And the word “order” is crucial; it is because of his “love of order” (order understood not in a Platonic sense but in the sense of an expression of God's nature) that God justifies those who are in Christ.¹⁴²

Logan also seeks to defend the Scriptural validity of Edwards’ idea of fitness. He asserts that Edwards's concept of fitness runs through the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, revealing that the many works of God are all part of the one plan of God. Just as Jesus came at the “fit” time to fulfill all that the Old Testament pointed to (see Eph 1:10; Mark 1:5), and just as it was “fitting” for him to endure sufferings (see Heb 2:10), all things in history find their fit place in God's sovereign plan. This is Edwards's theology, and Logan plainly shows that Edwards’ theology is grounded in the fullness of biblical revelation.

Both Cherry and Wilson agree that Edwards’ whole scenario presupposes a courtroom picture of justification. His developments in the doctrine continue to maintain a *forensic* aspect to justification wherein a sinner is judged righteous, or declared righteous, through the union with Christ that they have accepted by faith. Wilson notes, “Edwards is consistently concerned to try to formulate his position so that it never appears that the saint is able to merit divine favor.”¹⁴³ And this would certainly be in keeping with the Reformed scheme of salvation.

On the subject of obedience and how this relates to justification, many of Edwards’ interpreters have found him in harmony with his Calvinist predecessors. Wilson notes how Edwards sees the union with Christ as immediate and real, effecting a real change in a person. By emphasizing the real change that comes to a believer in justification, she sees a connection between Edwards and the Cambridge Platonists. In

¹⁴² Ibid., 37.

fact, she thinks Edwards is closer to them than to his Reformed predecessors on this point (since the Reformed stress the external declaration of righteousness more than the inward change). Just the same, Edwards differs from the Cambridge Platonists by emphasizing that all of this is the result of divine grace alone.¹⁴⁴ That point is where he preserves his harmony with the past. Wilson explains Edwards' view by stating,

Through changing the notion of justification from an externally imputed one to an internal change in man, Edwards was still able to defend the unity and uniqueness of the act of justification. Justification is logically and chronologically one act, with two participants, man passive with respect to righteousness, God acting in man to work good. But because God is the one working good in man, and God is ever faithful, God's first act of justification contains in it the promise of continuation of this union which will never be dissolved by an ever-faithful God.¹⁴⁵

Logan too demonstrates that, for Edwards, there is a real connection between obedience and justification, that true grace, which finds its origin in the sovereign work of God's spirit, is not inactive, but active. Therefore, evangelical obedience is a result, or sign, of the Spirit's work and not a cause of that work. The blessings connected with post-justification obedience also flow from the union a believer has with Christ. Logan shows how Edwards believes that it is the Holy Spirit that causes an individual's obedience. The Holy Spirit does this by affecting a person's inner disposition and changes their desires. Thus, God receives glory even for the obedience a Christian offers. All of this points to the fact that, for Edwards, justification and sanctification are inseparable. Making this plain should have helped Edwards to enforce a more strict standard in who may be admitted to the Lord's table.

Edwards' development of "fitness" as a way of explaining the nature of

¹⁴³ Wilson, 179-180.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 176-177.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 177.

justification by faith has already been explained. But Logan points out that Edwards also developed the idea of non-causal conditions. And on this point too Logan finds no necessary break with Reformed orthodoxy. He describes how Edwards makes a distinction between a cause and a condition, explaining that it is Christ's work alone, which is applied to an ungodly person by the Holy Spirit through the electing graces of God that makes for the only *cause* of justification. Edwards shows, to use Logan's words, that "all causes are conditions but not all conditions are causes."¹⁴⁶ Logan emphasizes that, "Edwards wants to maintain as clearly and strongly as possible the absolute qualitative difference between God's action and man's action."¹⁴⁷

Logan also makes clear that Edwards speaks of two different types of conditions in the justification process. As shown before, faith is a condition of a different order, or in a unique sense, from other conditions. Faith is the "closing with Christ", or coming into union with Christ that makes for the basis of God's justifying verdict. The only true condition is Christ and His redemptive works. Cherry saw this too. Thus he notes that "faith has some particular bearing on justification which the good works implied in and flowing from faith do not have."¹⁴⁸ So, Cherry sees in Edwards that faith is not really an "instrument", not even a God-given instrument, of salvation. And Edwards had argued against the "instrument" metaphor. But this does not constitute any wholesale rejection or major re-working of the Reformed understanding of faith's relationship to justification. Logan sums it up by saying, "Edwards's attempt to preach the biblical message accurately by utilizing the cause-condition distinction makes it possible for him at the same time to

¹⁴⁶ Logan, 39.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴⁸ Cherry, 100.

answer both Arminianism and antinomianism.”¹⁴⁹ At the same time, Logan concedes that Edwards's explanations do not solve all possible language problems. He says,

In terms of explaining the relationships among God's grace, human faith, and evangelical obedience in the justification of the ungodly, that cause-condition distinction works well (not perfectly – just “well”). It makes clear to the Arminian that no ground exists for human boasting before God and it makes clear to the antinomian that obedience is an absolute necessity. It thus maintains both the proclamation (the “is”) and the exhortation (the “ought”) of the gospel.¹⁵⁰

For Logan, it appears founded in the very nature of God and in the history of his redemptive work that faith, union with Christ, and evangelical obedience simply belong together.

These authors clarify many of Edwards’ points. But in the process of doing so, they are either eager to affirm a harmony with his theological tradition or to at least affirm a strong connection to Reformed orthodoxy. None of them see Edwards going an entirely new direction or leaving his tradition behind.

Authors Who Question or Deny Edwards’ Reformed Orthodoxy

Perhaps it is unfair to put Schafer and Morimoto into this category. They are both willing to acknowledge that Edwards was firmly rooted in his Calvinist and Reformed tradition. However, they do suggest that Edwards moves away from that tradition some in his exposition of justification by faith alone. They find that Edwards says many things that sound too much like the Roman Catholic version of the same doctrine. Hunsinger, on the other hand, outright accuses Edwards of failing to have argued precisely for justification by faith alone at all. He sees in Edwards more of an argument for

¹⁴⁹ Logan, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 47.

justification by “disposition alone”, or “a version of ‘justification by works’”.¹⁵¹

Thomas A. Schafer asserts,

There is no doubting Edwards’ own loyalties. He was deeply rooted in the Calvinistic Puritanism of both Old and New England. Nurtured on the writings of men like William Ames, John Preston, Richard Sibbes, and Thomas Shepard, he also made regular use of such works as Francis Turretine’s *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Geneva, 1679-85), which he prized for its help in theological polemics, and Peter van Mastricht’s *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* (ed. nova, Rhenum, 1699), which he ranked next to the Bible.¹⁵²

Schafer also states that Edwards seemed to hold to his 1738 exposition throughout his life. However, he thinks that the lack of much comment on the doctrine in his last twenty years of writing begs some explanation. He comments,

The pressure of events and the necessity of defending first those doctrines most strongly attacked no doubt explain this in part. Even so, the conviction has emerged in this study that there are important elements in Edwards’ religious thought which cause the doctrine of justification to occupy an ambiguous and somewhat precarious place in his theology.¹⁵³

In his examination of Edwards’ work on justification, Schafer thinks it is striking that Edwards focuses more upon the role of faith in justification than on Christ’s satisfaction or imputed righteousness. He thinks this reflects something of Edwards’ own theological mainstream. This “mainstream” is more focused on the connection between love, faith, and obedience than on traditional elements of the doctrine. Edwards spends much time commenting on how faith is the only means of justification. But, when Edwards writes about union with Christ as the “grounds” for justification, Schafer thinks that this implies that there is “something really existing in the soul (which) precedes the

¹⁵¹ George Hunsinger, “Dispositional Soteriology: Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith Alone”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 107-120.

¹⁵² Thomas A. Schafer, “Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith”, *Church History*, 20 (Dec. 1951), footnote 10.

¹⁵³ Schafer, “Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith”, 57.

external imputation” of righteousness.¹⁵⁴ And this is “faith”. Of course, Edwards does not feel that any “preceding” faith has merit in itself. Faith does not have *moral* fitness.

Just the same, Schafer feels that Edwards provides some answers here to the problems associated with justification by faith alone, such as whether faith precedes justification or vice versa. He interprets Edwards to be saying that faith comes first (but only in the *application* of salvation to the elect). Schafer sees here an agreement with New England tradition, and adds the interesting point, “Edwards was evidently not worried about making inherent states and qualities in the soul conditions of salvation so long as they were relieved of all meritorious connotations.”¹⁵⁵

Therefore, Schafer doubts the stability of Edwards’ doctrine of justification in his own thinking. He writes, “...the reader cannot help feeling that the conception of ‘faith alone’ has been considerably enlarged -- and hence practically eliminated.”¹⁵⁶ But surely this is due to a misunderstanding of Edwards’ position. One must keep in mind the complexity and precision of Edwards’ thought. True, Edwards stresses a connection between faith, love, and obedience that is not always found in other Reformed theologians. But does Edwards see this as a break with his tradition or contrary to them? Apparently not, since he is in fact arguing for justification by faith alone against Arminian foes. However, Schafer sees Edwards redefining certain terms in the discussion. He suggest that Edwards’ new rendition of historical theological terms, such as “faith” leads him to be, though a confessed Reformed Puritan, virtually Catholic in his doctrine of justification.

For instance, Schafer deals with some of Edwards’ writings, such as *The Nature*

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 59.

of True Virtue, Religious Affections, God Glorified in Man's Dependence as well as his *Personal Narrative*, to show how much Edwards equated faith with love for God and Christ. For Edwards, faith meant having a true sight and sense of God's majestic beauty. Schafer understands this to say essentially that coming to Christ in faith is an *act* of love. This love consists in the soul's consent to and affinity toward God and his holiness. Saving faith causes a person to love God and Christ for their own loveliness, not simply because the person realizes that God loves them.¹⁵⁷ Schafer feels that this emphasis on love as a central part of faith and obedience is more in the mainstream of Edwards' thought than justification by faith alone. By doing this, "Edwards bridge(s) the gap between faith and works: they have the same root – the soul's inmost "consent" to God and his holiness."¹⁵⁸

Schafer's point is insightful, but should hardly minimize the force with which Edwards argues for justification by faith alone in his lectures. It is a powerful exposition that would hardly be minimized in his own later theology. Perhaps a better way to understand all this is to say that Edwards clarifies the nature of relationships which underlie the process of applied redemption. Schafer concedes this, but adds that Edwards goes beyond the historic doctrine to deal mainly with the "real" acts of love that are connected with faith. If God takes real delight in the good actions of the saints (understood as reflections of God's graces reflected back to Him), then Schafer feels that Edwards' main emphasis in understanding justification is not "imputed righteousness, but

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 60-61. It appears by all of this that Edwards places love at the very center of the human response to the gospel. A person, according to Edwards, has a sense of love and desire for God even before they realize how much God loves them. See the *Religious Affections* and the other above mentioned writings for more on this.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 61.

rather “infused grace.”¹⁵⁹

Morimoto is perhaps a bit more gracious in dealing with Edwards’ works. He believes that Edwards is able to affirm such goodness, or the active role of faith, because he is simply articulating “a new rendition of the Augustinian concept of God rewarding his own gifts. All the virtuous dispositions, including faith, are nothing but God’s antecedent gift given with the intention to reward afterward.”¹⁶⁰ Morimoto explains that since Edwards is conscious of this, he has confidence in his assertions regarding human works, and does not fear being regarded as an Arminian.

At the same time, Morimoto, like Schafer, saw Edwards as bringing a bit of a Catholic twist on the doctrine. In his work on the subject, Morimoto seeks to show how Edward’s soteriology had many affinities with the Roman Catholic understanding of salvation. With the exception of his understanding of merit, Morimoto believes that Edwards’ theology opens a unique door for Reformed-Catholic dialogue.¹⁶¹ He does not feel that these assertions should cause any Protestants to worry. Rather, he demonstrates that Edwards remains in harmony with his Reformed Puritan context while at the same time making some arguments that could be affirmed by Protestants and Catholics alike.

Morimoto’s main goal in his investigation of Edwards’ doctrine of justification is to harmonize it with the rest of Edwards’ soteriology. If Edwards views the application of redemption as consisting in these four phases: conversion, justification, sanctification,

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 62-63. This phrase makes some Reformed theologians nervous. However, it works in one sense, as long as one does not read the Roman Catholic doctrine into this designation. Practically speaking, Schafer thinks that Edwards is close to the Roman conception of the place of love in justifying faith. He feels that Edwards mainly wants to preserve orthodox forms of expression and to avoid the Roman conception of merit. That is the only point that keeps Edwards from speaking in this way himself.

¹⁶⁰ Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 101.

¹⁶¹ Morimoto, 129-130.

and glorification, how are conversion and justification related?¹⁶² It is not always clear in Edwards' writings. However, Morimoto confirms Edwards' conception of justification "by faith alone", and "forensic imputation". But Edwards directed these arguments against the Arminian scheme of justification, not the Roman Catholic doctrine.

When Edwards discussed the active role of faith in justification, he qualified this by developing the ideas of moral and natural fitness. Morimoto does not think that Edwards' views of "fitness" are very clear though. He writes, "The distinction, however, is tainted with ambiguity. Edwards himself blurs it at times by affirming the existence of moral fitness prior to justification."¹⁶³ For this assertion, Morimoto looks to several of Edwards' "Miscellanies". There are places that deny moral fitness (such as nos. 647, 670, and 829), and there are places that seem to affirm some moral fitness, or at least affirm some sense of moral valuableness (nos. 687, 688, and 712).¹⁶⁴ However, it must be noted, that it is difficult to build an accurate or concrete picture of Edward's theology from his "Miscellanies". These represent the private outworkings of theological and philosophical themes for Edwards' own use. He did not publish these writings, though some are reproduced in his published works and sermons. Morimoto's objection may be valid, but it may also prove more helpful to look primarily to what Edwards was willing to affirm in his published works before going to his private notebooks.

In the end, Morimoto wants to assert that both Edwards and Roman Catholicism can affirm "that grace means at once God's gratuitous favor and a gift that effectuates itself in the person to whom it is given. 'Righteousness' is at the same time imputatory

¹⁶² Morimoto takes this order from Edwards' *History of the Work of Redemption*.

¹⁶³ Morimoto, 94.

¹⁶⁴ These "Miscellanies" are found in the Yale edition of Edwards' *Works*.

and effective.”¹⁶⁵

Hunsinger’s important article¹⁶⁶ significantly challenges the notion that Edwards has remained in harmony with the Reformation. He charges that “it is not clear that Edwards can successfully defend himself, as he explicitly tries to do, against the perception that his doctrine of justification implicates him in a doctrine of ‘congruent merit.’”¹⁶⁷ That is, Edwards’ doctrine seems to teach that God’s acceptance is a fitting reward for faith, though not obligatory. Hunsinger explains that Edwards seems to advocate that Christ is the primary grounds for justification, but that faith, inside the believer, is a secondary grounds. “Edwards clearly intends to set forth the virtue of faith as a secondary reason why the believer is accepted by God.”¹⁶⁸

On this point, Hunsinger positions Edwards in opposition to the Reformation. Whereas Edwards seeks to maintain faith as a virtue, “the Reformation had insisted that our justification depended entirely on Christ, and not in any sense on some virtue in ourselves—not before faith, but also after faith.”¹⁶⁹ And again, “He (Edwards) did not know, apparently, that by defining faith as a meritorious virtue, regardless of how secondary and derivative, he had moved closer to Thomas (Aquinas) than to the Reformation.”¹⁷⁰ But one can’t help but feel that Hunsinger has misunderstood, or mishandled, Edwards’ doctrine. He is willing to note that Edwards only defines faith as virtuous in a derivative sense, and that it lacks moral merit. At the same time, he seems to overstate Edwards’ intentions- that faith makes some sort of contribution to justification.

¹⁶⁵ Morimoto, 130. See 103-130 for the full comparison of Edwards and Roman Catholicism.

¹⁶⁶ George Hunsinger, “Dispositional Soteriology: Jonathan Edwards on Justification by Faith Alone”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 107-120.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

Edwards has said too much in opposition to this idea to interpret him this way. However, Hunsinger, while respecting Edwards' mind, does not think he has succeeded in his arguments.

Hunsinger makes use of Luther, Calvin, and Turretin to show how Edwards seems to be arguing for a different doctrine of justification. He implies that Edwards' doctrine is more of a justification by faith- "primarily", but not exclusively.¹⁷¹ Hunsinger explains the variation in Edwards as being due to his unique concept of faith as a "pleasing disposition." This disposition toward God includes faith, love, and other virtues. And even though they may only be in a believer after their initial justification, they contribute to a person's final acceptance- or salvation. Hunsinger feels that Edwards teaches that this disposition, while secondary and derived, still contributes in some way to a person being rewarded with Heaven. Therefore, in the end, "Works are not excluded from justification, ultimately because justification has a double ground: not only in Christ, but through Christ also in us."¹⁷² This is why Hunsinger concludes that "though different in weight and expression, obedience and faith are essentially the same in principle, since both count as exertions of the saving disposition. It seems fair to sum up by saying that what Edwards finally teaches is justification by disposition alone."¹⁷³

Hunsinger thinks that his own observations are the result of bringing a "crisper" focus to Edwards' writings than some others may have brought. "If one brings a soft focus, Edwards can end up sounding very much like the Reformation, as he himself

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷² Ibid., 117. This statement follows and explanation of how Edwards seems to depart from the Reformation on his exposition of Paul's and James' use of the words "justify" and "faith." Hunsinger here continues to interpret Edwards as arguing that works must in some way play a role in justification. On this he is correct. Edwards does say that they play a role, but works do not contribute to justification in any meritorious way.

clearly intended and often, it should be added, carried out.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, while noting Edwards’ intentions and how he may be interpreted, Hunsinger still concludes that Edwards has not been successful in arguing accurately or convincingly for justification by faith alone.¹⁷⁵

To conclude, some of the commentators discussed above propose that Edwards departed from his Reformed orthodoxy on certain matters here or there. Only Hunsinger is bold enough to undermine Edwards’ whole position, respectfully though not convincingly. Just the same, nearly all the other Edwards scholars assert that he continued to operate within the general framework of Reformed theology and the Puritan tradition of Old and New England, never departing from these spheres on the whole, nor in most of his conclusions. Many of these also provide a clearer restating of Edwards’ views. And authors, such as Cherry, Logan, and Gerstner clarify some of the points that Hunsinger challenged. Their works provide a helpful corrective to Hunsinger’s misunderstandings. Just the same, Hunsinger brings up some notable objections that the others did not deal with directly. It will be necessary in the near future for an Edwards’ scholar to offer answers to Hunsinger’s specific objections, or to at least demonstrate where he may have misunderstood Edwards. This thesis attempts to provide the foundations for such a work.

Examples of Other Reformed Scholars’ Use of Edwards for Clarifying Doctrine

¹⁷³ Ibid., 119. For more on Jonathan Edwards’ “dispositional” view of reality, see Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹⁷⁴ Hunsinger, 119.

¹⁷⁵ However, one might claim that the quotation from *Religious Affections*, which concludes Hunsinger’s article (p.120), does more to disqualify his conclusions than strengthen them. But Hunsinger feels that this statement is too general- thus it sounds more like a Reformational view- and cannot have the final say on Edwards’ doctrine of justification.

It may be helpful to see how other Reformed scholars have made use of Edwards' teaching to define and clarify their own positions on this, and related, doctrines. Their use of Edwards demonstrates an acceptance of him as a source for Reformed orthodoxy.

In 2002, John Piper published an important work on the imputation of Christ's righteousness titled, *Counted Righteous in Christ*. In this timely work, Piper argued in favor of the historic Reformed position on justification against many of the contemporary challenges in theology. At one point Piper states that the "new challenge to justification obscures half of Christ's glory in the work of justification."¹⁷⁶ For Piper, the challenge seeks to deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness and claims that the Bible contains no such teaching. Though Edwards' theological opponents had different objections, Piper finds in Edwards a timely quote for his own situation. Edwards had argued, "To suppose that all Christ does is only to make atonement for us by suffering, is to make him our savior but in part. It is to rob him of half his glory as Savior."¹⁷⁷

Piper references Edwards again when speaking of how the doctrine of justification has sparked historic spiritual awakenings. Edwards had written in 1738, following a first phase of the Great Awakening, "The beginning of the late work of God in this place, was so circumstanced that I could not but look upon it as a remarkable testimony of God's approbation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone."¹⁷⁸ This argument serves to show the importance of this doctrine in the context of the Holy Spirit's work of church renewal.

Later in Piper's work he examines whether Christ's "one act of righteousness"

¹⁷⁶John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 35.

¹⁷⁷See Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 638. Cited in Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, 35.

(Romans 5:18) refers to his life of obedience or not. Piper believes it does, but that it is not entirely crucial to the doctrine. In this examination Piper again cites Edwards intending to show how Edwards' observes that Christ's death itself both paid the penalty for sin and accomplished the positive righteousness of His people. Edwards writes, "Christ underwent death in obedience to the command of the Father...And this is part, and indeed the principal part, of the active obedience by which we are justified."¹⁷⁹ Piper often looks to Edwards for such insights in theology and considers Edwards his greatest teacher and influence from the past- aside from the Bible.

James White looks to Edwards' insights in his recent magnum opus, *The God Who Justifies*. When arguing that the Apostle Paul intends to say that the moral law is not a condition for justification, White cites Edwards' sermons on justification by faith from Romans. Edwards argued, "The apostle does not only say that we are not justified by the works of the law, but that we are not justified by works, using a general term."¹⁸⁰ And later on, "therefore our breaches of the law argue simply that we cannot be justified by the law that we have broken."¹⁸¹ White's goal in citing Edwards is to strengthen his argument that Paul's use of the phrase "works of the law" in his letters is primarily focused on the works of the moral law, not just the ceremonial law.¹⁸²

Earlier in the 20th century, the great Old Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, used Edwards' arguments for justification by faith to support his own work on the subject. In fact, Hodge wanted to show how firm Edwards was in his adherence to this

¹⁷⁸C.f., Edwards, *The Great Awakening, Editor's Introduction, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 4 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 19. Cited in Piper, *Counted Righteous*, 43.

¹⁷⁹Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1(Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 638-639. Cited in Piper, *Counted Righteous*, 111.

¹⁸⁰Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, (Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 38-39. Cited in James R. White, *The God Who Justifies*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 182.

¹⁸¹Edwards, *Justification*, 40, cited in White, 183.

doctrine, wherein he faithfully concurred with the historic Reformed faith. Commenting on Edwards' definition of justification, Hodge summarizes Edwards' position by saying, "It is not on account of any virtue or goodness in faith, but as it unites us to Christ and involves the acceptance of him as our righteousness. Thus it is that we are justified 'by faith alone, without any manner of virtue or goodness of our own.'"¹⁸³ Hodge wants to demonstrate that Edwards' argument here is the same as his own. Therefore, he argues that the grounds of justification is having the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. To show that this is the case, Hodge again cites Edwards: "Christ's perfect obedience shall be reckoned to our account so that we shall have the benefit of it, as though we had performed it ourselves."¹⁸⁴ In case someone thinks this is a strange assertion to make, Hodge quotes Edwards' entire passage here where he goes on to say, "Why is there any more absurdity in supposing that Christ's obedience is imputed to us than that his satisfaction is imputed?"¹⁸⁵ If the Christian understands the Gospel to teach that Christ's death is reckoned as ours, as though we had suffered it, is God not also then just in reckoning Christ's faithful obedience to our account, as though we had obeyed Him? These arguments are specifically targeted at the Arminians who hold to the one (imputed sacrifice) but not the other (imputed obedience). Hodge wishes to affirm these same claims against all opponents of the full gospel and justification by faith alone. And he finds a helpful and authoritative ally in Edwards.

¹⁸²See also White's use of Edwards in *The God Who Justifies*, 212.

¹⁸³Charles Hodge, *Justification by Faith Alone*, (Hobbs, NM: The Trinity Foundation, 1955), 41.

¹⁸⁴*Works of President Edwards*, New York, 1868, Vol. IV, 66, 91, 92. Cited in Hodge, *Justification*, 42.

CHAPTER 5

¹⁸⁵ Hodge, *Justification*, 42.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

A survey of the literature that has resulted from Edwards' life and teachings reveals that his thought has been extremely influential. It is even possible that Edwards is more influential in our day than he was in his own lifetime. Pastors and theologians continue to learn from and examine the life and work of this mild-mannered, yet brilliant, New England pastor. Edwards was like the many church reformers who came before him in that he defended the true gospel of grace in Christ Jesus against its enemies. And since the enemies of the gospel never cease to appear in every age, and since their essential errors do not change much over time, orthodox heroes, like Edwards must continually be read and understood by later generations if we are to fight as well.

Edwards stands above some of those reformers because of the intellectual and spiritual gifts that he possessed. His depth of insight and clarity of argument made him one of the strongest defenders and expositors of doctrine of all time. Not only this, but a massive spiritual awakening resulted in his church and the surrounding colonies, in large part due to his preaching and writing, demands that he be heard and understood. It is not often that one man has such a role in a wide-spread work of God's Spirit. Edwards' work and times are comparable to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. He is like Luther in that he was an unashamed defender of the Gospel and Justification by Faith Alone amidst extreme opposition. Additionally, Edwards, like John Calvin, had a tremendous ability to think clearly and articulate doctrine powerfully and precisely. To ignore his great work on the doctrine of justification would be a mistake for the 21st century church.

Edwards' contributions to the exposition of the doctrine were built upon historic

and Reformed foundations. As demonstrated above, he kept close to the historic language and understanding as taught earlier by great Reformed theologians such as John Calvin and John Owen. He fully affirmed what was written in the historic confessions of faith such as *The Augsburg Confession* and *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Nearly all of Edwards' interpreters have acknowledged this.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, his unique emphases of union with Christ, natural fitness, and non-causal conditions, make him a necessary source for understanding the doctrine today. In essence, Edwards helped answer any previously unanswered questions regarding justification by faith alone. His additions of theological and philosophical speculation were offered within the context of a conscious historic orthodoxy. This is how Edwards should be read and understood. To do otherwise, and accuse him of departing from Puritan Reformed orthodoxy, would surely reflect a misunderstanding that would offend Edwards himself, since he was purposefully opposing the Arminian view and using the historic language in the majority of his expositions.

It is also important to note that the objections that Edwards answers are being interjected today. And since Edwards dealt with them so thoroughly and effectively, we should look to his insights to answer today's critics.¹⁸⁷ Others have agreed, and thus, many theologians today are still looking to Edwards for assistance in defending and explaining justification by faith (and related doctrines such the imputation of Christ's

¹⁸⁶ Gerald R. McDermott, a gifted and influential Edwards scholar in his own right- and notable exception to the above comment, represents another one of the few recent scholars who have suggested that Edwards broke away from Reformed orthodoxy on certain points. However, he, like Hunsinger, has much to overcome in light Edwards' own words and the other interpreter's conclusions. The burden of proof seems to lie upon those who would contest Edwards' orthodoxy. See McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁸⁷ Brandon G. Withrow, "Jonathan Edwards as a Resource for Current Evangelical Discussion Over the Language of the Doctrine of Justification," Microfiche, 1999.

righteousness). Even in the present controversy over justification related to the New Perspective on Paul¹⁸⁸, theologians will find in Edwards a helpful and insightful guide. In fact, if others were as solidly grounded and open at the same time, as Edwards was, the controversy might be abated as both sides became more thoughtfully informed. Even Hunsinger has noted this. He comments on Edwards' exposition of Paul's use of the term "law",

Edwards not only defends the Reformation, but he does so at a level of sophistication that would seem to remain unsurpassed. Although I am no expert on the current New Testament debate, I suspect that Edwards's meticulous examination of the internal evidence would still hold up rather well. Those dissatisfied with the arguments of scholars like E. P. Sanders and James Dunn will find a welcome ally in Edwards, should they choose to consult him. If Edwards is any indication, one cannot help but feel that standards of evidence and argumentation were perhaps higher in the eighteenth century than they are in theology today.¹⁸⁹

As this thesis has shown, they all do well to look to Edwards for such help.¹⁹⁰

Edwards proclaimed that we are justified only by faith alone in Christ alone, not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own. He thoroughly demonstrated how faith unites a person to Christ, and that this union with Christ is the basis for everything in salvation, including justification. He proved that the Reformers were correct to assert that

¹⁸⁸ For a helpful writing on this subject see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current justification Controversy*, (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2003)

¹⁸⁹ Hunsinger, "Dispositional Soteriology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 107.

¹⁹⁰ Another fairly recent discussion on justification produced a Joint Statement on Justification by some in the Lutheran and Reformed Church alliance. This document continues much of the historic language on justification. It also affirms "justification by grace through faith alone", citing both Luther and Calvin. It also notes that believers do not earn God's acceptance by works. Rather, acceptance is all from grace through Christ's life, death and resurrection. Works are affirmed to be a real and necessarily present outworking of the Spirit in a believer. At the same time, this document states, using language that seems to reject elements of Reformed orthodoxy, that the works of Christ reconciled "the entire world to God," thus suggesting a universal salvation- at least potentially. This may be explained by noting that the parties involved in this declaration represent the theologically liberal proponents in their respective denominations. They are made up of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the Reformed church in America. More conservative spheres of these denominations, such as the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod provided a minority report. Others rejected it altogether. Available from

justification was by faith “alone”, and that this faith may not be regarded as a work of human goodness. He plainly demonstrated how good works flow from a justified heart, but do not make it so. He also answered the most common objections to the doctrine. And in the end, Edwards refuted the growing Arminianism and antinomianism of his day. He regarded these as two thieves of the true gospel and the doctrine of justification. It is the conclusion of this author that Edwards’ work continues to bring us back to the truth and beauty of the gospel today.

Practical Considerations

There are many practical considerations that could be made as applications of this study. Pastors and theologians have been applying the doctrine of Justification by faith for a long time. And the truth is, Edwards helps us to better understand the gospel as a whole. This understanding provides great comfort and assurance to the redeemed sinner who continues to struggle with his corrupt nature. He also helps us understand the proper view of how works are related to our faith and protects us from erroneous views. Finally, Edwards helps us to glorify the triune God and Him alone for his works in salvation.

As Edwards explains justification by faith alone, he also helps us understand the full Gospel. This gospel includes both Christ’s obedience on our behalf as well as Christ’s satisfaction (or sufferings and death) on the cross in our place. Often we focus only on the fact that Christ took the punishment for our sins on the cross. This is indeed a great comfort! However, Edwards shows us how it was necessary for Christ to obey the law of God perfectly in our place as well. This was to accomplish a positive

<http://www.warc.ch/dt/er11/10.html>. For a Lutheran rebuttal, see <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2144>.

righteousness for us. Therefore, Christ not only took away our guilt and shame, he provides a perfect record of obedience to be applied to us as well. Thus, Christ's satisfaction for sins and his perfect righteousness are imputed, or ascribed, to the believer. This imputation of righteousness comes from the spiritual union that occurs between Christ and a believer, such that all that belongs to Christ becomes the believer's.

Without both of these aspects of the gospel, it may appear that Christ is our redeemer only in part. Edwards explains how all of this is necessary and provided for according to the nature and providence of God. This makes the gospel truly good news!

Edwards' explanation of justification by faith alone makes us certain that God is the one who has accomplished our redemption. He has fully accomplished it through His Son and He fully applies this redemption to us through His Spirit. This means that the Gospel is the good news concerning what God has done to save us! It is not instruction on what we are to do to achieve salvation. And Edwards shows us how God applies it to us in such a way that it can only be received as a gift by believing it, trusting it, that is, by "faith alone." Without Edwards' explanation of how faith operates in the receiving of justification as a gift, we would be very much prone to make the Arminian mistake of judging faith as a worthy deed, or independent godly exercise.

Understanding the gospel and justification, according to Edwards' exposition, also gives great comfort and assurance to the heart of the believer. If any of the objections to which Edwards responded are true, then the believer may not have any true sense of peace or security in their salvation. Our consciences would continually condemn us for our ongoing sins if we were not able to turn to the true gospel of redeeming grace that proclaims that we have peace with God (Romans 5:1) and are no longer under His

condemnation (Romans 8:1). As it is, we may appeal to the works of Christ and his merits and trust that they have become our surety before God, since He has seen fit to unite us with His Son through the grace of faith.

To understand that real forgiveness is ours in Christ, and that a perfect record of righteousness has been granted to us in Christ, gives great peace to one's conscience. But beyond this, it also gives one great courage in repentance. When a believer knows that they will not be cast away from God, or thrown out of the kingdom, or exempted from the heavenly life because of their sin, then they may boldly approach the throne of grace in confession and allow the Spirit of Christ to search the depths of their souls. If the Christian's acceptance before God depends on the measure of their obedience or performance, then they will likely have less courage or honesty in confession, always fearing that God will reject them. They will ignore the deep sins of the heart. In fact, believers may quickly become like the Pharisees who emphasized only outward conformity to the law while overlooking the grievous sins of their hearts. No, the true gospel, that brings us justification before God by faith alone, gives us comfort, assurance, and courage in our repentance.

Edwards also helps us understand the proper role of works in our salvation. They are actions that flow from our justification, not that which achieves justification. There is a sense in which our works demonstrate, or "prove," our justification before men, and perhaps to our own consciences. But at their root, they must be understood as something that comes as a result of being unified with Christ. This work of God has a true effect in the human heart, resulting in new desires and actions of obedience to Christ. But the focus is on Christ, the redeemer and giver of salvation, not on the person who must obey

and work to receive divine favor. Divine favor already rest upon the believer because Christ has divine favor. In union with Christ, the believer has what Christ has. Thus, a new heart has to be “made” before good actions may follow. As Jesus taught, the tree has to be made good before it can produce good fruit (Luke 6:43-45, cf. Matthew 12:33)!

A final practical application of Edwards’ teaching on this doctrine is that it causes the believer to thank God more for his or her salvation. It results in worship! If one understands the gospel as outlined above, and believes that justification comes by faith alone (where faith is not regarded as a holy human work), then one can hardly exalt oneself in worship. We are driven to exalt God’s work of grace and love the Redeemer for his glorious work on our behalf. We also may be freed from self-absorption, pride for our obedience, or even despair over our sins when we understand that salvation is all from grace. We come to understand that we have no righteous “leg to stand on” before God and must trust Christ’s merits completely. And if we have sinned, we may run to the throne of grace in repentance and not despair, remembering that it is those who renounce any personal righteousness that receive justification from God (Luke 18:13-14).

Likewise, if one has been obedient, they will glorify Christ’s work of grace that has enabled that obedience (see Hebrews 13:20-21; cf. Phil. 2:13). Along the same lines, we may be enabled to give grace to our brothers and sisters who have sinned, not casting a prideful judgment of condemnation upon them. All things considered, all may come to Christ and exalt him together as the source, author, and perfecter of our faith.

Justification by faith alone, as Edwards has defined and explained it, gives God more glory for our salvation than the other schemes of salvation. Christ is exalted and humanity is humbled. This is the biblical understanding of the gospel. It brings honor to

God and true, lasting joy to the believer- who no longer has to strive to attain the unattainable, but may delight in the gracious God who is the fountain of living waters.

In conclusion, it cannot be overlooked that Edwards' preaching on this doctrine had practical results in his own time. In fact, "preaching this doctrine, he later emphasized, proved the spark that set off the nearly unprecedented spiritual fires."¹⁹¹ It caused people to think more deeply about theological truths, and this resulted in spiritual renewal for many. It caused them to seek the Lord for salvation, for spiritual life, and for societal change. As the people were humbled before the Lord by the truths contained in this and other like doctrines, God sent the Holy Spirit to awaken the people to Christ in a dramatic way. It seems that the doctrine of justification by faith alone has been at the center of many historic movements of God's Spirit. The Great Awakening of Edwards' day may be second only to the Protestant Reformation, which was itself centered on this great doctrine. There are perhaps countless stories of other pastors who have experienced awakening in their churches associated with the preaching of these biblical truths. There is something refreshing and life-giving about truth. Life and freedom are part of its nature. Perhaps there might be similar experiences of God's grace if such truths are continually preached, expounded, and emphasized in pulpits today.

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¹⁹¹ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 178. Especially 175-183.

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