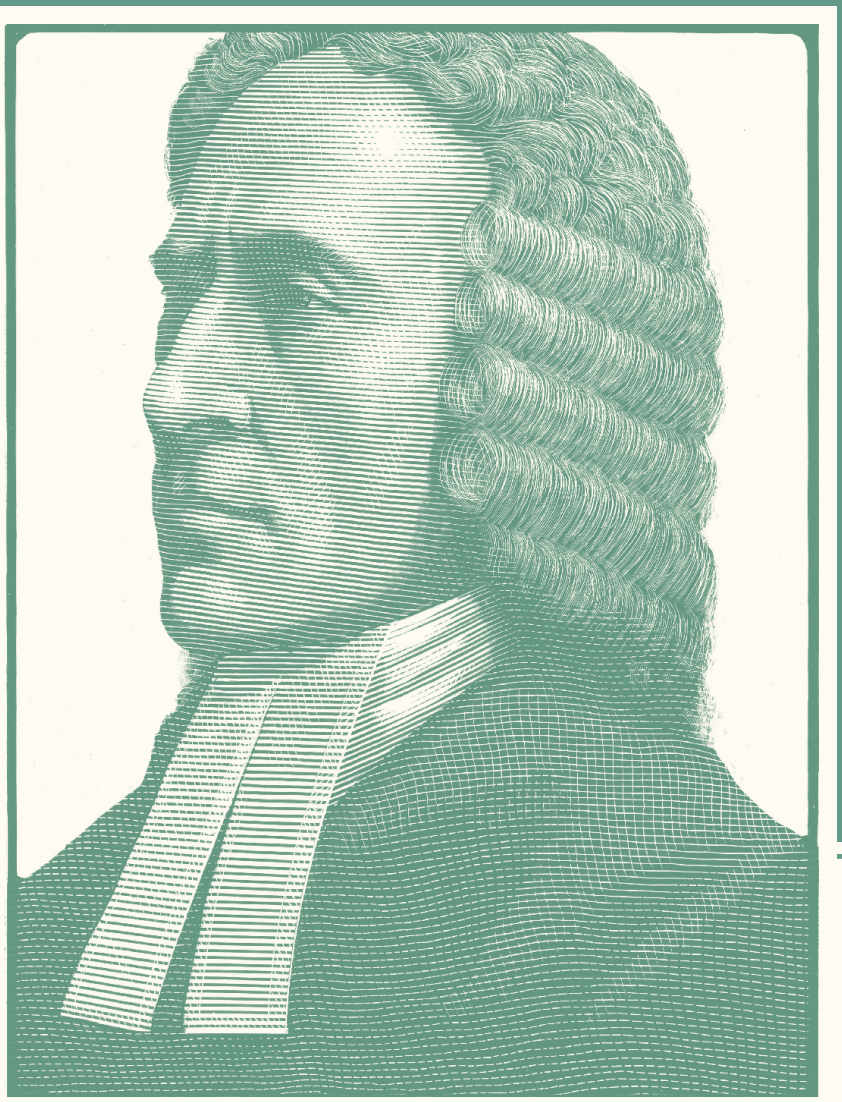
FOREWORD BY GEORGE M. MARSDEN

DANE C. ORTLUND



EDWARDS

on the Christian Life

ALIVE TO THE BEAUTY OF GOD

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CHAPTER 5

GENTLENESS

The Aroma of the Christian Life

It may seem odd to include a chapter on gentleness in a book on Jonathan Edwards's view of the Christian life. Are there not more central, more significant virtues to focus on?

Edwards didn't think so. He wrote that "a lamblike, dovelike spirit and temper" is "*the* true, and distinguishing disposition of the hearts of Christians."[1] And he has something to teach us. We give a chapter to gentleness here because it is a neglected virtue both in what others have unearthed in Edwards's writings and more generally in the Christian church today. Not many have identified gentleness as a major theme in Edwards (more common are titles such as *Jonathan Edwards: The Fiery Puritan*);[2] and not many identify gentleness as a major need in the church right now. And yet gentleness is perhaps the most neglected virtue among Christians today. Edwards wrote in his diary on February 16, 1725: "A virtue, which I need in a higher degree, to give a beauty and luster to my behavior, is gentleness. If I had more of an air of gentleness, I should be much mended."[3] True for him then. True for us today.

Some may hesitate to agree. Indeed, it may seem to many that the urgent need in the twenty-first-century church is not gentleness but its

[1] *WJE*, 2:344–45, emphasis added.
[2] Henry B. Parkes, *Jonathan Edwards: The Fiery Puritan* (New York: Menton, Balch & Co., 1930).
[3] *WJE*, 16:787.

opposite: steely, grim-faced, jaw-set, warrior-like championing of sound doctrine, moral living, and strategic social agendas. Will the kingdom of God truly advance through *gentleness*? Being gentle is nice. But will it really change anything?

Yes. The most steely, warrior-like theologian of church history, Martin Luther, wrote in 1528 to Duke John Frederick: "God has promised great mercy to those who seek peace and endure guile when he says: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' War does not gain much, but loses much and risks everything. Gentleness, however, loses nothing, risks little, and gains everything."[4]

Jonathan Edwards would agree. And unlike Luther, Edwards returns again and again to this theme of gentleness in exploring the Christian life.[5] In this chapter we first unearth what Edwards means by "gentle." We will then consider, through his eyes, how gentleness is compatible with three equally biblical calls—warring, zeal, and manliness.

In this angry world, gentleness sticks out. Jonathan Edwards guides us into such a life.

What Is Gentleness?

But what precisely is it? Though we know gentleness tacitly when we see it, it is difficult to define. Looking to Edwards, we discover six points.

First, we begin to get the flavor of what Edwards means by gentleness simply by noting what other words he tends to string together with it. Edwards returns to the same synonyms time and again when speaking of gentleness: calmness, long-suffering, forbearance, quietness, patience, kindness, a "lamb-like" or "dove-like" spirit, and—especially—meekness.[6] Gentleness makes us "like little children."[7] In one 1750 sermon he brings much of this together when he speaks of divine grace generating "those sweet, calming, and quieting principles of humility, meekness, resignation, patience, gentleness, forgiveness, and sweet reliance on God."[8]

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[4] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 49, *Letters II*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 196. Another window into Luther's ability to be truly tender and gentle is his moving word to a friend upon the death of Luther's one-year-old daughter (ibid., 203).

[5] A quick search at the *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online* provided by Yale University lists 349 independent instances of "gentle"/"gentleness." See edwards.yale.edu.

[6] On the overlapping relationship between gentleness and meekness in Edwards, see Paul Ramsey's editorial note in *WJE*, 8:189n4.

[7] *WJE*, 14:259.

[8] *WJE*, 25:544.

A second way to get at what Edwards means by gentleness is to see how he defines what it isn't. In *Charity and Its Fruits*, Edwards explains what Paul means when the apostle calls love "patient and kind" in 1 Corinthians 13:4 (or as Edwards's KJV had it, "Charity suffereth long"). Edwards suggests that to be long-suffering includes within it being gentle, and he cites James 3:17 (on the gentleness of the wisdom from above) and Galatians 5:22 (on gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit).[9] Edwards then identifies the photo negative of gentleness: "In him who exercises the Christian spirit as he ought there will be no passionate, rash and hasty expression; there will not be a bitter exasperated countenance, or air of behavior, no violence in talk or carriage, but on the contrary, those words and that behavior which savor of peaceableness and calmness."[10]

Third, gentleness is essential to Christian living. It is not an add-on. It is, for Edwards, one of the few indisputable evidences of the Holy Spirit alive and well within someone. Gentleness is not just for some Christians, those wired a certain way. It cannot merely be an inherent character trait, a result of personality or genetic predisposition, because it is listed as part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Looked at another way, nowhere in the New Testament's lists of spiritual gifts is gentleness identified as one such gift. It is not a *gift* of the Spirit for a few. It is the *fruit* of the Spirit for all. To be gentle is to become who we were meant to be; that is, to return to who we once were, in Eden.[11]

Fourth, gentleness is not only for all Christians but also for all times. It is not a "mode" into which a believer shifts on occasion. In this way gentleness is different from many other Christian virtues. Courage, for example, or chastity, is summoned forth by specific concrete circumstances. Gentleness is not summoned from time to time; it is what we are. It is not a virtue that is triggered but air that is exhaled. Edwards speaks of gentleness as a "spirit" that is "breathed."[12] It is an aroma. Those who are alive to beauty have a certain fragrance about them that hangs over all they do, sweetening their words, their actions, and their countenance. "The eminently humble Christian is as it were clothed with lowliness, mildness, meekness, gentle-

[9] These are the two New Testament texts to which Edwards returns time and again when speaking of gentleness.
[10] *WJE*, 8:189–90.
[11] In a 1945 letter to his son, J. R. R. Tolkien connected Eden and gentleness: "Certainly there was an Eden on this very unhappy earth. We all long for it, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with the sense of 'exile'" (Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000], 110).
[12] *WJE*, 3:91.

ness of spirit and behavior, and with a soft, sweet, condescending, winning air and deportment; these things are just like garments to him; he is clothed all over with them."[13]

Fifth, a high view of God's sovereignty fuels Christian gentleness. The theological tradition and system to which Edwards belonged, which is often stereotyped as cold and harsh, in truth produces its opposite. When Edwards's own eyes were opened to God's beauty, he saw two things above all else: God's "majesty and meekness joined together." On the one hand was God's utter sovereignty, which appeared to him as "an exceedingly pleasant" and "bright" doctrine, and on the other hand was God's condescending meekness, which was "sweet and gentle." Putting them together, Edwards saw God as possessing "a high, and great, and holy gentleness."[14] The sovereignty of God and the meekness of his children are mutually reinforcing. The English hymn writer John Newton captures this connection in a letter to a Calvinistic pastor who wrote him describing his intentions to rebuke the doctrinal errors of another pastor. Newton responds:

> Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy: but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who oppose.[15]

Sixth, reflecting the consistent pattern of biblical ethics, the vertical fuels the horizontal. Befriended by the gentleness of God in Jesus, we reflect that divine tenderness toward others. "Nothing," said Edwards, "has a greater tendency to promote those amiable dispositions of mercy, forbearance, long-suffering, gentleness and forgiveness, than a sense of our own

[13] *WJE*, 4:422.
[14] *WJE*, 16:792–93.
[15] See the full letter online at http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=217; accessed January 23, 2013. Calvin himself, as much as anyone in his train, understood that his own theology generated rather than snuffed out gentleness and humility. As Bavinck said: "For Calvin the passive virtues of submission, humility, patience, self-denial, cross-bearing stand in the foreground. Like St. Augustine, Calvin is mortally afraid of pride, whereby man exalts himself above God. His strong insistence upon the inability of man and the bondage of the will is not for the purpose of plunging man into despair, but in order to raise him from his lethargy and to awaken in him the longing for what he lacks, to make him renounce all self-glorying and self-reliance and put all his confidence in God alone" (Herman Bavinck, *Calvin and Common Grace*, trans. Geerhardus Vos [New York: Westminster, 1996], 23).

extreme unworthiness and misery, and the infinite need we have of the divine pity, forbearance and forgiveness."[16] There is one place only in all four Gospels where Jesus tells us about his heart. In the one place where he opens to us who he is at his radiating core, Jesus says he is "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). When we come to speak of gentleness in the Christian life, we are talking about embodying *who Jesus is*. To be Christlike is to be, if nothing else, gentle. Edwards himself feels the weight of what Spurgeon would later observe when he says of Jesus's words in Matthew 11:

> Meekness is a great part of the Christian spirit. Christ in that great call and invitation which we have in the close of the eleventh chapter of Matthew, where he calls all that labor and are heavy laden to come unto him, particularly mentions this as that in which he calls upon them who come to him to imitate him. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."[17]

We turn now to consider what gentleness looks like in the Christian life in light of other Christian obligations that seem at odds with it.

Gentleness and War

Reflecting on what it means to be gentle introduces a tension for those who read their Bibles carefully. For all over the New Testament believers are called to do what appears to be precisely the opposite of gentleness—fight, wage war, do battle.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says that the violent take the kingdom of heaven by force (Matt. 11:12), and in Luke's Gospel he tells his disciples to count the cost, likening the demands of discipleship to the demands of war (Luke 14:25–33). Paul called Timothy a "soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3–4) and told him to "wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18) and "fight the good fight" (1 Tim. 6:12). Paul told the Ephesians they are in a battle and they need to strap on their armor (Eph. 6:10–17). How does gentleness fit with such fierce, even violent, imagery?

This is a tension not only in Scripture but in Edwards too. For all his exhortations to gentleness, he could also preach:

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[16] *WJE*, 3:424. Elsewhere Edwards makes the same point: "Christians that are but fellow worms ought at least to treat one another with as much humility and gentleness as Christ that is infinitely above them treats them" (*WJE*, 4:420).

[17] *WJE*, 8:186. "Christ when upon earth was wont to treat his disciples with wonderful tenderness and true gentleness" (*WJE*, 25:720).

> The work that a Christian is called to is the work of a soldier; 'tis a warfare. He is not called to sleep but to conflict. . . . He is called to take heaven by violence and to obtain the prize by conquest. . . . The Scripture tells us of no other way of getting to heaven but by running, and fighting, and obtaining of it as it were by conquest.[18]

Evidently Edwards did not view the Bible's calls to be gentle and to be a soldier as mutually exclusive.

Edwards wrestled with the tension head-on in *Religious Affections*. Discussing the sixth sign of authentic spiritual affections—that true godly experience results in meekness, gentleness, and lowliness of spirit—he raises the objection: "But here some may be ready to say, Is there no such thing as Christian fortitude, and boldness for Christ, being good soldiers in the Christian warfare, and coming out bold against the enemies of Christ and his people?" He responds: "There doubtless is such a thing. The whole Christian life is compared to a warfare, and fitly so. And the most eminent Christians are the best soldiers, endowed with the greatest degrees of Christian fortitude."

The problem, says Edwards, and the reason gentleness and soldier-like boldness or fortitude seem to be in tension, is how we define Christian boldness and fortitude. It is not "a brutal fierceness." Rather:

> True Christian fortitude consists in strength of mind, through grace, exerted in two things; in ruling and suppressing the *evil*, and unruly passions and affections of the mind; and in steadfastly and freely exerting, and following *good* affections and dispositions, without being hindered by sinful fear, or the opposition of enemies. . . .
>
> Though Christian fortitude appears, in withstanding and counteracting the enemies that are without us; yet it much more appears, in resisting and suppressing the enemies that are within us; because they are our worst and strongest enemies, and have greatest advantage against us. The strength of the good soldier of Jesus Christ, appears in nothing more, than in steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of his mind, amidst all the storms, injuries, strange behavior, and surprising acts and events of this evil and unreasonable world.[19]

[18] *WJE*, 22:147.

[19] *WJE*, 2:350; cf. 2:351: "If therefore we see any of the followers of Christ, in the midst of the most violent, unreasonable and wicked opposition, of God's and his own enemies, maintaining under all this temptation, the humility, quietness, and gentleness of a lamb, and the harmlessness, and love, and sweetness of a dove, we may well judge that here is a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

The Christian life is a life of war—against sin. But the sin we know best is our own. The Christian's warring is against something inside him, not outside. We might say that we war against our impulse to make war. We fight the very instinct to fight. And what such fighting looks like is generally the precise opposite of war as we think of it. For triumph over sin involves not "a brutal fierceness," says Edwards, but "holy calm" and "sweetness." Such things shake the gates of hell. Gentleness—authentic, gospel-fueled, Spirit-wrought, gentleness—is a mighty weapon wielded against the kingdom of darkness.

A major way Christians wage war is by being gentle. We do not leave gentleness behind when we take up arms against the Devil. Gentleness is itself a way we take up arms against the Devil. The film version of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* captures this when Gandalf, the wise wizard, tells Bilbo that another wizard, Saruman, "believes that it is only great power that can hold evil in check; but," Gandalf continues, "that is not what I've found. I've found it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk, that keeps the darkness at bay. Simple acts of kindness and love."[20]

Gentleness and Zeal

What then of zeal? Does not the New Testament call us to be "zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14; cf. 1 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 3:19)? And yet here too a tension arises, for gentleness and zeal seem to coexist in believers in inverse proportion.

Consider the young seminarian whose zeal for doctrinal truth outstrips his communication of that truth in love and gentleness. Or the well-meaning Christian activist whose zeal for various valid social causes is communicated in a harsh tone that undercuts her otherwise noble intentions. Or the zeal of the inexperienced preacher who exhorts his people to live a life of full surrender to Christ, yet does so without the compassion of one who knows the complexity of life in a fallen world. In all such cases, otherwise admirable zeal lacks gentleness and is consequently emptied of persuasive power. This is not the kind of zeal to which we are called.

How then do we put these things together? How can Christians appropriately be both radically zealous and beautifully gentle?

[20] This quote is from the 2012 film production of *The Hobbit*: *The Unexpected Journey*. It is not found in the book, though it gathers together various disparate remarks of Gandalf's and is true to what the wizard would say.

Edwards helps us. On the one hand, he was one of Christian history's great champions of zeal. For he knew that Christianity that is never felt, that never exercises us, is no Christianity at all. "The holy Scriptures," he said, "do everywhere place religion very much in the affections; such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal."[21] Edwards preached an entire sermon on the necessity of zeal.[22]

Spiritual zeal is laudable. It is the nonnegotiable calling of all Christians. "Be zealous" (Rev. 3:19). Jesus himself was zealous (John 2:17), as Edwards reminds us.[23]

Yet for all that Edwards said on the goodness and even necessity of zeal, he said even more about its danger. "There is nothing that belongs to Christian experience that is more liable to a corrupt mixture than zeal,"[24] he remarked. In a 1743 letter to Thomas Prince in Boston, he put it this way: "The degree of grace is by no means to be judged of by . . . the degree of zeal."[25] Again: "The devil scatters the flock of Christ, and sets 'em one against another, and that with great heat of spirit, under a notion of zeal for God."[26]

Edwards had seen in the revivals how elusive godly zeal is. For unlike those sins which manifest themselves in ugliness, misdirected zeal easily disguises itself as uprightness.[27] The same heart of pride can manifest itself in meanness in one person or in zeal in another, looking like vice in the one case and virtue in the other—yet the rotten heart being no different on the inside.

In 1954 a woman wrote to C. S. Lewis asking, "Why has sex become man's chief stumbling block?" Lewis responded:

> But has it? Or is it only the most *recognisable* of the stumbling blocks? I mean, we can mistake pride for a good conscience, and cruelty for zeal, and idleness for the peace of God, etc. But when lust is upon us, then, owing to the obvious physical symptoms, we can't pretend it is anything else. Is it perhaps only the least *disguisable* of our dangers?[28]

Sin is often disguised as zeal.

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[21] *WJE*, 2:102.
[22] "Zeal an Essential Virtue of a Christian," in *WJE*, 22:136–55.
[23] *WJE*, 2:112.
[24] *WJE*, 4:460.
[25] *WJE*, 4:556.
[26] *WJE*, 2:88.
[27] This way in which sin can disguise itself as zealous morality is a recurrent theme in Robert Jenson, *Jonathan Edwards: A Recommendation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[28] Walter Hooper, ed., *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 3, *Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2007), 510, emphasis original.

The fallen human heart, even the fallen human heart that has been redeemed, is strange. When we take up the cause for what we believe to be (and what likely *is*) right, personal moral zeal easily, quietly, hardens the heart. Love evaporates. We do not self-consciously send love away. But our earnestness to see truth vindicated muffles other considerations—such as *how* such earnestness is communicated. Harsh assertions, even assertions of truth, are self-contradictory and counterproductive. In a sense, truth communicated in self-righteous zeal is untrue.

To put it another way: we quickly confuse our passion for the truth and our passion to be seen as right. Though the two often look identical on the outside, one cares about God's honor, the other about mine. How easy it is to act on that sense of truth violation we perceive in others when it wells up within us, yet the intense emotion of that moment may simply be a desire that we be proved right. It is alarmingly natural to pass off cantankerous or scoffing speech as concern for truth when really it is just a form of self-vindication. A healthy self-suspicion ought to accompany all moral zeal. And when gentleness is absent, that is a sign that our zeal is not of the Spirit but of the flesh. David Brainerd, whose diary Edwards edited and published, understood this: "Oh, the pride, selfishness, hypocrisy, ignorance, bitterness, party zeal, and the want [lack] of love, candor, meekness, and gentleness, that have attended my attempts to promote religion, and virtue."[29]

In his *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards brings together both the necessity and the danger of zeal. "Lukewarmness in religion is abominable," he says, "and zeal an excellent grace; yet above all other Christian virtues, it needs to be strictly watched and searched; for 'tis that with which corruption, and particularly pride and human passion, is exceeding apt to mix unobserved."[30] Outward passion and zeal is just as easily the Devil's influence as that of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 10:2). What is unmistakably from God is gentleness, broken-heartedness, non-showy humility. Hell can imitate zeal far better than it can imitate gentleness.[31]

In speaking of the danger of zeal more often than its necessity, Edwards echoes the rhythm of the New Testament. For while indeed believers are called to be zealous for good (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:11; 9:2; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 3:19), more often the New Testament speaks of zeal as something

[29] *WJE*, 7:206.
[30] *WJE*, 4:243.
[31] Cf. *WJE*, 4:419.

either morally neutral or downright dangerous (e.g., Rom. 10:2; 13:3; 1 Cor. 3:3; 13:4; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:6; James 3:14, 16; 4:2). Indeed, it is among the works of the flesh—and not, with gentleness, the fruit of the Spirit—that Paul lists zeal (Gal. 5:20).[32]

How then are we to exercise true Christian zeal without sacrificing gentleness? How do Christians keep in step with the Spirit such that they obey both Titus 2:14 (be zealous) and Galatians 5:22 (be gentle) at the same time?

Edwards answers this in *Religious Affections*. His answer, in a word, goes back to the third chapter of this book: love. "As some are much mistaken concerning the nature of true *boldness* for Christ, so they are concerning Christian *zeal*. 'Tis indeed a flame, but a sweet one." How so? Edwards explains:

> For the flame of which it is the heat, is no other than that of divine love, or Christian charity; which is the sweetest and most benevolent thing that is, or can be, in the heart of man or angel. Zeal is the fervor of this flame, as it ardently and vigorously goes out towards the good that is its object, in desires of it, and pursuit after it: and so consequentially, in opposition to the evil that is contrary to it, and impedes it. There is indeed opposition, and vigorous opposition, that is a part of it, or rather is an attendant of it; but it is against *things*, and not *persons*. Bitterness against the *persons* of men is no part of it, but is very contrary to it; insomuch that so much the warmer true zeal is, and the higher it is raised, so much the further are persons from such bitterness, and so much fuller of love.[33]

And so Edwards concludes by bringing together both zeal *and* gentleness: "Therefore there is nothing in a true Christian zeal, that is contrary to that spirit of meekness, gentleness and love, that spirit of a little child, a lamb and dove."[34] On the contrary, Edwards goes on to say, true zeal fuels, rather than competes with, gentleness. Even in his sermon "Zeal an Essential Virtue of a Christian," Edwards defines zeal, intriguingly, in

[32] Most English translations have not "zeal" but "jealousy," but it is the Greek word *zēlos*, from which we get our English word *zeal*, and which in many other New Testament texts is translated "zeal."
[33] *WJE*, 2:352–53. On gentleness as subsumed within love, see also the first sermon in *Charity and Its Fruits*: "Love will dispose men to meekness and gentleness in their carriage towards their neighbors, and not to treat them with passion or violence, but with moderation and calmness. Love checks and restrains a bitter spirit. For love has no bitterness in it. It is altogether a sweet disposition and affection of the soul" (*WJE*, 8:136). See also *WJE*, 25:527.
[34] *WJE*, 2:353.

terms of love. The "affection that is principal in this virtue is love. Zeal is an inward heat or fervency of spirit, and love is the flame whence that heat comes."[35]

For many Christians today, zealous holiness is most immediately associated with outward fervency, vehemence, ardor, passion. A more truly Edwardsian vision of zealous holiness would instead be associated with the words "sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm"—as the following bit from his *Personal Narrative* testifies:

> Holiness, as I then wrote down some of my contemplations on it, appeared to me to be of a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature, which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness and ravishment to the soul. In other words . . . it made the soul like a field or garden of God, with all manner of pleasant flowers; all pleasant, delightful, and undisturbed; enjoying a sweet calm. . . .
>
> The soul of a true Christian, as I then wrote my meditations, appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the years; low and humble on the ground, opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory, rejoicing as it were in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrance; standing peacefully and lovingly, in the midst of other flowers round about; all in like manner opening their bosoms, to drink in the light of the sun.[36]

Gentleness and Manliness

Finally, some—I have in mind here my brothers—resist gentleness because they associate it with being effeminate. Strength and gentleness, courage and meekness, are viewed as mutually exclusive. As we picture what it means to man up and be a leader in the home and in the church, gentleness is not, for many of us, part of that picture.

Once more, the way forward is not by choosing gentleness over against manliness, but by rightly defining manliness. Is the Hulk the epitome of masculinity? According to Hollywood, perhaps, but not according to Jesus Christ. After all, if anyone was ever a man, a true man, he was. And yet while he could drive the money changers from the temple, he also delighted to gather up into his arms the little children whom his disciples tried to send away (Matt. 19:13–15). He dealt gently with outsiders. He wept

[35] *WJE*, 22:141.
[36] *WJE*, 16:796.

over the death of a friend (John 11:35). He welcomed healthy, manly physical affection with his dear disciples. The apostle John, for example, was (to translate the text literally) "reclining . . . at Jesus's bosom" (John 13:23—the very relationship said to exist between Jesus and the Father earlier in John, at 1:18).

The supreme display of Jesus's manhood, however, was in his sacrificial laying down of his life on behalf of his bride, the church. When the apostle Paul defines what it means to be a husband, he can speak simultaneously of the husband's headship and the husband's sacrificial, Christ-imitating laying down of his life on behalf of his bride (Eph. 5:25–33). Such sacrifice is not unmanly: it is the supreme display of masculinity. Any immature man can be a forceful, unheeding, unloving "leader." Only a true man can be gentle.

Men who long to be the leaders God is calling them to be must see that the glory of Christ, into whose image they are being formed, is the uniting together of awesome majesty and tender gentleness. In the sermon preached at David Brainerd's funeral, Edwards speaks of what saints in heaven will look upon when they see Christ:

> The nature of this glory of Christ that they shall see, will be such as will draw and encourage them, for they will not only see infinite majesty and greatness; but infinite grace, condescension and mildness, and gentleness and sweetness, equal to his majesty . . . so that the sight of Christ's great kingly majesty will be no terror to them; but will only serve the more to heighten their pleasure and surprise.[37]

True manhood, to Jonathan Edwards, is not a hard, tough exterior with a soft, spineless interior, but just the opposite—a steely, rock-solid interior mediated through an exterior emanating with the beauty of gentleness. Manliness is not machismo. Masculinity is not inadequacy-mitigating posturing and chest-puffing. On the other hand, gentleness is not cowardice. Both non-gentle masculinity and non-manly gentleness are to be avoided. What we are not after in the Christian life is cowardice clothed as gentleness. We are after a life that is both courageous and contrite, both tough and tender, both manly and gentle. Francis Schaeffer observed that it is relatively easy to show either one or the other of these two poles—either

[37] *WJE*, 25:233.

toughness or gentleness. But only in the power of the Holy Spirit can we be both at the same time.[38]

In God himself, as Edwards reminds us, these two poles are "admirably tempered together in the revelation of the Gospel: there is a proportionable manifestation of justice and mercy, holiness and grace, majesty and gentleness."[39] Thus the same man who wrote Galatians 3:1 ("O foolish Galatians!") and the searing tone of 2 Corinthians 10–13 also told the young pastor Timothy to engage his opponents "with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:23–25). Paul said, "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men" (1 Cor. 16:13), *and* he said repeatedly to do all things with gentleness (Gal. 5:23; Eph. 4:2). How could this be? Edwards's answer is: whether he was sharply attacking or gently comforting, Paul was doing all in love. Paul was being a man.

A mature oak tree is immovable when the storms rage against it, but it is also beautiful, and provides shelter for others. This is the vision of Christian manhood painted for us by Jonathan Edwards.

Conclusion

The Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield embodied Edwards's vision of gentleness in the Christian life. Warfield's personal acquaintance F. T. McGill wrote, in a letter to a certain John Meeter:

> But if Dr Warfield was great in intellectuality, he was just as great in goodness. Over a long period of years this man stands out in my mind as the most Christ-like man that I have ever known. In spite of his brilliance of mind, there was no spirit of superciliousness, no purpose to offend the dullest pupil, no haughtiness of heart. . . . Rather there was always the spirit of humility and meekness and the spirit of kindness and gentleness toward others.[40]

This is what Edwards was after in his vision of gentleness. By the gentle life Edwards had in mind not cowardice or a lack of conviction but the calm and quiet strength of one who has been made alive to true beauty.

The turning point of Ephesians drives home Jonathan Edwards's insistence on the importance of gentleness in the Christian life. Taking a breath

[38] On this observation by Schaeffer see Dick Keyes, *Chameleon Christianity: Moving beyond Safety and Conformity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 22.
[39] *WJE*, 4:463; see also 10:275; 16:416.
[40] Cited in Fred Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 32–33.

after three exultant chapters that remind his readers of what God in Christ has done, Paul turns in Ephesians 4 to remind them what this means for their personal conduct: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all . . ." (Eph. 4:1–2).

How would you expect Paul to finish that sentence? Having exulted in the truths of the gospel for three chapters, Paul now turns his attention to his Ephesian readers; he is not so much looking at Christ in light of the Ephesians but looking at the Ephesians in light of Christ.

We might expect something like "with all sacrifice," "with all zeal," "with all boldness," "with all fortitude." Paul says, "with all humility and gentleness." That is where the first three chapters of Ephesians take us. Jonathan Edwards understood this. The lofty theological discourse of Ephesians 1–3 funnels down, above all else, into an aroma of gentleness exuded by ordinary Christians in their ordinary lives. Yet such an aroma is not ordinary. It is extraordinary, supernatural. It is where the Spirit takes us.