

Jonathan Edwards has much to contribute to our understanding of the relation between prayer and the sovereignty of God. In a sermon on Psalm 65:2 with the theme, "That it is the character of the Most High God, that he is a God that answers prayer," Edwards spoke to this issue:

INQ. I. Why doth God require prayer in order to the bestowment of mercies?

It is not in order that God may be informed of our wants or desires. He is omniscient, and with respect to his knowledge unchangeable. God never gains any knowledge by information. He knows what we want, a thousand times more perfectly than we do ourselves, before we ask him. For though, speaking after the manner of men, God is sometimes represented as if he were moved and persuaded by the prayers of his people; yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing by our prayers; for it is no more possible that there should be any new inclination or will in God, than new knowledge. The mercy of God's beneficence is within himself only; he is self moved; and whatsoever mercy he bestows, the reason and ground of it is not to be sought in the creature, but in God's own good pleasure. It is the will of God to bestow mercy in this way, viz. in answer to prayer, when he designs beforehand to bestow mercy, yea, when he has promised it; as Ezek. xxxvi. 36, 37. "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it. Thus saith the Lord, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be antecedent to the bestowment of mercy; and he is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayer, as though he were prevailed on by prayer.-When the people of God are stirred up to prayer, it is the effect of his intention to show mercy; therefore he pours out the spirit of grace and supplication."

There is much to be learned from these words of Jonathan Edwards. We see in them that in Edwards understanding God's sovereign predetermination makes prayer possible not impossible. May we ponder and reflect much upon these words as we seek to better understand prayer and the sovereignty of God.