

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php



Reformation
& REVIVAL
JOURNAL

JONATHAN EDWARDS:
An Anniversary Celebration

A Quarterly for Church Leadership

VOLUME 12 · NUMBER 3 · SUMMER 2003

*“God Never Begrutches His People
Anything They Desire.”*

Jonathan Edwards and the Generosity of God



Glenn Kreider

Christians pray.¹ As children in Sunday School classes, we were taught that one of the keys to spiritual growth is prayer.² We learned to sing: “Read your Bible, pray every day, and you’ll grow, grow, grow.” As adults we read books on prayer, attend seminars and prayer meetings, and otherwise develop our corporate and individual prayer lives.³ Our worship services include prayer as an essential element. But why pray? The simple answer is an appeal to duty, “Do it because the Bible commands it.”⁴ Such an answer, although accurate, is not all that can be said.

In May 1738, Jonathan Edwards addressed the topic of prayer in a sermon titled, “The Terms of Prayer.” Edwards encouraged his congregation to pray with confidence and boldness because of God’s generosity.⁵ Of the numerous reasons why Christians ought to pray, Edwards appeals to God’s nature. His insights into prayer and the character of God remain timely for the Church in the twenty-first century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE SERMON

In late 1735, the town of Northampton had voted to construct a new meetinghouse, to replace the structure built in 1661.⁶ However, this building was not completed until December 1737. Patricia Tracy notes that “the temper of the times was clearly displayed in the building of a new meetinghouse

between 1736 and 1738. The need for a larger edifice had been discussed in town meeting as early as March 1733, but construction was delayed until the summer of 1736 by disagreements over cost and location."⁷

The need for a new meetinghouse escalated when, in March 1737, the back gallery of the old building collapsed on a Sunday morning while Edwards was preaching. That, miraculously, no one died or was seriously hurt seems to have been a miracle.⁸ However, even after such a providential deliverance, the congregation soon returned to quarreling over pew assignments in the new meetinghouse. As in most New England Congregational churches, seating was assigned on the basis of age and social rank.⁹ The process by which a committee of church officers made these assignments was particularly acrimonious in Northampton.¹⁰

When the building was completed and the congregation had taken occupancy, Edwards preached his famous sermon series on spiritual growth, based upon 1 Corinthians 13, later published as "Charity and Its Fruits."¹¹ The selection of this topic could hardly have been unrelated to the long process of building the new meetinghouse. Early in this series, for reasons which are not known, he deviated from the topic of love to deliver this sermon on prayer.

The format of this sermon is typical of Edwards' style of preaching.¹² He begins with an interpretation of the text of Psalm 21:4 in its context. After this short explication of the biblical text, Edwards states the doctrine of the sermon, which he then explains and defends. The third major section of the sermon, approximately thirty percent longer than the middle section, provides several uses, or applications, of the sermon and addresses the objection to the doctrine raised by unanswered prayer.

EXPOSITION OF PSALM 21:4

The biblical text for this sermon is Psalm 21:4, "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days forever and ever" (KJV).¹³ In his exposition of this text, Edwards connects this Psalm to the previous one. In Psalm 20, David

entreats God for his blessing upon the king.¹⁴ Psalm 21 seems, Edwards says, "to be a song of praise to God for answering the prayer made in the foregoing psalm."¹⁵ Thus, Edwards reads the two psalms antiphonally. In the twentieth Psalm, David petitions God and then in the twenty-first, he records God's answer to that prayer.

Although Edwards affirms Davidic authorship of both psalms, he applies a Christocentric hermeneutic to the interpretation of the regal language. When the author "speaks of the king in them, we may understand him as having respect more immediately to himself, but ultimately to Jesus Christ, 'the root and offspring of David;' which is very common in the psalms of David."¹⁶

Edwards concludes his introduction to the sermon by stressing that the words of this text are "an acknowledgement of God's great goodness, in hearing and answering the request of the king."¹⁷ Thus, the theological foundation for the doctrine which follows is that God is good and that his goodness is superlative. God hears and answers the prayers of his people because he is a good God, and when he answers, he does not merely provide the bare minimum which is requested but his gifts transcend even what his people can conceive.¹⁸ For example, the king asked God for life (Psalm 21:4) and God granted his request but "God did not only give him a very long life, but a life without end, a life infinite in its duration . . . It was impossible that his desires should stretch themselves beyond this; for there is no such thing as anything beyond that which is without bounds."¹⁹

In the early section of the sermon, Edwards has laid the biblical and theological foundation for his doctrine. That God is an infinitely generous benefactor of his people is, in Edwards' view, not only the message of the biblical text, but it is the basis for the main idea of the sermon which he then clearly articulates in the statement of doctrine.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SERMON

From his understanding of God's goodness and generosity to the psalmist, Edwards develops this doctrine: "God never

begrutches his people anything they desire, or are capable of, as being too good for 'em."²⁰ This section of the sermon divides into three parts; an explanation of the doctrine, evidence for it, and reasons why it is so.²¹

The reader of this sermon is immediately struck by the language of this doctrine. Why does Edwards choose this dialectical variant of "begrudge?"²² That this word is crucial to the argument of the sermon seems obvious as it appears more than twenty times, the first time in the doctrine.²³ That Edwards was aware of the more common and standard "begrudge" is also clear since at the end of the sermon he asks his audience, "And will you notwithstanding be grudging and strait-handed in owning or paying your debts to God, especially when you are not required to do so without a promise of being rewarded for it with eternal and unspeakable rewards?"²⁴ Then why does he overwhelmingly use the variant "begrutch" instead of the more standard "begrudge?"²⁵ M. X. Lesser observes that although the reason for Edwards' use of this "regional, if hoary, form of the verb" is unknown; "Whatever his reasons, or lack of them, the repeated word not only conjures up quills and inkpots but stubbornly forces the Doctrine."²⁶

EXPLANATION OF THE DOCTRINE

Edwards' explanation of the doctrine begins with three possible reasons why a being might withhold generosity from another.

First, either because they are unwilling that others' happiness should be in such proportion to their own; or second, because they are looked upon so little and mean that it is thought too good for 'em upon that account; or third, because they have offended, and are looked upon guilty, and resentment makes 'em esteem it too good for 'em.²⁷

In short, a human might begrudge another because of envy, contempt, or resentment. "But God doth not begrutch his people anything as too good for them on neither of these accounts."²⁸ Since God is infinite in his being and possessions, there is nothing for him to envy. Since God is gracious

and good he does not have contempt on his "mean and despicable," "poor, feeble, shortsighted creatures" who "dwell in houses of clay, and are crushed before the moth," and are "but worms of the dust."²⁹ Since God is holy and just he would have reason not only to resent them but to pour out his wrath and indignation on humans, but instead he "is willing to bestow unspeakable blessedness on them."³⁰ Thus, although humans might seem to have reason to envy, have contempt for, and even resent others, God, who would be infinitely justified to hold humans in contempt, pours out abundant good gifts to those who ask. God's overwhelming generosity flows from his benevolent character.

EVIDENCE FOR THE DOCTRINE

Having explained the text and the doctrine, Edwards now provides four arguments in support of the doctrine of God's generosity. All that God does in redemption is intended to "magnify the infinite riches of his grace."³¹ The sinfulness of humanity, rather than working against God's purpose, actually contributes to the manifestation of God's grace. Edwards concludes:

God's design in the works of redemption is to show, and to give the most bright and demonstrative evidences to angels and men, that his grace is infinite, by showing that nothing is too great for it; that 'tis not too great a thing for his grace to show mercy to those that were very mean and inferior; {that 'tis} not too great {a thing for those that were} most sinful and vile; and that no degree of happiness that is fitted to the capacities and desires of such, is too great {for his grace and mercy}.³²

Second, God has already expended great goodness on his people in procuring their salvation. He gave "his only begotten Son to die for them," and "what thing greater, or what better, could have been given than Christ?"³³ Edwards concludes, "God that han't begrutched this, does begrutch nothing in the measure of happiness itself; for we may fairly argue from the means to the end, that there will be correspondence between them."³⁴

Third, Edwards appeals to Christ's role as mediator.

If they were beheld as they are in themselves, anything would be esteemed too good for them . . . but God don't behold 'em so, but he beholds 'em as in Christ. And they don't look to God, or come to him, for blessedness in their own names, but in the name of Christ. Christ stands for 'em as representing them in his own worthiness and merits, appearing in that worthiness for them; so that they are in God's account, in some respect, as Christ.³⁵

In this way, Christ not only represents his people but, in some respect, they are identified with him, they are in Christ.³⁶ Since God the Father loves his son perfectly and "we may be sure that [God] begrutches nothing as too good for his Son," we might also be sure that those who are in the Son are recipients of God's generosity.³⁷

Edwards' fourth argument for the doctrine is an appeal to the promised exaltation of the saints. These privileges "are of the highest kind imaginable."³⁸ Because believers are united with Christ "into a union that is more after that of being one flesh," they are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ," and promised an inheritance that is "of the highest kind."³⁹ Ultimately, God has promised "the full enjoyment of God, without restraint, in the boldness and nearness of excess. . . . If the greatest good that God gives them even in himself, what can God give more than himself?"⁴⁰

Although he does not specifically mention the recent conflict in the church over construction and seating arrangements in the new meetinghouse, it seems clear that the pastor intends his audience to see the contrast between them and God. They had recently quarreled over social status and privilege. God, although infinitely above them in status, is generous, gracious, and giving. Furthermore, he desires to pour out even more blessings on his people, as much as they desire and are capable of receiving. In comparison to God's generosity, his people's stinginess and pettiness are more clearly seen to be unbecoming.

REASON FOR THE DOCTRINE

Finally, Edwards concludes the second major section of the sermon with the reason why God is generous toward his people. Quite simply, "no other reason can be given of it than that God's goodness is without bounds."⁴¹ God's generosity is not dependent on the goodness of the creatures, but solely upon his own goodness, and is freely given at his discretion. "Those that God is pleased to make the objects of his love, let them be who they will, or what they will—never so mean, never so great sinners—they are the objects of a love that is infinitely full and sufficient."⁴²

Edwards concludes this section with this summary and preliminary application: "And therefore nothing that they need, nothing that they ask of God, nothing that their desires can extend themselves to, nothing that their capacity can contain, no good that can be enjoyed by them, is so great, so excellent that God begrutches it to them."⁴³

APPLICATION OR USE

Having explained that God's abundant generosity to his children is based upon his goodness, Edwards provides two categories of applications of this truth. First, the sermon doctrine is useful for instruction. He instructs his congregation on a proper attitude toward God, the nature of prayer and grace, and on the basis of joy and hope. In the midst of this first application, he responds to the objection of unanswered prayer. Second, the sermon doctrine is useful for exhortation. Edwards uses the doctrine to exhort both unbelievers and believers.⁴⁴

USE FOR INSTRUCTION

There is nothing anyone can do to deserve God's grace. The recipient of grace is unworthy to receive it. However, God's generosity should not lead believers to "question their good estate, because it seems to them that being a child of God, and an heir of heaven, is too great a thing for them."⁴⁵ There is no ground for presumption of worthiness of God's

grace, because they are "little, despicable, and unworthy creatures;" "weak, ignorant creatures, and otherwise persons of but little consequence in the world;" "they are persons of but small abilities;" and "they have been very great sinners."⁴⁶

Having received grace, there is also no need to attempt to repay God for it. They might begin to think:

Surely, in order to my having a title to such blessings as those, I had need to be better than ever yet I have been. Certainly, it needs to be something very great indeed that shall be what shall entitle persons to such glory; and I fear I have never had that which is sufficient. I have abundance of sin and corruption in my heart, and have but very little of that which looks like any goodness. It seems to me I must have a great deal more, and do more, in order to my having a portion in such things.⁴⁷

But, Edwards explains, such an attitude demonstrates a failure to understand that God's generosity is based always only on his goodness. God's generous blessings to his people are only given because of his grace. There is nothing anyone can do to earn God's grace and nothing could ever repay or reimburse God for his grace.⁴⁸

This unmerited favor of God freely given to unworthy creatures is the heart of the gospel, according to Edwards.

'Tis true those things are too good and too great for them to deserve, but not too great for the grace of God to bestow on those that are so undeserving. Their meanness and unworthiness can be no impediment to him whose declared design it is to magnify his free grace, by doing great things for the mean and unworthy. A sufficient acquaintance with the gospel, where this design of God is revealed, would remove all such objections.⁴⁹

Rather than doubt, fear, hesitation, and uncertainty, God's grace should produce boldness and confidence in his people. They

may boldly rejoice in hope of those great, and unspeakable, and everlasting blessings; and need not doubt but that God will

grant 'em all their requests, and fulfill and satisfy their desires, even to length of days forever and ever; and that they shall have those things that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, which God hath prepared for his people. And [they] may boldly bless and magnify God's name for it, that has been so infinitely gracious to them, as being self-moved, and out of the infinite fullness of the grace of his own heart.⁵⁰

Because God's generosity is based upon his goodness and grace and not upon any desert in the recipient, Edwards encourages "God's people in their prayers to look to God for whatever blessings they need, and for as great happiness as they desire, and for all that is requisite in order to their complete and eternal felicity. For God won't begrutch them anything that they ask as being too good for them."⁵¹

Edwards does not find fault with people desiring great things from God. In fact, he notes that "godly men's desires of happiness are no less large than others. Godliness regulates men's desires of happiness, and directs them to right objects; but it don't diminish and confine them, or reduce them to straiter limits."⁵² There is here no hint that desiring good things from God is inappropriate or ungodly. Rather, Edwards seems to indicate that these desires for happiness, when properly directed, are legitimate and fitting.

Ironically, Edwards explains, God's people have even greater desires than others because "God stirs up in his people the lively exercises of God, and gives a great sense of the excellency and glory of spiritual things [and] this stirs up large desires in them. The saints never have such large and earnest desires as in such a frame."⁵³ Thus, God provides strong desires for happiness which only he can meet. God's goodness means that "'tis with more delight that God bestows great blessings than small ones."⁵⁴ Edwards concludes: "Therefore let the godly take encouragement from hence in their prayers to come boldly to the throne of grace, and to come frequently" for God is "ready at all times to hear and to grant you whatever you desire that tends to your happiness."⁵⁵

In short, God's generosity should motivate his people to

come to him boldly and confidently. Since God's goodness is boundless, there is no reason to avoid asking him for good things. He will never be annoyed with those who come to him on the terms he has established, nor will he withhold his gracious blessings from them.

AN OBJECTION

Edwards then addresses an obvious objection to God's generosity in prayer, the problem of unanswered prayers. Many have "often prayed to God, and God don't seem to hear them . . . they have prayed for outward mercies . . . they have prayed that God would lift up upon them the light of his countenance . . . they have often prayed that God give 'em the comfort of his Spirit." In short, "they have prayed often, but have received no answer."⁵⁶ The reality of unanswered prayer would seem to call into question either the goodness and generosity of God or the accuracy of Edwards' application of this doctrine to prayer.⁵⁷

Edwards divides his response to this objection into two categories. To begin, he notes that God's goodness means that he will not give his people that which is not good for them.

As to outward enjoyments, 'tis no argument against that which you have heard that they ben't bestowed. For it may be God sees that those particular things you have asked, are not best for you; and then your not having them bestowed, is no argument that God begrutches you anything as being too good for you. For God don't withhold it as good, nor as anything that would be good at all to you, but evil.⁵⁸

If God were to give some of the things we request, he would be evil, not good, for sometimes some of the things we ask of him are not good for us.

Further, that God has not answered a prayer yet does not mean that he will never answer it. God might be delaying his answer. Edwards says, "'Tis no argument that God is unwilling to bestow this mercy on you as too good for you, because he don't bestow it in your time. He may bestow it in his own time, and it may be most for his glory, and also best for

you."⁵⁹ God's timing is perfect and his people can trust him to do what is best.⁶⁰

A second reason prayers remain unanswered is that "though you have often prayed for spiritual comfort, you han't done it in sincerity. That duty which is not done in sincerity, is not done at all in the sight of God."⁶¹ Thus, a prayer which is not offered in sincerity is not a prayer at all. Although the words might sound like a prayer, "there is no such thing as prayer in the heart."⁶² When Christ promises to answer prayer,

he has not respect to a mere pretense of prayer without any real prayer. Everything that men have a mind to have, and go and seem to cry to God for in words, they don't pray for with any real prayer in the sight of God. 'Tis only a show and pretense of prayer, and that because their prayer is not the voice of the heart, but only of the mouth; and so is as it were the prayer only of the body, and not the soul.⁶³

There are a couple of reasons why a prayer might not be a "real prayer in the sight of God." It might not be "made with a humble sense of their unworthiness of what is prayed for, and a submissive sense of its being something that is in God's free disposal. If a prayer ben't made with such a frame as this, 'tis no real prayer."⁶⁴ It might be that the prayer has not been "the voice of faith. All real and true prayer is the voice of faith."⁶⁵ A prayer of faith is directed to God. "He that don't pray in faith, don't look to God in his prayer; he looks somewhere else. He directs his words to God, but at the same time looks, it may be, to himself, or to the creature, or looks to nothing at all."⁶⁶ Edwards notes that "God never promised that he would hear and answer those that don't look to him for what they need."⁶⁷

However, although God has not obligated himself to answer prayers not offered according to his terms, in his grace, he sometimes even answers such prayers. Edwards explains,

God may, and sometimes does, answer such requests made after such a manner; but he has nowhere promised that he will do [so]. God may hear such petitions, and oftentimes does, as

he hears the young ravens when they cry, out of pity to them and regard to the voice of nature, which desires its own happiness; but not that their cry is any more real prayer to him in his sight than the cry of the ravens that know nothing of him.⁶⁸

In short, although God is under no obligation to answer requests not offered in faith, he may choose to do so. He has not promised that he will but out of his compassion he often does. The God who takes pity on infant ravens oftentimes responds in grace to even selfish and misdirected cries for help from humans.

A third reason a prayer may remain unanswered is that God is withholding "spiritual comfort" until heaven.

There are two ways that God brings light out of darkness to his people. One is by making their fears and spiritual troubles in the issue a means of a great deal of light and comfort to 'em in this world; and another is by making of them a means of a great increase of joy and felicity in heaven. And if God don't bring light [out] of darkness in the former of these ways, he may do it in the latter.⁶⁹

Edwards knows from the testimony of Scripture and history, and from his own experience, that the righteous suffer. He knows that "God knows how to bring light out of this darkness, and God commonly doth it in this world. But sometimes the day don't dawn till death, and then the day dawns, and the sun rises never to set more."⁷⁰ He calls for an eschatological perspective on suffering in this life.

When they get to heaven, they see how it was for their good to be so many years in the wilderness. And though in the time of it they did not know what Christ did unto them in hiding his face from them, yet now they know. . . . And if it does prove so, that they have the more light, and comfort, and glory to all eternity by means or, on occasion, of their darkness and spiritual afflictions in this world; then all objections from hence against what has been sought are removed. For what is time to eternity? What is the spiritual trouble of the saints for a moment in com-

parison with that glorious light of the heavenly world to everlasting ages?⁷¹

Edwards concludes this section with a rousing reminder of the Christian's eschatological hope.

If God begrutches them nothing {they desire}, then we may conclude that they will have length of days {forever and ever}; that their desires shall be fully satisfied; that they shall be brought to pleasure exquisitely sweet indeed; {that they shall be brought} now far beyond all that eye has seen {and the ear heard}, far beyond all that ever was experienced on earth, {and} that it shall be divine pleasure; [that there shall be] honors and glory inconceivable; {that there shall be} riches; {that there shall be} excellent things, things precious beyond all conception.⁷²

USE FOR EXHORTATION

Finally, the sermon doctrine is useful for exhortation, both for unbelievers and believers. Three considerations are proposed to "natural men. Earnestly to seek that they may be some of God's people. This shows how happy a state they are [in]."⁷³ Edwards' first exhortation appears to appeal to human desires for satisfaction and pleasure. "If you continue wicked, hereafter you shall have none of your desires gratified. Though the godly shall have all their desires, you [shall have] nothing."⁷⁴ The godly have an expectation that their appetite for happiness will be fulfilled; the ungodly will be frustrated and unsatisfied.

Second, Edwards appeals to human desires to avoid dissatisfaction and displeasure. He reminds his audience that God will not have pity or mercy on the ungodly. "Your misery shall be as great and dreadful as your sins, nor will God abate the least mite."⁷⁵ The misery of the wicked will be as terrible as the happiness of the godly is pleasurable.

As God won't withhold the eternal happiness of heaven from the saints, because it is so exceeding excellent, but will bestow nevertheless freely; so neither will he forbear to inflict the

torments of hell on the ungodly, because they are so dreadful, so intolerable, so much beyond what they can bear.⁷⁶

Third, this doctrine, Edwards says, should be encouraging for unbelievers to "seek the privileges of God's people . . . repent and come to Christ" and thereby receive the blessings promised to Christians.⁷⁷ Edwards issues this evangelistic appeal: "However great a sinner you have been, and how vile soever you are, the way is open to your partaking of those great and unspeakable blessings, if your heart be but open. All the bleakness and difficulty is within yourself; there is none on Christ's part nor on God's part."⁷⁸

Finally, Edwards uses the doctrine to exhort the godly in his audience to do great things for God.

If it be that {you seek to be God's people}, then don't think that anything that lies in your power is too much to do for God. Shall God be so wonderfully gracious and open-hearted to you as to think nothing—no blessedness, no pleasure, however exquisite; no honor or glory, however high—too good for you, and nothing too much to be done {or} to be given? And shall Christ think nothing too much to be suffered for you to procure this blessedness, which is such as infinitely beyond all that you can do throughout eternity to requite it? And will you think {nothing}—any portion, any self-denial, any labor, any suffering—too much for God?⁷⁹

The sermon concludes with this exhortation:

Surely, those things may well humble Christians to the dust, and cover 'em with shame for their backwardness to their duty; their lothness to take pains, and be at a little difficulty or expense for God, and so apt to excuse themselves from anything that is a little cross to a carnal inclination; in their being so ready to think the things that are required are too much. And that after all the calls and counsels that are given them, they do so little for God, and are so backward to do those things that are to his glory, and so forward to sin against him.⁸⁰

Clearly, Edwards believes that grace, although free, is not cheap and that although there are no conditions or requirements to receive it from God, the reception of grace brings responsibilities to live in obedience to the God who has granted grace.

CONCLUSION

God is generous and his generosity is boundless.⁸¹ He desires to pour out goodness and blessings on his people. Whatever he does is good, so that those who come to him with requests that are evil will never receive them. Whatever he does is good, so that those who come to him with improper attitudes and motivations cannot demand anything from God. But those who come to him on his terms can know that his provision of blessing is unlimited and that he takes great pleasure in giving good gifts to his children. God has not obligated himself to answer the prayers of the ungodly nor those which do not fulfill his terms. However, God is so infinitely such a gracious God that he sometimes provides good gifts even to those who approach him inappropriately. His grace really is amazing!

Author

Dr. Glenn Kreider is associate professor of theological studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, and an adjunct professor at Taylor University. An ordained Baptist minister (SBC), he previously taught theology and church history at Criswell College. He is married, the father of two children, and presently lives in Cedar Hill, Texas. This is his first contribution to *Reformation & Revival Journal*.

Notes

1. Prayer is not distinctly Christian; other religions value and practice prayer. Further, Christians might not pray as fervently or as consistently as they ought. However, prayer is valued and practiced by those who name Jesus Christ as Lord.
2. The literature on spiritual disciplines is extensive. For Edwards and the spiritual life, see *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith. Vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). For

- a "popular" presentation of Edwards's approach, see Gerald R. McDermott, *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995; reprint, Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000).
3. The literature on prayer is also extensive. One particularly helpful treatment is Tomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
 4. Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17
 5. Jonathan Edwards, "The Terms of Prayer," in *Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, ed. M. X. Lesser. Vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 771-91. This edition is the first publication of this sermon.
 6. Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 148.
Lesser explains, "Church members had quarreled over a new meetinghouse at least since a site for it was first proposed at a town meeting early in 1733. After more than two years and "considerable debate" about need, they voted to build it, agreed to its dimensions, and appointed a committee of seven to oversee its construction, but it was another nine months and an "agitated" adjournment before they decided where to put it" (M. X. Lesser, "Preface to the Period," in Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738*, 29-30).
 7. Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 125.
 8. Of course, another interpretation of these events is possible. See Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), 170. Winslow writes: "During a crowded Sunday morning service, the gallery of the old meetinghouse fell. Strangely enough, no one was killed, although more than seventy persons were seated directly underneath. They were protected by the tops of the high pews, but to Northampton God had carefully planned it so."
 9. Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, 171, explains, "The current importance of this appraisal cannot well be exaggerated. 'Seating the meetinghouse' in any parish was equivalent to issuing a new edition of the *Social Register*, and if any mistakes were made they would probably not be rectified for another generation, possibly not while the meetinghouse stood." (*Jonathan Edwards*, 171).
 10. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 125-28. Tracy's description of this process provides a foreshadowing of the church's attitude toward their pastor, which finally culminated in his removal from the position.
 11. Jonathan Edwards, "Charity and Its Fruits," in *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey. Vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 123-397. This series of sermons includes fifteen separate sermons which are divided into twenty-one preaching units, delivered between April and October 1738. This sermon series seems to have been designed to coincide with the opening of the new meeting-

- house, to inaugurate this new building in the spring of its first year with a series on the central Christian virtue. That the process of planning, constructing, and seating this building was not marked by love should be noted.
12. On Edwards' sermonizing see Wilson H. Kimnach, "Jonathan Edwards' Art of Prophesying," in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach. Vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1-258.
 13. All biblical quotations are from the King James Version, the version of choice for Jonathan Edwards.
 14. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 771. Specifically, Edwards links the psalms together textually. Praise for the answer to the prayer of the king for the Lord to grant his desire (20:4) is found in (21:2). Fulfillment of the request for the Lord to fulfill the king's petitions (20:5) is affirmed in 21:4. Hope for joy in salvation is requested in 20:5 and expressed in 21:5. That these are only a representative list seems implied when Edwards states: "And so other things might be observed, wherein this psalm, that is a psalm of praise, answers to the foregoing which [is] a psalm of prayer" ("Terms of Prayer," 771).
 15. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 771.
 16. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 771. This section is worthy of notice for a summary of Edwards' Christocentric hermeneutical approach. He continues, "David in them speaks more immediately of himself as the head of the congregation or church of Israel; but yet 'tis plain that the Holy Ghost in David has a further meaning, and that David speaks in the person of Christ, and that 'tis he that is principally intended. Multitudes of instances might be given, if there were room for it, and those instances be confirmed by the application of 'em in the New Testament" ("Terms of Prayer," 771-72).
On Edwards' Christocentric hermeneutic, see my "Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation 4:1—8:1," Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001.
 17. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 772.
 18. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 772. See also Jonathan Edwards, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London, 1834; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998): 2:113-118; and my "Jonathan Edwards's Theology of Prayer," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (forthcoming).
 19. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 772.
 20. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 772. Edwards continues with his Christocentric hermeneutic, "Whether we understand the words of the text as applied to David as to Christ (as they are indeed applied to both, the one as a type of the other); yet either way, this doctrine may justly be drawn from the words."
 21. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 773.

22. "Begrudge" means "to give or concede reluctantly, to look upon with reluctance or disapproval, to take little pleasure in, be annoyed by, to envy the pleasure or enjoyment of" (*Webster's Tenth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "begrudge").

The Dictionary of American Regional English, ed. Frederic G. Cassidy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1985), 1:207, designates "begrutch" as a variation of "begrudge" found in Western Connecticut.

23. Lesser, "Introduction," 768.

24. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 791.

25. This is not the only sermon in which Edwards uses this term. In a sermon on John 8:34, the date and context of which is unknown, Edwards develops the doctrine: "Wicked men are servants and slaves to sin." He concludes the sermon with this stern warning: "This is the wages due to you for your hard service and cruel servitude. Satan is willing enough you should have it, he'll not begrutch it you, nor God is not so unjust as not to pay it: the harder you labor, and the more work you do for sin, the greater will be your wages. You shall have a larger cup of vengeance and a hotter place than others who have sinned but little in comparison of you. God will deal justly with everyone, will do with all according to their works, and they that do most work for sin will have a reward accordingly, and a proportionable retribution." (Jonathan Edwards, "Wicked Men's Slavery to Sin," online: <http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/sermons/slavery.html>, accessed 7 January 2003.)

26. Lesser, "Introduction," 768. Thus, consistent with the editorial policy of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, the archaic spelling "begrutch" stands in their publication of Edwards' work. See "Note to the Reader," in *Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, xi-xiii.

27. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 773.

28. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 773.

29. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 774-75. Edwards concludes, "It is indeed very wonderful, that we that are but worms are not had in contempt of God, and that he condescends to take any gracious notice of us."

30. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 775. Edwards continues: "They are looked upon as deserving no good but ill; and on that account they are unworthy, they should receive good. God might justly be unwilling ever to bestow any good at all on men on this account; for they, as they are in themselves, are exceeding guilty. They have provoked him to anger exceedingly: they have made themselves infinitely abominable in his sight: they have rebelled against him, and been enemies to him. And God's people or saints, while in this world, have still abundance of sin in their heart's principles remaining, that God's holy nature is contrary to, and we are every day offending and sinning against God. And they deserve that God should infinitely resent it. Every sin deserves God's eternal wrath and indignation. But yet God is willing to bestow unspeakable blessedness on them, and he begrutches 'em nothing."

31. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 776. See Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson. Vol. 9 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by John E. Smith (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989).

32. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 777. The curly brackets ({}) are the editor's, "repeated phrases sometimes represented by Edwards with a long dash are inserted in curly brackets" ("Note to the Reader," xiii).

33. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 778.

34. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 778.

35. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 778-79.

36. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 779. The language of identification with Christ which Edwards uses here is worthy of further reflection for its implications for the atonement as well as sanctification.

37. That Edwards is intending more than just a legal representation become clear when he explains, "Christ is not only the legal head of the saints. As their head, he is their representative, and their head of government, but also their vital head, their head of influence and communication, and that both of holiness and happiness" (Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 779).

38. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 779.

39. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 779-80.

40. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 780.

41. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 780. In support of this theological affirmation, Edwards cites 1 John 4:16, "God is love," affirming that the essence of God is love, "as it were an infinite ocean of love without shores and bottom, yea, and without a surface."

42. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 781.

43. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 781.

44. He begins with instruction to the godly but also applies the sermon to those he calls "ungodly," "natural men," "wicked," and "foolish". (Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 789-90).

45. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 781.

46. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 781.

47. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 782.

48. See John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1995). Although Piper does not reference this sermon in his work, his emphasis on the liberating force of grace seems consistent with Edwards' argument here.

49. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 782-83.

50. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 783.

51. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 783. Among other texts, Biblical support cited by Edwards includes 1 John 5:15 and Matthew 7:7-11.

52. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 784.

53. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 784.
54. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 785. Luke 11:11-13 is cited in support here.
55. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 785. A specific application to "those who are in affliction and disconsolate circumstances on the account of difficulties, either of body or mind" to make their requests known to God follows.
56. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 785.
57. Every Christian can identify with this struggle. We have all prayed fervently for things and God has not seemed to answer the prayer, at least not in the way we had asked.
58. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 785-86.
59. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 786.
60. Edwards provides numerous biblical examples of God deferring the fulfillment of his promises into the future. "[It is a] common thing for God to defer long, {for} time to seem very long to God's people: so the promise to Abraham of a son {Isaac}; [so the] promise of deliverance out of Egypt {of the children of Israel}; [so the] promise of [the] covenant {or redemption}; [so the] promise of building David's house, and making the 'righteous branch' to spring forth {in Christ}. Hence those many counsels in Scripture so earnestly pressed {upon us} to wait and hope (Psalm 27:14)" (Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 786).
61. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 786.
62. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 786.
63. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 786-87. The biblical reference for the statement of Jesus seems to be John 16:24.
64. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 787. Such a "prayer" is a challenge or demand and not a "real prayer."
65. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 787.
66. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 787.
67. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 787-88.
68. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 788.
69. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 788.
70. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 789.
71. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 789.
72. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 789. He concludes, "See that God's grace is so boundless, and the happiness of the saints in glory is designed on purpose for the glory of the boundlessness of that grace, surely there will be something very high and very excellent indeed. And the saints have no reason to doubt of this. For however great their defects are, there is nothing wanting in the heart of God; {there is} nothing wanting in the Mediator."
73. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 789.

74. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 789.
75. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 790.
76. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 790.
77. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 790.
78. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 790.
79. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 791. Edwards continues: "How little is it that God requires of you, and how little is the utmost that you can do. When you have done all you can for God, what is it to what God hath done, and stands ready to do, for you? How infinitely does it fall short? And shall God, who is infinitely great, be so free towards you, a worm; and will you be backwards and strait-handed towards him? Shall your creator be thus infinitely liberal to you, and will you, his creature, be apt to begrutch the pains and self-denial that is required of you towards him?
 Shall God think nothing too good for you that are unworthy of anything, for any to enjoy through eternity? And will you be apt to think a little pain and suffering, a little inconvenience for a few days, too much for him, who is infinitely glorious and worthy of infinitely more than you can render to him? You deserve no good at all of God, but deserve infinite evil. And shall God be so liberal in bestowing that which is so free? And will you notwithstanding be grudging and strait-handed in owning or paying your debts to God, especially when you are not required to be this without a promise of being rewarded for it with eternal and unspeakable rewards? But you never can reward God for anything he has done for you."
80. Edwards, "Terms of Prayer," 791.
81. Lesser's summary of "The Terms of Prayer" accurately captures the essence of Edwards' sermon: "Only their 'wrong notions' of God keep some people from happiness: their unworthiness and want of 'good estate' misconstrue the free and infinite grace of God; their proud spirit mistakes the 'eternal dying love' of Christ. Yet when God quickens their 'spiritual appetite' for the 'sweetness of divine objects,' their desire for happiness grows, and God readily satisfies it. Edwards exhorts the ungodly to repent and the godly to labor, not to 'begrutch the pains and self-denial' required by God. Such are the ancient terms of the covenant, he reminds them, and of prayer." (Lesser, "Preface to the Period," 32-33.)

Edwards self-confessed dependence on Locke is well-known. But what is its exact extent? This is a large question but the evidence [in certain works] is that Edwards used Locke where it suited him, rather than followed him uncritically. It is one of the oddities of the history of ideas that whereas many of Edwards' contemporaries in Britain found the seeds of deism in Locke, Edwards used him to buttress Calvinism.

PAUL HELM

It was the consistent intention of Edwards' life to write a *summa*, a complete "body of divinity" on the scale of the great medieval and Protestant scholastic masterworks. By the time of his call to Princeton, he felt ready to begin, and described the project in a letter to the Princeton trustees. The work, he said, would be "in an entire new method," and as we read his description, we see that the claim was justified.

The *summa* was never written. . . . the organizing principle would have been eschatology.

ROBERT W. JENSON