CHAPTER SEVEN

EDWARDS’S INFLUENCE ON FULLER’S CONCEPTION
OF ‘JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH’

The greatest, though not the only, instruction that I have received from human writings, on these subjects, has been from President Edwards’s Discourse on Justification.\(^1\)

Andrew Fuller

A general consensus of the secondary literature on Fuller to date\(^2\) indicates that throughout his life, he altered his theological viewpoints. Perhaps most clearly in terms of assigning specific dates,\(^3\) E.F. Clipsham has articulated that these changes took place over three stages: before 1787 (earlier view),\(^4\) between 1787–1799 (intermediate view),\(^5\) and after 1806 (mature view).\(^6\) If what Clipsham has argued is in fact historically accurate, or even generally true, it is important to determine the nature of some of the factors that were influencing Fuller to change his mind during those stages. As noted in chapter 6, most commentators of Fuller identify that his so called “intermediate view” was influenced by the New England theologians. This consensus, however, does

\(^1\) “Baxterianism” (January 22, 1803), WAF, 2:715.
\(^3\) Clipsham, “1. The Development of a Doctrine,” 114, n.40.
\(^4\) The Nature and Importance of Walking by Faith (1784); Fuller’s responses to William Button, Dan Taylor, John Martin: A Defense of a Treatise Entitled, the Gospel Worthy (1787); A Defense of a Treatise Entitled The Gospel of Christ … With a Reply to Mr. Button’s Remarks and the Observations of Philanthropos (1787); Remarks on Mr. Martin’s Publication (1787).
\(^5\) The Christian Doctrine of rewards (1799); Fuller’s responses Abraham Booth: Appendix to Gospel Worthy (1801), Three Conversations on Imputation, Substitution and Particular Redemption (1806, but written 3 years earlier). Clipsham argue that “it is not surprising therefore that Abraham Booth misunderstood him, for between 1877 and 1802 for his idea underwent a change” (Clipsham, “1. The Development of a Doctrine,” 113).
\(^6\) Dialogue, Letters and Essay (1806); Expository Discourses on the Book of Genesis (1806); Strictures on Sandemaniansism (1810); Fuller’s “Recommendatory Preface” to Religion Delineated (1812).
not account for a letter dated June 18, 1785, which is located in the University of Edinburgh archive. This correspondence indicates that Erskine had sent Ryland Jr., a copy of Edwards’s sermon on Justification.7 This means Fuller probably had access to it soon afterwards,8 and preached his sermon on Justification most likely some time between the late 1780s or early 1790s.9 Although Clipsham claimed to have some evidence of validation, in the light of this discovery, he does overlook the fact that it was also during this intermediate period (perhaps even slightly before), that Fuller was carefully reading Edwards’s *Justification by Faith Alone*. In fact, it was during this period that Fuller preached his sermon, *The Christian Doctrine of Rewards* (1799),10 which contains an excerpt from Edwards’s sermon on Justification. As will be demonstrated, this does not help the types of arguments that implicate Fuller as being heavily influenced by the New England theologians from 1787 to 1799. Therefore if Fuller was influenced by Edwards’s sermon on Justification as early as 1785, then Fuller’s usage of figurative language in the doctrines of imputation and justification (that were so rigorously opposed by Abraham Booth) do not have to be seen as influential features of New England theologians, but rather from the master architect, Edwards himself. The significance of this sermon is with Fuller and is well said in his own words:

The President [Edwards’s] sermons on justification have afforded me more satisfaction on that important doctrine than any human performance which I have read.11

---

7 Erskine writes to Ryland Jr.: “Booksellers to whom the usual allowance will be given, chose to commission a number from M. Gray …” (Correspondence of John Erskine to John Ryland, June 18, 1785, Letter 16, Special Collections Division, Edinburgh University Library, University of Edinburgh). In the light of this inkling, Erskine probably sent the Edinburgh edition of Edwards’s *Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (Edinburgh: M. Gray, 1785), which includes his sermon on Justification. The close network between Erskine and Ryland Jr. served as a direct line to Fuller’s possession of Edwards’s corpus. The *Humble Attempt* also reached Fuller in a matter of days via the same route (3.1.2).

8 At the latest, by March 27, 1790, Fuller surely had access to it, since his diary records how Edwards’s sermons on Hebrew 5:12 and Psalm 72:25 were for Fuller’s spiritual edification. See, Ryland Jr, *The Work of Faith* (1st ed.), 190. The fact that Fuller mentions these two sermons means that he would have had access to Edwards’s *Practical Sermons, Never Before Published* This volume would have given him an entry into thirty-one other sermons of Edwards as well, see Appendix, n.2.

9 I am gratefully indebted to Michael Haykin for this point.

10 *Christian Doctrine of Rewards*, WAF, 1:178.

11 “Letter to Timothy Dwight on June 1, 1805,” WAF, 1:85.