

DIVINE LOVE AS THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS'S DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

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Abstract: *This essay offers a fresh look at Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of atonement. Following the doctrine in its logical order (i.e. from eternity past, through redemptive history, and then into eternity future) with a representative sampling of Edwards's writings in each section, this essay aims to prove that the great body of documents touching on the doctrine of atonement in the Edwards corpus, for all of their variety, do reveal a consistent organizing principle—namely, divine love. Particular attention is given to Edwards's views on the mechanics of the atonement and the distinctive role that love plays in his thinking on that subject. For Edwards, love was not only a divine motive for the atonement, but part of the actual mechanism which made it effectual for the elect.*

Key words: *Jonathan Edwards, Reformed, atonement, satisfaction, sacrifice, penal substitution, penal example, divine love*

Jonathan Edwards never wrote a systematic treatise on the atonement. As a result, his doctrine must be discerned through careful interaction with the entire body of his extant writings. While many have made the attempt,¹ it does pose a

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¹ General treatments of Edwards's doctrine of atonement include John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (1869; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 65–104; Anton K. Jacobs, "Evangelicalism and Capitalism: A Critical Study of the Doctrine of Atonement in the History of American Religion" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1985); Michael Jinkins, *A Comparative Study in the Theology of Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and John McLeod Campbell: Atonement and the Character of God* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993); Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 142–49; Amy Plantinga-Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 119–50; Oliver Crisp, "Non-Penal Substitution," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9.4 (2007): 415–33; Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244–61; Brandon James Crawford, *Jonathan Edwards on the Atonement: Understanding the Legacy of America's Greatest Theologian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); Tyler Kerley, "The Beauty of the Cross: Retrieving Penal Substitutionary Atonement on Jonathan Edwards' Aesthetic Basis," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 7.2 (2017): 79–102; and Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, "The Atonement," in *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 121–45.

Works dealing more specifically with the question of whether Edwards leaned more toward the penal substitution or moral governmental view include Edwards Amasa Park, "The Rise of the Edwardean Theory of the Atonement: An Introductory Essay," in *The Atonement: Discourses and Treatises by Edwards, Smalley, Macey, Emmons, Griffin, Burge, and Weeks* (Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1859), xi–xxxix; Parsons Cooke, "Edwards on the Atonement," *American Theological Review* 2 (1860): 97–120; Ralph Orin Harpole, "The Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement in American Thought from Jonathan Edwards to Horace Bushnell" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1924); Ernest Cornelius Widenhouse, "The Doctrine of the Atonement in the New England Theology from Jonathan Edwards to

number of challenges. To begin with, one must decide how to organize the material. Shall the doctrine be presented in logical order (i.e. creation to consummation), or shall Edwards's manuscripts be placed in chronological order, with the doctrine being considered as it unfolds in the corpus? After this, one must make judgment calls about how Edwards's various remarks on the atonement should be weighted (e.g. should his public treatises carry more weight than his private musings?). Additionally, one must decide how to handle the apparent contradictions in some of Edwards's writings. Like most of us, Edwards did adjust his thinking over the course of his life. Should the final word be given to his later writings, or should any contradictions stand?

In this essay I will not attempt another comprehensive study of Edwards's doctrine of atonement. Instead, I will make a general sweep of the doctrine (following its logical order) for the purpose of showing that the great body of documents making up the Edwards corpus, for all of their great variety, do reveal a consistent organizing principle for his doctrine of atonement. That organizing principle is *divine love*.

I. DIVINE LOVE MANIFESTED IN ETERNITY PAST

The Christian doctrine of atonement does not begin at the cross, but in eternity past, when there was none but God. It was here that the atonement was conceived. And, according to Edwards, it was conceived as a product of divine love.

1. *Eternal love within the Godhead.* From eternity past, God has been defined by love. Before creation, it was a love entirely *within* himself—a love of happiness and

Horace Bushnell" (Ph.D. diss., Hartford Seminary, 1931); Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 532–36; Edward Daniel, McCreary, Jr., "Representative Views of the Atonement in American Theology: A Study of Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, and Reinhold Niebuhr, Including the Major Trends in 18th, 19th, and 20th Century American Theology" (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1951); Dorus Paul Rudisill, *The Doctrine of the Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and His Successors* (New York: Poseidon, 1971); Allen C. Guelzo, "Jonathan Edwards and the New Divinity: Change and Continuity in New England Calvinism, 1758–1858," in *Pressing Toward the Mark* (ed. C. G. Dennison and R. C. Gamble; Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), 147–67; Bruce M. Stephens, "An Appeal to the Universe: The Doctrine of the Atonement in American Protestant Thought from Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park," *Enc* 60 (1999): 55–72; John H. Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (3 vols.; Powhatan, VA: Berea, 1993), 2:424–73; Oliver Crisp, "The Moral Government of God: Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Bellamy on the Atonement," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Course of New England Theology* (ed. O. D. Crisp and D. A. Sweeney; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78–90; S. Mark Hamilton, "Jonathan Edwards, Anselmic Satisfaction and God's Moral Government," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17 (2015): 46–67; S. Mark Hamilton, "For *What* does Christ Die? Jonathan Edwards on Divine Justice and Atonement" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, 16 Nov 2016), 1–9; S. Mark Hamilton, "Jonathan Edwards on the Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15 (2013): 394–415; and Daniel W. Cooley and Douglas A. Sweeney, "The Edwardseans and the Atonement," in *A New Divinity: Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates During the Long Eighteenth Century* (ed. Mark Jones and Michael A. G. Haykin; Reformed Historical Theology 49; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018). Gratitude is extended to Tyler Kerley, whose article, "The Beauty of the Cross," introduced me to several of the above-named sources.

delight. As Edwards explains in his "Discourse on the Trinity," "God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself, in perfectly beholding and infinitely loving, and rejoicing in, his own existence and perfections." This is owing to the fact that God is a unity in *Trinity*. Indeed, the very fact that the Scriptures say "God is love" is proof that there are "more persons than one in the Deity," Edwards argues, since "all love respects another."²

In further explaining the loving relations within the Trinity, Edwards writes that the Father is the Prime Being, who "with perfect clearness, fullness and strength understands himself, [and] views his own essence." The Father's self-understanding is so utterly complete, in fact, that his perfect "idea" of himself actually *replicates* himself, so that the divine essence exists concurrently as God, and the perfect idea which God has of himself. This perfect idea of himself is the second member of the Godhead. "Hereby is another person begotten," Edwards writes, "there is another infinite, eternal, almighty, and most holy and the same God, the very same divine nature. And this person is the second person of the Trinity, the only begotten and dearly beloved Son of God. He is the eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial and personal idea which God hath of himself."³ He is "begotten" by virtue of "God's having an idea of himself and standing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea."⁴

Edwards then writes, "a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sweet energy" exists "between the Father and the Son: for their love and joy is mutual, in mutually loving and delighting in each other" (cf. Prov 8:30). In this loving exchange "the Deity becomes all act; the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the Deity in act."⁵ The Holy Spirit is "God's love and delight" in its own subsistence.⁶

2. *Eternal love expressed in the covenant of redemption.* Because of God's intra-Trinitarian love, he is utterly self-sufficient. He does not need anyone or anything outside of himself to be happy. At the same time, it is this intra-Trinitarian love which explains God's desire to create. Out of his love, the Father desired to provide a bride for his Son—a spouse who could be brought into the full joy of the Trinity through her marriage to the Son.

To see this desire realized, the Father and Son contracted together in eternity past in a compact called the "Covenant of Redemption." In this covenant the Father agreed to elect a people in love to be his Son's bride, and the Son agreed to give his life in love in order to have that bride. Edwards explains it this way:

² Jonathan Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online* [hereafter *WJE Online*], vol. 21: *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith* (ed. Sang Hyun Lee; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 113–14.

³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

That was a covenant that the Father and the Son from all eternity entered into with each other. God the Father, from love to them, did from all eternity appoint Jesus Christ his Son to be their security. ... And Christ from all eternity, from his great love to them, undertook to stand for their security, and to die for them. Christ became engaged to the Father to become incarnate, to go through such great labors and extreme sufferings in these conditions; that such and such particular persons might be redeemed, might have all their sins pardoned, and might have eternal life, who were the objects of his eternal love. And God the Father did in that covenant of redemption, give such and such persons by name to Jesus Christ from his eternal love to them.⁷

By means of this covenant, the members of the Trinity express the fullness of their love for one another as well as to the Son's bride: "The infinite love of the Father to the Son is ... manifested, in that for [the Son's] sake he would forgive an infinite debt, would be reconciled with and receive into his favor and to his enjoyment those that had rebelled against him and injured his infinite majesty." The love of the Son to the Father would be seen in the Son's "infinitely abasing himself for the vindicating of [the Father's] authority and the honor of his majesty."⁸

In "Miscellanies," no. 483, which looks back on Christ's work in history, Edwards offers this interpretation: "the divine excellency of Christ and the love of the Father to him, is the life and soul of all that Christ did and suffered in the work of redemption. Indeed, men have their sins pardoned for the sake of the divine excellency of Christ, and we are accepted into God's favor and have a title to eternal life for the sake of Christ, because the Father infinitely loves him." This means that God's willingness to receive sinners is not fundamentally because he loves sinners, but because he loves his Son, who fulfilled his part in the Covenant of Redemption to secure his bride. Indeed, God's infinite love for his Son is what motivates him to love the sinner, according to Edwards.⁹

Of course, this is not to minimize God's love for sinners, which Edwards is pleased to express often, primarily in connection with the doctrine of election. In a sermon entitled, "Christians a Chosen Generation," Edwards emphasizes this point:

This electing love of God is singly of every particular person. ... God set his love from eternity upon this and that believer as particularly as if there were no others chosen but he. ... In election, believers were from all eternity given to Jesus Christ. As believers were chosen from all eternity, so Christ was from eternity chosen and appointed to be their redeemer.¹⁰

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, "The Everlasting Love of God," in *WJE Online*, vol. 19: *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738* (ed. M. X. Lesser; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 480.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "The 'Miscellanies' no. 327(a)," in *WJE Online*, vol. 13: *The 'Miscellanies,' Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500* (ed. Harry S. Stout; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 406.

⁹ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 483, *WJE Online*, 13:524. The same point is made in "Miscellanies," no. b, *WJE Online*, 13:164–65.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "Christians a Chosen Generation," in *WJE Online*, vol. 17: *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 281–82.

And in his sermon on Gal 2:20, Edwards emphasizes the Son's love for the elect: "[Christ] had a dying love to every particular believer . . . to all that have been since Christ was upon the earth amongst all Christianized nations and to all that shall be to the end of the world. [Furthermore,] Christ don't only love them after they actually believe in him and love him, but the apostle tells us in 1 John 4:19, 'we love him because he first loved us,' and the shedding of his blood is the fruit of this love." He goes on:

The love of Christ is not the less to one because there are a great many that are loved. . . . 'Tis no hindrance to the entireness and strength of Christ's love that there are such multitudes. . . . Our love is finite and may be divided, but the love of Christ is boundless. . . . [There] is no emptying of the fountain of his love because the fountain is infinite. His dying love is not divided but is as it were wholly exercised towards every particular believer.¹¹

To summarize this section, we can see that divine love is the ground of the atonement in Edwards's view. Christ's historical work finds its origin in the eternal love existing between the members of the Trinity, which found expression in eternity past in the Covenant of Redemption. In it the Father expresses his love for the Son, the Son expresses his love for the Father, and together Father and Son express their love for the Son's bride.

II. DIVINE LOVE MANIFESTED IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

The loving desire of the Father to provide a bride for his Son explains, on one level at least, the very existence of the physical universe. As Edwards states in "Miscellanies," no. 103, "This spouse of the Son of God, the bride, the Lamb's wife, the completeness of him who filleth all in all, is that for which all the universe was made. Heaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse."¹²

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 091," in *WJE Online*, vol. 43: *Sermons, Series II, 1728–1729* (ed. Jonathan Edwards Center; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), unpaginated. This sermon is currently only available in a rough format. The quotations above represent my own edition of the text.

¹² Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 103, *WJE Online*, 13:271. This quote raises the question of Edwards's view of the order of the divine decrees. Some, like Phillip Hussey, have concluded that Edwards embraced a modified supralapsarianism. See his "Jesus Christ as the 'Sum of God's Decrees': Christological Supralapsarianism in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 6.2 (2016): 107–19. However, a better case can be made that he embraced a modified infralapsarian view. The details of his position are clearly articulated in "Miscellanies," no. 704 ("Decrees"), in *WJE Online*, vol. 18: *The "Miscellanies," 501–832* (ed. Ava Chamberlain; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 314–21. Edwards argues that God *first* decreed to communicate his goodness to creatures. However, this was only in a general sense; no specific individuals were yet contemplated. God then decreed to create the world, to permit the fall, and then finally to elect some to become the bride of Christ—to receive and share in the glory of God through Christ—while others would face perdition. It is only at this final point in the decrees of God the doctrine of election becomes concrete. Douglas Sweeney describes this as a "two-stage doctrine of election." For additional support of this view, the reader should also consider the logic of Edwards's treatise, "The End for Which God Created the World," in *WJE Online*, vol 8: *Ethical Writings* (ed. Paul Ramsey; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 405–536.

1. *In creation and the fall.* The first concrete step in securing a bride for the Son was God's act of creating the universe. The result of creation was that the internal glory of the Trinity was now, for the first time, being manifested externally. And this was well-pleasing to God. Edwards writes, "the display of the divine glory is ... most excellent. 'Tis good that glory should be displayed ... 'Tis an excellent thing that that which is excellent should be expressed."¹³ God's creation was his glory *ad extra*. Tyler Kerley explains the concept well: "Just as the eternal generation of the Son and of the Spirit from the Father are the self-replications of divinity within the Trinity, so too is creation the self-replication of God's being outside of himself on a different level of being."¹⁴

Incidentally, understanding this connection in Edwards's mind between the Triune God and his universe also helps us to understand his doctrine of "continuous creation." In Edwards's conception of things, so close is the relationship between God's glory *ad intra* and his glory *ad extra* that the universe could not even exist were it not in a state of continual creation, defined by Edwards as "immediate production out of nothing, at each moment."¹⁵ John Bombaro suggests that this represents a kind of panentheism whereby God "enlarges himself" through the universe,¹⁶ and of course Edwards claimed scriptural warrant for the doctrine. As he says in "Miscellanies," no. 346, "It [is] most agreeable to the Scripture, to suppose creation to be performed new every moment. The Scripture speaks of it not only as past but as a present, remaining, continual act."¹⁷

After creating the physical universe, God then created human beings—intelligent creatures who were capable of perceiving and rejoicing in the glory of God, and from whom that multitude would be called to become the Son's bride and enter into mystical union with the Godhead through the Son. God began with two people, Adam and Eve. At the time of their creation they enjoyed a state of perfect righteousness and fellowship with God. Their hearts "possessed ... that principle of divine love."¹⁸ Indeed, Adam's whole being was set in a Godward direction. He "enjoyed noon-day light, the light of the knowledge of God, the light of his glory, and the light of his favour." His will "was subject to reason and motivated by that love to God which 'was the principle in his heart that ruled over all other principles.'"¹⁹ Adam and Eve understood their duty toward God and the consequences of rejecting him, because God "made known to [Adam] the methods of

¹³ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 699, *WJE Online*, 18:282.

¹⁴ Kerley, "The Beauty of the Cross," 89.

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *WJE Online*, vol. 3: *Original Sin* (ed. Clyde A. Hollbrook; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 400–401.

¹⁶ John Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate* (Princeton Theological Monographs Series; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), cited in Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards*, 94–95.

¹⁷ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 346, *WJE Online*, 13:418.

¹⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, *WJE Online*, 3:230.

¹⁹ These citations come from A. B. Crabtree, *Jonathan Edwards' View of Man: A Study in Eighteenth Century Calvinism* (Surrey, UK: The Religious Education Press, Ltd., 1948), 22. Crabtree cites excerpts from Edwards's sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:29, *History of the Work of Redemption* Part 1, sermon on Matthew 16:11, *Miscellanies*, *Freedom of the Will*, and *Original Sin*.

his moral government towards him ... and let him know, that obedience to him was expected as his duty" through a compact called the Covenant of Works.²⁰

Of course, Adam and Eve did not remain in their exalted state for long, but fell under the curse of sin and death. Edwards spent years trying to understand how persons infused with the principle of divine love could have succumbed to the temptations of sin. His basic answer was that Adam succumbed because, while he certainly possessed *sufficient* grace from God to enjoy a righteous standing, he lacked that *confirming* grace which was necessary to establish him irrevocably in his righteous state. In his writings Edwards implies that Adam could have asked God for this additional grace when temptation struck, and God would have granted it. But Adam failed to do so because his "rational will" had been neutralized by the serpent's deception, and thus his appetites were able to run unchecked.²¹

As a result of Adam's sin, he, his wife, and all their posterity were plunged under the curse of sin and death. Edwards explains in a sermon from Luke 13:5:

All men are guilty of Adam's first sin. Adam was our common father and representative who stood in our room: we were all in his loins. The covenant which he broke was made with us all, and for us all in him; it cannot be supposed that the covenant that God made with Adam, He made only for his single person. That is ridiculous, for at that rate there must be a particular covenant made with every particular person, in all nations and ages. We might know that we are guilty of Adam's sin because we see that the effects of it are transmitted down to all his posterity ...

But we have something that is more sure, whereunto we do well if we give heed: Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, [and] death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"; which is as much as if the Apostle had expressly said, "All men have sinned in one man." Romans 5:15, "For if through the offence of one many be dead"; in Romans 5:16, "for the judgment was by one to condemnation"; Romans 5:17, "for if by one man's offence death reigned by one"; Romans 5:18, "therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation"; and Romans 5:19, "for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Also, 1 Corinthians 15:21–22,

²⁰ Edwards, *Original Sin*, *WJE Online*, 3:238.

²¹ Jonathan Edwards, *WJE Online*, vol. 1: *Freedom of the Will* (ed. Paul Ramsey; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 413. See also "Miscellanies," no. 290. McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 352 n. 48, note that this general opinion was shared by Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 114; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:610; and Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia*, IV:1. Calvin, however, was content to let this question remain a mystery. On the question of how Adam's appetites could have inclined him to sin when he was created in righteousness, Edwards offers the novel suggestion that Adam could have possessed an "imperfection" in his nature from the time of his creation which would eventually lead him into sin unless prevented from doing so by the confirming (or efficacious) grace of God, which God was under no obligation to provide. For a more thorough discussion of this issue, including a fairly recent Reformed orthodox critique of Edwards's position, see John Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:303–22.

“For since by Adam came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead, for as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.”²²

Edwards’s most extensive treatment of this topic is found in the treatise entitled *Original Sin*. As the work begins, he explains the doctrine of imputation, writing “on account of one man’s disobedience, mankind were judicially constituted sinners; that is, subjected to death, by the sentence of God the judge,”²³ and states that “the doctrine of the corruption of nature, as derived from Adam, and also the imputation of his first sin, are both clearly taught [in Scripture]. The imputation of Adam’s one transgression, is indeed most directly and frequently asserted.”²⁴

On the question of how God could justly impute the sins of Adam to the entire race, Edwards writes that God could do so because of the natural “oneness” which exists between Adam and the rest of humanity. Using a botanical analogy, Edwards argues that humanity is to Adam what “buds and branches” are to “the stock or root of a tree.” As a result, God treats all humanity, stretched out in time though it may be, as a single organism with a single “moral state.” For Edwards, the idea that human beings could be found in “exceeding different states, as that some should be perfectly innocent and holy, but others corrupt and wicked; some needing a savior, but others needing none; some in a confirmed state of perfect happiness, but others in a state of public condemnation to perfect and eternal misery; some justly exposed to great calamities in this world, but others by their innocence raised above all suffering,” is an absurdity. Humanity, though stretched out in time and particularized into billions of individuals, is still naturally and morally one entity. This is why every human being can be “justly looked upon in the sight of God ... as fully consenting and concurring” with Adam’s sin, and thus receive the same sentence of death that Adam received.²⁵

At this point, it might be helpful to restate that Edwards did not view the fall and its consequences as an interruption in God’s plan. The fall, though unspeakably tragic, was permitted by God as part of his plan. And out of this now-fallen humanity, God would provide a bride for the Son—a bride chosen by the Father from eternity past, secured by the Son’s sacrifice in the fullness of time, and finally drawn by Spirit’s supernatural work.

2. *In the incarnation and ministry of the Son.* According to Edwards, all that was done from the beginning of the world to the incarnation of the Son was building up to the moment when the Son would come into the world to secure the redemption of his bride. Indeed, Edwards asserts that “nothing in human history had significance on its own ... Christ’s saving love was the center of all history and defined its meaning.”²⁶ Everything before Christ was building up to his arrival, every-

²² Jonathan Edwards, “True Repentance Required,” in *WJE Online*, vol. 10: *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723* (ed. Wilson H. Kimnach; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 512.

²³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, *WJE Online* 3:247–48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 405–9.

²⁶ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 488–89.

thing after Christ looks back on his work, and the days of Christ's earthly ministry were the fulcrum upon which all of history has turned.

And it wasn't just the Son's work on the cross that secured his bride's redemption. It was the totality of his earthly life. The Son's redeeming work began immediately upon his conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, and it took up the whole of his earthly existence. Yet, it was also *limited* to his earthly life. Nothing was done before the incarnation, and nothing has been done since the resurrection, to secure the redemption of the Son's bride. The price was fully paid during that brief season of his earthly life.²⁷ Edwards subsumes the Son's earthly ministry under two categories: *satisfaction* and *merit*. "The satisfaction of Christ is to free us from misery, and the merit of Christ is to purchase happiness for us."²⁸ Edwards writes that the satisfaction was paid by the Son's sufferings,²⁹ while the merit was secured by the Son's obedient life.³⁰

a. *The Son's merit delineated.* To explain the concept more fully, Edwards asserts that the righteousness by which Christ earned merit for his bride consisted, first, of his fulfilling the demands of the covenant of works, that covenant which had been breached by the fall. "That was the covenant that we had broken, and that was the covenant that must be fulfilled." To this end, Christ subjected himself completely to the demands of God's moral law, as well as to the "ceremonial laws" of the Jews and the "mediatorial laws" to which he alone was bound by virtue of his position as Mediator. He perfectly obeyed them all; not only externally, but also with the right inner disposition, despite the manifold trials and temptations he endured. Moreover, he obeyed with "infinite respect to God and the honor of his law," which was due to his infinite love for God.³¹

The Son's righteous acts also encompassed "the different parts of his life where-in they were performed," Edwards says. He was perfectly obedient in his private life, as well as his public life; in childhood, as well as in adulthood.³² Moreover, his righteousness encompassed those *virtues* which he exercised throughout his

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *WJE Online*, vol. 9: *A History of the Work of Redemption* (ed. John F. Wilson; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 294–95.

²⁸ Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, *WJE Online*, 9:304.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 312. Early in his ministerial career, Edwards suggested a modified understanding of the covenants of grace and works, arguing that they were in fact the same covenant, different only in the sense that they had different federal heads. As he writes in "Miscellanies," no. 30, "With reference to what has been before spoken of the covenant [No. 2]. Covenant is taken very variously in Scripture, sometimes for a divine promise, sometimes for a divine promise on conditions. But if we speak of the covenant God has made with man stating the condition of eternal life, God never made but one with man to wit, the covenant of works; which never yet was abrogated, but is a covenant stands in full force to all eternity without the failing of one tittle. The covenant of grace is not another covenant made with man upon the abrogation of this, but a covenant made with Christ to fulfill it. And for this end came Christ into the world, to fulfill the law, or covenant of works, for all that receive him."

³² *Ibid.*, 312–21.

life, including his “holy fear and reverence” of God, his “humility and patience, contempt of the world,” and his “meekness and love” toward men.³³

b. *The Son’s satisfaction delineated.* The Son’s work of making satisfaction began with the “uncommon humiliation and sufferings” of his infancy, which included his birth in a manger, his subjection to persecution by Herod, and all that added to his trials in youth. It included his “private life at Nazareth,” where he labored in obscurity for many years. It included the humiliations of his public life, from his poverty, to the “hatred and reproach” he experienced, to the “buffetings of Satan” he endured, to his passion, “by which principally it was that he made satisfaction to the justice of God for the sins of men.”³⁴

The entirety of the Son’s earthly life, then, from conception to resurrection, was taken up in that great work of purchasing his bride. With the conclusion of the Son’s earthly ministry, Edwards could say,

And thus was finished the greatest and most wonderful thing. Now the angels beheld the most wonderful sight that ever [was]; the main thing that had been pointed at by the ceremonial law, all typical dispensations, all sacrifices, from the beginning of the world ...

And then was finished that great work, the purchase of our redemption, that such great preparation had been made for from the beginning of the world. Then was finished all that was required in order to satisfy the threatenings of the law, all in order to satisfy divine justice, the utmost that vindictive justice demanded, [the] whole debt paid. Then finished the whole of the purchase of eternal life. And now there is no more need of anything more [to] be done towards a purchase of salvation for sinners, nor has ever anything been done since, nor ever will anything more be done, for ever and ever.³⁵

In summary, we can see that divine love was the motivating principle behind the entire course of redemptive history from creation to the cross. All was done in fulfillment of that goal laid out in the eternal Covenant of Redemption, which itself arose out of the overflow of Trinitarian love. From creation to the incarnation, eternal, divine love took concrete form. At the cross, the expression of God’s love reached its apex.

III. DIVINE LOVE MANIFESTED AT THE CROSS

The primacy given to love is a distinctive feature of Edwards’s doctrine of atonement. It was the Son’s love for the Father which drove him to make atonement for sin. It was the Father’s love for the Son which motivated him to receive those for whom the Son died. It was also their mutual love for the Son’s bride that committed them to the task. But all of this does lead to an important question:

³³ *Ibid.*, 320–21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 327.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 331.

what *theory* of atonement did Edwards embrace? In his understanding, what did the cross achieve, and how?

1. *The cross as penal substitution.* When discussing the atonement, Edwards uses the words “sacrifice” and “satisfaction” more than any others. Oftentimes, he uses the terms together, and interchangeably. In his sermon on Rev 5:12, for example, he writes, “Christ’s death did not merely satisfy for sin. Christ’s death was a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice for our sins.”³⁶ Likewise, in his sermon on Ps 110:4, he states that Christ’s atoning work was twofold: (1) “Removing God’s anger by satisfaction to God’s justice”; and (2) “Procuring the favour of God and the fruits by his merits.”³⁷ In his sermon on Gal 2:20, he declares that Christ satisfies God’s wrath and lifts the curse of the law,³⁸ and in his sermon on Heb 12:2, he connects the concepts of sacrifice and satisfaction again: “Jesus Christ has satisfied divine justice; he offered up that that fully satisfied infinite justice. Our glorious Savior descended to the earth and here made a sacrifice of himself that justice might be satisfied. In order to satisfy, it was requisite that he should bear that which justice required. Now justice requires the greatest pain and horror in the soul; this Christ underwent, etc.”³⁹ In his sermon on Eph 5:25–27, he refers specifically to God’s *vindictive* justice as the reason for Christ’s atonement. He declares that the church was “fast bound under [divine justice] and could not deliver herself,” so Christ offered himself to pay her ransom: “He gave himself to the revenging justice of God ... He gave himself up to divine wrath.” He was “wholly in body and soul to be as it were consumed by the justice and wrath of God ... to be all a sacrifice to justice and divine wrath.”⁴⁰

Edwards is also careful to stress that Christ’s satisfaction was *substitutionary* in nature. In his sermon on Heb 9:13–14 he states that Christ suffered “in the stead” of sinful men; that he “represented him that sinned.”⁴¹ And this substitution, Edwards argues, was accomplished by means of a legal exchange. Commenting on 1 Cor 5:21 he writes, “‘He was made sin,’ i.e. sin was imputed to him. And what sin was it? Why, that sin that was *in us*. So we are made ‘the righteousness of God.’ But what righteousness of God is it that we are made? Why, that which was in Christ our Mediator.”⁴² In his *Controversies* notebook, he writes that Christ “imput[ed] his sufferings to the sinner as one that in that manner stood for the sinner and was his

³⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “Sermon no. 263,” in *WJE Online*, vol. 47: *Sermons, Series II, 1731–1732* (ed. Jonathan Edwards Center; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), unpaginated.

³⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “Sermon no. 746,” in *WJE Online*, vol. 67: *Sermons, Series II, 1749* (ed. Jonathan Edwards Center; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), unpaginated.

³⁸ Edwards, “Sermon no. 091,” *WJE Online*, 43.

³⁹ Edwards, “Christ’s Sacrifice,” *WJE Online*, 10:598.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Edwards, “Sermon no. 358,” in *WJE Online*, vol. 50: *Sermons, Series II, 1735* (ed. Jonathan Edwards Center; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), unpaginated.

⁴¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Sermon no. 495,” in *WJE Online*, vol. 53: *Sermons, Series II, 1738, and Undated, 1734–1738* (ed. Jonathan Edwards Center; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), unpaginated.

⁴² Jonathan Edwards, “Scripture Note no. 318,” in *WJE Online*, vol. 15: *Notes on Scripture* (ed. Stephen J. Stein; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 296.

representative.”⁴³ In another section of his *Controversies* notebook he writes, “God’s saints in Israel supposed that the Messiah, when he came ... would make an end of their sins and wholly abolish the guilt of them by an atonement which he should make; and that the guilt of their sins, though removed from them and as it were laid upon that divine person who dwelt on the propitiatory in the temple, and was by him taken on himself, yet would not properly be abolished and made an end of till he should come.”⁴⁴ And, in “Miscellanies,” no. 846, he writes, “Indeed, how far the dignity or worthiness of Christ’s person comes into consideration in determining the propriety of his being accepted as a representative of sinners.”⁴⁵ Perhaps the clearest statement of all is found in “Miscellanies,” no. 1035: “Christ indeed suffered the full punishment of the sin that was imputed to him, or offered that to God that was fully and completely equivalent to what we owed to divine justice for our sins.” The sin for which Christ was punished was not “sin that he himself committed, but that sin that was laid upon him, or that he took upon him.”⁴⁶

For Edwards, as for so many others in the Reformed tradition, penal substitution was the necessary correlate to his federalist theology. As he explains in “Justification by Faith Alone,”

Adam was not to have the reward [of eternal life] merely on account of his being innocent; if so, [God] would have had it fixed upon him at once, as soon as ever he was created ... but he was to have the reward on account of his activeness in obedience ...

Christ is our second federal head, and is called the second Adam ... because he acted the part for us, that the first Adam should have done: when he had undertaken to stand in our stead, he was looked upon, and treated as though he were guilty with our guilt; and by his satisfying, or bearing the penalty, he did as it were free himself from this guilt. But by this, the second Adam did only bring himself into the state that the first Adam was in on the first moment of his existence, viz. a state of mere freedom from guilt; and hereby indeed was free from any obligation to suffer punishment: but this being supposed, there was need of something further, even a positive obedience, in order to his obtaining, as our second Adam, the reward of eternal life.⁴⁷

Edwards’s commitment to the doctrine of penal substitution is even evident in his evangelistic appeals. One example will suffice, this one from his sermon entitled “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” which is based on Rom 3:19:

Christ came into the world on this errand, to offer himself as an atonement, to answer for our desert of punishment. But how is it possible that you should be

⁴³ Jonathan Edwards, *WJE Online*, vol. 27: “*Controversies*” Notebook (ed. Jonathan Edwards Center; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), unpaginated.

⁴⁴ Edwards, “Justification,” *WJE Online*, 27.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 846, in *WJE Online*, vol. 20: *The “Miscellanies,” 833–1152* (ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 67.

⁴⁶ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1035, *WJE Online*, 20:375–76.

⁴⁷ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” *WJE Online*, 19:187.

willing to accept Christ, as an atonement for that guilt that you be not sensible that you have? How can you be willing to have Christ for a Savior from a desert of hell, if you be not sensible that you have a desert of hell? If you have not really deserved everlasting burnings in hell, then the very offer of an atonement for such a desert is an imposition upon you. If you have no such guilt upon you, then the very offer of a satisfaction for that guilt is an injury, but it implies that in it a charge of guilt that you are free from. . . . A man that is not convinced that he has deserved so dreadful a punishment, can't willingly submit to be charged with it; if he thinks he is willing, it is but a mere forced, feigned business; because in his heart he looks upon himself greatly injured: and therefore he can't freely accept of Christ, under that notion, of a Savior from that guilt, and from the desert of such a punishment.⁴⁸

On the question of how the punishment inflicted on the sinless Christ could satisfy the demands of God's justice against sinners, Edwards again appeals to divine love. He argues that Christ's love for the sinner has the effect of "thoroughly assuming them into union with himself." It is a love "sufficient to cause the lover to place himself in the beloved's stead for his sake in the most extreme case, and even in the case of [the] beloved's loss of his all, and his utter destruction."⁴⁹

It was effective, Edwards argues, because the Son's affection for his bride caused him to set a value upon his beloved's welfare which was equal to the value he placed on his own.⁵⁰ In "Miscellanies," no. b, Edwards draws an analogy from the human body. He explains that if a man steals with his hands, justice does not require that the hands themselves receive the punishment for the offense. So long as the man himself is punished, justice is satisfied. And so it is with Christ. Sinful men committed the offense, but the spiritual union forged by Christ's love for his people means that justice may be satisfied by his punishment, even though he did not technically commit the offense.⁵¹ The union "holds" with God, Edwards says.⁵²

In answer to the objection that it would be unseemly for a perfect being like Christ to unite himself in love to sinners, Edwards argues that it would only be problematic if Christ was unwilling to "bear their guilt himself and suffer their punishment." But by acknowledging the "infinite evil and ill desert" of their sin, and by "appearing ready to suffer the punishment deserved himself," to "receive the Father's wrath to them" himself, Christ is able to unite himself in love to sinners, becoming one with them, without becoming an accomplice in their sins.⁵³

⁴⁸ Edwards, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners," *WJE Online*, 19:362.

⁴⁹ The same point is made in his sermon entitled "The Sacrifice of Christ Acceptable." Edwards writes, "He laid down his life out of love to us; he has been pleased to unite himself to us in his heart, to love us so as to put himself in our stead in the most extreme case." See *WJE Online*, vol. 14: *Sermons and Discourses: 1723–1729* (ed. Kenneth P. Minkema; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 453.

⁵⁰ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 483, *WJE Online*, 13:524–27.

⁵¹ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. b, *WJE Online*, 13:164–65.

⁵² Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 398, *WJE Online*, 13:463–64.

⁵³ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 483, *WJE Online*, 13:524–27.

In one fascinating passage from “Miscellanies,” no. 1005, Edwards muses about Christ’s state of mind and heart on the cross. As he prepared to die, Edwards says, “Christ’s love ... brought his elect infinitely near to him, in that great act and suffering wherein he especially stood for them, and was substituted in their stead; and his love and pity fixed the idea of them in his mind, as if he had really been they, and fixed their calamity in his mind, as though it really was his.” Then he offers a commentary on his own words: “a very strong and lively love and pity towards the miserable tends to make their case our own ... it doth in our idea place us in their stead under their misery with a most lively feeling sense of that misery, as it were feeling it for them, actually suffering it in their stead by strong sympathy.”⁵⁴

Some of the wording of passages like this one might lead some to question whether Edwards’s perspective can be regarded as a truly penal substitutionary view. However, the concern would seem to be unwarranted. As J. I. Packer explains, the penal substitution theory is merely “a model setting forth the meaning of the atonement.” It is *not* a system purporting to explain all the mechanics of the atonement. As such, the theory leaves unexplored a number of the atonement’s deeper mysteries, such as how Christ could be “made sin” for the elect and precisely how the union of Christ and his elect was achieved.⁵⁵

Taking Edwards’s work on the whole, it is clear that all of the essential pieces of the penal substitutionary model are there. He affirms that humanity’s sin deserves God’s retributive justice, and that men cannot remedy this problem themselves. He affirms that Christ endured the penalty of sin in the place of the elect, accepting the just judgments of God in their stead. And, he affirms that the Son’s work is the sole basis upon which any can be reconciled to God. In light of this, I conclude that all Edwards was doing in some of these “Miscellanies” entries was seeking to probe the deeper mysteries surrounding the mechanics of Christ’s atonement. His words do not undermine the penal substitutionary model, but merely try to explain some of the details left unresolved in that model. It is for the student of Edwards to decide whether his musings have merit. What cannot be doubted, however, is Edwards’s commitment to the penal substitutionary view. It also cannot be doubted that Edwards placed divine love at the center of Christ’s substitutionary work.

2. *The cross as penal example.* As important as the doctrine of penal substitution is to Edwards’s understanding of the atonement, it does not represent his total understanding of the doctrine. As the following paragraphs demonstrate, equally important to Edwards’s theory of atonement is his belief that Christ’s death was a public vindication of God’s honor and law, which, Edwards believes, was also necessary before God could receive sinful people.

⁵⁴ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1005, *WJE Online*, 20:332.

⁵⁵ J. I. Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution,” *TynBul* 25 (1974): 24–33.

In "Miscellanies," no. 161, Edwards writes, "God gave a law, that [Adam] might have an opportunity to honor God by obeying it; and God now insists upon satisfaction, that this law may not go without its honor. And it's certain, that Christ by his obedience has done much more honor to God's law than Adam by his obedience could have done, and God is hereby satisfied."⁵⁶ It is important to notice that Edwards speaks of honoring *God* and honoring the *law* as if they were synonymous ideas. This is likely owing to the fact that Edwards saw the law as the outward expression of God's nature and position. Therefore, to honor the law is to honor God, and to honor God is to honor his law. By rendering perfect obedience to the law, Edwards maintains that the Son honored the law; which is to say that he showed proper respect to both the person and position of God—something the first Adam failed to do. As a result, God was *satisfied* with his Son's work, meaning that the Son's obedience fully answered the Father's demand that his glory and government be given the open respect that they are due.

In "Miscellanies," no. 451, Edwards continues this thought by writing, "the sacrifice of [Christ] may properly be said to be infinitely holy, as it was an expression of an infinite regard to the holiness, majesty, etc. of God."⁵⁷ And, in "Miscellanies," no. 452, he again states that Christ's death showed "infinite respect" to God, demonstrating that "he was willing to be at infinite expense, rather than the salvation of men should be any injury to the glory of God's majesty" and that "he was at infinite expense to obey God's commands to him."⁵⁸ The idea here is that God required a public vindication of his authority for the penalty of sin to be satisfied, and Christ was more than willing to give that honor to God.

In his sermon on John 10:18, Edwards emphasizes this theme again: "Christ ... showed his infinite esteem of God ... in that when he had a mind that sinners should be freed, he had rather bear such great suffering, and be so exceedingly humbled, than that their salvation should be to his dishonor."⁵⁹ Similar language appears again in a 1736 sermon from Rev 14:13, where he declares that Christ's death "was a testimony of God's abhorrence sufficient for the greatest wickedness that ever was in the world that Christ the eternal Son died for it."⁶⁰ Thus, two concepts came together for Edwards here: sin injured God's honor, meaning that God required Christ's atonement to include a public vindication of that honor in order for sins to be satisfied; and, Christ's love for the Father was so great that he *wanted* God's honor and position to be publicly vindicated.

This is a recurrent theme in Edwards's writings. Returning to his sermon on John 10:18, Edwards also declares, "Christ by his death in a transcendent manner glorified the authority of God, as it was to atone for the injury and offense done to God's authority by men's sins. Christ hereby gave his testimony that so sacred was the divine authority, that nothing less than his own blood would atone for the con-

⁵⁶ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 161, *WJE Online*, 13:311.

⁵⁷ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 451, *WJE Online*, 13:498.

⁵⁸ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 452, *WJE Online*, 13:498.

⁵⁹ Edwards, "The Free and Voluntary Suffering and Death of Christ," *WJE Online*, 19:504.

⁶⁰ Cited in Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:436.

tempt of it.”⁶¹ And in “Miscellanies,” no. 483, he writes, “it was judged meet that Christ himself should do that honor to God’s authority . . . by perfectly obeying his law, that he might do that honor to God’s authority by his obedience, the principle instance of which was his laying down his life in obedience to his Father. Christ having obeyed and given this honor and respect to God’s authority, it is given for us.”⁶² And, in “Miscellanies,” no. 1146, he writes that the *goal* of Christ’s sufferings was “his openly honoring God by such a manifestation of his love.”⁶³

3. *Bringing the concepts together.* Edwards’s doctrine of atonement, then, includes two prominent concepts: Christ as a penal substitute, and Christ as a penal example. As the two concepts are placed side by side, it becomes apparent that these ideas are not contradictory in Edwards’s mind, but complementary. Indeed, as we consider these concepts in light of Edwards’s complete theological system, we discover that the beauty, harmony, and symmetry of Edwards’s doctrine of atonement is quite striking.

As was noted earlier, Edwards maintains that Adam and all his progeny form a single organic whole, Adam being the “root and stock” of the human tree and all coming after him being the “buds and branches.” Likewise, Edwards maintains that Christ and the elect, his bride, form a single organic whole, with Christ being the “root” and the elect being the “branches.”⁶⁴ Additionally, Edwards believes that the organic unity of Adam and the race explains how God can justly impute Adam’s sins to us all. Likewise, he believes that the organic unity of Christ and the elect explains how God can accept Christ’s punishment on their behalf, and how he can count Christ’s satisfaction and merit as theirs.⁶⁵ Moreover, Edwards maintains that the first Adam’s sin involved a twofold offence: it injured God’s *person* and *position*.⁶⁶ Thus, he also maintains that Christ’s atonement necessarily involved a twofold work: he had to offer himself as a penal substitute for sinners, and he had to publicly vindicate God’s honor and law. And, in both instances, the organizing principle is divine love. Because of his love for his bride, the Son was willing to be their penal substitute; and because of his love for his Father, he wanted the Father’s honor and law to receive public vindication.

3. *Love as the element which makes the cross effectual.* Divine love motivated the Son of God to take on human flesh and go to the cross. Divine love is also what makes the cross effectual for our redemption, according to Edwards. He makes his case in his notes on Leviticus 14:12–18, which are found in his *Blank Bible*. He writes, “The sacrifice of Christ was offered up to God with the Spirit, with divine love, love to God and love to men, which sanctified the sacrifice and made it effectual.” Draw-

⁶¹ Edwards, “The Free and Voluntary Suffering and Death of Christ,” *WJE Online*, 19:503.

⁶² Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 483, *WJE Online*, 13:526.

⁶³ Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1146, *WJE Online*, 20:518.

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, *WJE Online*, 3:386.

⁶⁵ Mark Hamilton describes this teaching as the “realist-federalist amalgam” in “Jonathan Edwards on the Atonement,” 397 n. 11.

⁶⁶ Edwards’s “Miscellanies,” no. 319, *WJE Online*, 13:398, offers one example of the twofold offence of sin: “God’s infinite holiness and justice obliges him to exert his hatred and wrath against that that is infinitely odious, and an affront to an infinite majesty and authority.”

ing on an OT analogy, he continues: "Both the blood and the oil were first offered to God before they were applied to the leper. So not only is Christ's blood first presented to God before 'tis applied to the sinner, but the spirit of love that he has without measure, first flows out to God before it flows out to the sinner and be communicated to him in sanctification."⁶⁷

Connecting this quote to previous statements found in this essay, Edwards's meaning is clear. The Son's love for his Father and his bride made his atoning work effectual in the sense that it was his infinite love for his bride which forged the bond of union between them, enabling his payment to be counted as theirs. And, it was his love for the Father's person and position which caused the Son to agree to an incarnation and atonement in the first place. More than that, it was his love for the Father which rendered the Son's atoning work pleasing to God. In other words, just as God was not moved by empty ritual under the old dispensation, so too is he unmoved by anything short of a loving act in the present age. And, finally, it is the Father's love for the Son which prompts him to reconcile with those sinners for whom Christ died, for if Christ loved them enough to substitute himself for them, then the Father must love them enough to reconcile with them.

4. *Redemption applied when Christ's love is reciprocated.* It is the Father's love for his Son which explains his desire to provide a bride for his Son. It is the love of each member of the Trinity for the others which explains the Covenant of Redemption. It is Christ's love for his Father and his bride which explains the cross in all its aspects, and it is the Father's love for his Son which explains the Father's satisfaction with his Son's sacrifice. But Edwards is not through, for he also believes that it is the elect's *loving response* to God, expressed in faith, which applies the benefits of Christ's atonement to them in time.

In "Justification by Faith Alone," he makes his case in the following manner: If two persons are to be legally regarded as one, "there should be a *mutual* act of both, that each should receive the other, as actively joining themselves to one another." "God ... treats men as reasonable creatures," Edwards writes, "capable of act, and choice; and hence sees it fit that they only, that are one with Christ by their own act, should be looked upon as one in law." And again, he says, "it is something really in them, and between them, uniting them, that is the ground of the suitability of their being accounted as one by the Judge," that he might "accept the satisfaction and merits of the one, for the other, as if it were their satisfaction and merits."⁶⁸ How does this union come about? By love: "Now there is no other way of different spirits' being thus united, but by love."⁶⁹ So it was the Son's infinite love for his bride which joined them together in a manner that would allow his payment for sin to be regarded as theirs, but it is not until each member of his bride actually reciprocates his love in time that his satisfaction for sin is actually counted as theirs.

⁶⁷ Edwards, "Leviticus 14:12–18," *WJE Online*, 24:254.

⁶⁸ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," *WJE Online*, 19:158. Emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 398, *WJE Online*, 13:463.

In other words, justification is the fruit of union with Christ, which itself is made reality through the bond of mutual love.

The sinner's love for Christ, Edwards argues, finds concrete expression in the act of faith. "Faith is the soul's active uniting with Christ," he says, "or is the very act of union, on their part." Upon exercising faith believers are united to Christ, and all the benefits of the atonement are applied to them. In his sermon entitled "The Excellency of Christ," Edwards rhetorically asks, "will God reject his own Son, in whom his infinite delight is, and has been, from all eternity, and that is so united to him, that if he should reject him he would reject himself?"⁷⁰

The significance of all of this is that Edwards clearly did not understand the atonement primarily in legal terms, but in relational terms. Yes, a legal transaction does take place in his doctrine of atonement, but that transaction is a consequence of the union established between the Son and his bride by virtue of their mutual love. In other words, in Edwards's theology, the doctrines of imputation and justification are subsumed under the doctrine of union with Christ, which he frames in relational, affective terms.

IV. EVER-INCREASING LOVE THROUGH EVER-INCREASING UNITY AS THE ETERNAL DESTINY OF THE SON'S BRIDE

As Edwards ponders the eternal future of Christ's bride, he envisions a future of ever-increasing love and unity with God through her marriage to the Son. Indeed, in Edwards's understanding, this eternal future was the vision set forth in eternity past. Edwards writes,

It perhaps was thus: God created the world for his Son, that he might prepare a spouse or bride for him to bestow his love upon; so that the mutual joys between this bride and bridegroom are the end of the creation. God is really happy in loving his creatures, . . . Yea, and he is really delighted in the love of his creatures and in their glorifying him, because he loves them, not because he needs. For he could not be happy therein, were it not for his love and goodness. *Colossians 1:16*, "All things were made by him and for him," that is, for the Son.⁷¹

In Edwards's understanding, eternity future will entail the never-ending movement of Christ and his bride into ever greater levels of union with one another, approaching ever more closely to the union enjoyed by the Trinity itself: "In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. . . The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original."⁷² Throughout all eternity, "the union will become more and more strict and perfect;

⁷⁰ Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," in *WJE Online*, 19:585.

⁷¹ Edwards, "Miscellanies," no. 271, *WJE Online*, 13:374.

⁷² Jonathan Edwards, "Dissertation I: Concerning the End for which God Created the World," in *WJE Online*, vol. 8: *Ethical Writings* (ed. Paul Ramsey; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 531.

nearer and more like to that between God the Father and the Son; who are so united, that their interest is perfectly one."⁷³

V. CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted a general sweep of Edwards's doctrine of atonement, from eternity past to eternity future, for the purpose of demonstrating that the great body of documents making up the Edwards corpus reveal a consistent organizing principle; namely, divine love. In eternity past that divine love was manifested in the covenant of redemption, in which Father, Son, and Holy Spirit consented together to redeem a bride for the Son. In time this love was revealed through the incarnation and death of the Son. Love for the members of his bride motivated Christ to offer himself as their penal substitute, and even served as the mechanism by which he was able to act as such; while love for the Father motivated him to offer himself also as a penal example. The Father's love for the Son motivated him to accept those for whom his Son died. For their part, sinners come into union with the Son by reciprocating his love, expressing their love through faith. And finally, divine love will be central in eternity future as the Son and his bride draw ever closer together in the enjoyment of their mutual love, moving ever closer to experiencing the reality of that loving union that exists within the triune God himself.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 534.