

## The Church Ethic 312: A Study of All Biblical Prayers



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Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

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### Note 42 – Philippians 1:2-11

(KJV) **Philippians 1:19** For **I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,** 20

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

(NIV) **Philippians 1:19** for **I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.** 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

In this passage, Paul refers to the Philippians praying for his “salvation” and “the supply of the Spirit.” The combination of “salvation” and the involvement of the Holy Spirit could prompt a Calvinist to suggest that here we have a prayerful expectation that God would cause someone to persevere to salvation by means of the Holy Spirit acting directly on their decision-making faculties. However, the Greek term for “salvation” is “soteria” (4991), is frequently used in the New Testament specifically in reference to eternal salvation, but it is also a general term used in reference to any kind of deliverance.

There are two possibilities here regarding the idea of the “provision of the Spirit,” both of which are established in clear biblical precedent and neither of which even hint at Calvinistic mechanisms.

First, in this context, in which Paul is clearly contemplating the possibility of his own impending death as seen in verse 20, it is likely that Paul is referring to the potential for God to deliver him from his present incarceration. In fact, Paul specifically mentions his incarceration awaiting trial by the Romans, when he speaks of his “bonds” in verse 14, saying, “And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” in light of this contextual reference to Paul’s imprisonment awaiting trial, it would seem that Paul has in mind a deliverance that is comparable to two separate events in Acts 12:5-11 and Acts 16:22-35. In those passages, Peter and more importantly Paul and Silas, were delivered from prison. In other words, Paul is drawing on precedent from his own life. In Peter’s case, he is saved by the “angel

of the Lord” in verses 7 and 11. (Passages like John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7 and close proximity interchangeability such as Acts 8:26 and 29 strongly suggest that in the New Testament era, the title “angel of the Lord” was understood to be a synonym for the Holy Spirit.) Moreover, Acts 12:12 denotes that the Christians were praying at the time when Peter was delivered by the angel. Ultimately, Paul is likely simply discussing how the Philippians were praying for his potential supernatural deliverance from imprisonment.

Second, passages like Romans 8:11, Galatians 6:8, and Revelation 11:11 make it clear that Christians who die before the Lord’s return will be resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since Paul makes reference to his potential death in verse 20, it is equally likely that the phrase “supply of the Spirit” is an anticipation of his own resurrection should his death actually occur as a result of his current imprisonment.

In fact, it is likely that Paul has both of these two possibilities in view simultaneously. After all, verse 20 does assert Paul’s confidence that Christ would be “exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” Paul may have seen two possible ways that God could be faithful to the Philippians’ prayer on his behalf. One in which God sent the Holy Spirit to deliver him from prison as God had done on other occasions. And another in which God sent the Holy Spirit to resurrect Paul along with other faithful martyrs on some future day. In either case, there is no basis for inserting Calvinistic notions into this prayer.

#### **Note 43 – 1 Thessalonians 5:21-24, 28**

**1 Thessalonians 5:21** Prove all things; **hold fast that which is good.** **22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.** **23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** **24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.** **25 Brethren, pray for us.** **26** Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. **27** I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. **28** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

While Calvinists might argue that verse 23 implies God will cause the Thessalonians to persevere in the faith so that they receive their reward when Jesus returns, there are several contextual problems with this.

First, once again the petition itself presents a problem for Calvinism. The difficulty stems from the need that motivates the petition in the first place. In Paul’s mind, there is a danger that if he does not pray the Thessalonians will not persevere. So, he petitioned God to act in order to avert the danger of the Thessalonians falling short. Therefore, such a petition itself indicates that Paul did not believe that the perseverance of the saints was irresistible or guaranteed.

Second, the immediately preceding statements in verses 21-22 put the responsibility on the Thessalonians to “hold fast to that which is good” and to “abstain from evil,” both of which are directly related to the idea of remaining holy and blameless. It wouldn’t make sense for Paul to charge the Thessalonians with the responsibility to choose these things if it was beyond their control and God was going to unilaterally and irresistibly guarantee their perseverance in blamelessness unto salvation anyway.

Third, given Paul’s insistence in verses 21-22 that the Thessalonians had it within their power to choose or not to choose to continue in righteousness, at most we would have to conclude that Paul is presenting a cooperative rather than unilateral process.

Fourth, within this context, particularly the cooperative system described in these verses, Paul’s petition for God to sanctify and preserve the Thessalonians as blameless in verse 23 simply reflects God’s ongoing application of Christ’s atonement to the Thessalonians. Teaching from Jesus himself in Matthew 18:23-35 indicates that guilt for past sins can be reinstated even after it is forgiven. In other words, God doesn’t have to continue applying Jesus’ atonement to us perpetually. There is no need to interpret this passage as a petition for God to cause the Thessalonians to act or believe correctly. Instead, Paul is telling the Thessalonians to do their part by continuing in what is good and abstaining from evil and at the same time petitioning God to do his part by continuing to accept them as righteous by means of Christ’s atonement. In other words, it is a standard intercessor prayer conditioned upon repentant effort.

Verse 24 likewise simply reflects Paul’s confidence that God would continue to apply the atonement to anyone who had accepted the invitation of the Gospel. This doesn’t imply God is causing their acceptance or perseverance. It simply reflects the inherent logical proposition that God’s invitation to accept people through Christ implies God’s ongoing willingness to make good on that promise for those who continue in that invitation. In this passage, verse 24 serves as Paul’s reassurance to encourage the Thessalonians to do what he has instructed them in verses 21-22. In short, he reminds them that God will do what he has promised, and in saying this Paul encourages the Thessalonians that their efforts to cling to what is good and avoid evil will not be in vain.

#### **Note 44 – Hebrews 13:20-22**

**Hebrews 13:15** By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. **16 But to do good and to communicate forget not:** for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. **17** Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. **18** Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. **19** But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. **20 Now the**

**God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 22 And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation:** for I have written a letter unto you in few words. 23 Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. 24 Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. 25 Grace be with you all. Amen.

Verses 20-21 deserve some discussion. The noteworthy phrase is the petition for God to “make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which wellpleasing in his sight.” Does this suggest that the author expects God to unilaterally cause his audience to do behave righteously by means of some internal, irresistible action on their decision-making faculties?

First, it is important to note that in verse 16, the author encourages the audience to exercise their choice to “do good” as a sacrifice to God. The author even acknowledges the real possibility that they might “forget” or neglect to do good. Likewise, in verse 22, the author “beseeches” his audience to heed his words of instruction here, which contextually include his admonition for them to do good works in verse 16. The fact that the author is identifying that his audience has the power to choose whether or not to do good works in verses 16 and 22 means that the author cannot believe God’s efforts in verses 20-21 are unilateral and irresistible. At the least, the author must see this as a cooperative process that can fail because men don’t do their part even while God is doing His part.

Second, in the New Testament “good works” include miraculous works. And earlier in this same book, the author has already emphasized the function of miracles to confirm God’s message and thereby to motivate people by means of external evidence to believe and persevere.

**Hebrews 2:3** How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; **which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;** 4 **God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost,** according to his own will?

We have mentioned this theme from Hebrews 2 before and also noted parallel sentiments expressed in Mark 16:16-20, Acts 4:29, 33, and 1 Corinthians 1.

**Mark 16:16** He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 **And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;** 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; **they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.** 19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right

hand of God. 20 **And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.** Amen.

**Acts 4:29** And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30 **By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus...**33 **And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus:** and great grace was upon them all.

**1 Corinthians 1:4** I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; 5 That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; 6 **Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:** 7 **So that ye come behind in no gift;** waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: 8 **Who shall also confirm you unto the end,** that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Like Hebrews 2, these passages describe how God provided confirmation of the gospel message by virtue of miraculous gifts. In particular, notice the similarity between “lacking no gift” in 1 Corinthians 1:7 and being “made complete in every good work” in Hebrews 12:21. Since this is a known pattern in the New Testament and since it is already mentioned early on in Hebrews, it is not unreasonable to infer that the prayer from the author in Hebrews 13:20-21 is simply another example of this trend. In other words, the author exhorts his audience to exercise their own choice to do good works and then petitions God to add supernatural works to them as well. What results is a complete set of works, both natural and supernatural, resulting from both human choice in one case and from divine choice in the other.

Ultimately, verses 16 and 22 make it difficult to conclude that the author viewed good works as resulting from some internal, unilateral and irresistible action by God on the decision-making faculties of his audience. And there is nothing about verses 20-21 that would demand anything other than what we’ve seen clearly elsewhere. New Testament leaders (such as the author of Hebrews) saw the value of external evidences such as miracles for confirming the gospel message and strengthening people’s motivation to persevere. There is no warrant for Calvinistic concepts of prayer in this passage.

#### **Note 45 – 1 Peter 1:2-5**

**1 Peter 1:1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. 3 **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively**

**hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,** 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 **Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through  **manifold temptations:** 7 That  **the trial of your faith,** being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,  **though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:** 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9  **Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.** 10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. 13  **Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end** for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14  **As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.**

Although verse 5 itself isn't really a petition for God to do anything, its contents occur as part of a general description of God in a worshipful blessing of God. For that reason, we will address verse 5 in this study. The relevant portion of verse 5 is the phrase, "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

The key questions pertain to how, i.e. by what mechanism, God is "keeping" these Christians and what God is keeping them from. Calvinists might argue that God is keeping these Christians from falling away or losing faith and so, subsequently, from missing out on salvation. They might also argue that an irresistible, unilateral, internal action on the decision-making faculties of these Christians is the mechanism by which God keeps them from losing faith.

However, there is a very natural alternative, and this alternative is affirmed by the context. For those who reject Calvinism in favor of Freewill theology, this verse is very similar to Romans 8.

**Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?** 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that  **neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,** 39  **Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

First, in Romans 8, Paul provides a list of potential external factors that threaten to separate us from the love of Christ, including tribulation, distress, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, angels, other authorities, and any other creature. And Paul concludes that none of these things can separate us from the love of God. Similarly, in 1 Peter 1:5, the apostle is referring to external things and how none of these external things can take us from the power of God that will save us when Christ returns. We can see this plainly in verses 6-7 when Paul refers to the “manifold temptations” and “trial of your faith.” These phrases correspond to the “tribulation, distress, and persecution” mentioned by Paul in Romans 8.

Second, the phrase “through faith” in verse 5 makes perfect sense in this context. It is similar to Romans 11:17-25 in which Paul declares that some of the Jewish people were cut off from God’s goodness due to their unbelief and that the Gentiles who had been grafted in by means of faith could also be cut off if they did not continue to have faith. Peter’s point is that for those who continue to believe, God will not allow any external threat to deprive them of their salvation and inheritance.

Third, we see further confirmation of these conclusions in 1 Peter 4:19 as well, where the apostle writes, “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” Just as chapter 1-6-7 demonstrate that it is the unbelieving world that threatens and causes the Christians to suffer, chapter 4:19 demonstrates that it is the Christian themselves who “commit their souls” to God. Again, this is cooperative picture in which the individual is credited with committing themselves to God in the midst of persecution. And we might also ask what the implication is for those who do not commit themselves to God? Chapter 4 also answers this question for us. Verses 17-18 state, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” As we can see, the context leading to verse 19 is one of judgment upon those who disobey, both in the church and outside the church. Consequently, in this context, verse 19 expresses that Christians who are in the midst of suffering and do not endure in their commitment to God are in danger of being judged as disobedient and losing their salvation along with the general unbelieving world.

There are also several other points worth noting here.

First, we might also discuss the testing that is mentioned in this passage. According to verse 7, the purpose is to test or try their faith. What is the test? It is a test to determine if their faith will endure. If it does endure, it passes the test, and they will receive their inheritance in Christ when he returns. But who is it that desires to test or prove their faith? It is God himself, even as he tested Abraham, the father of faith (Romans 4:1, 11) in Genesis 22:1, 22. It is God who wants to find out if our faith will withstand the test, whether it is the kind of faith that endures. This directly contradicts Calvinism’s irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints. If Calvinism was correct, then God Himself would guarantee our

perseverance. In that context where faith is guaranteed to endure, testing and trying faith would be unnecessary. Only in a scenario where the endurance of faith is not certain, is there any reason or room for that faith to be tested and proven.

Second, notice also that according to verse 7, it is the trial itself that is compared with the fire that refines our faith. This is not a reference to God strengthening our faith by some internal impartation of grace that acts upon our decision-making faculties. Instead, it is a depiction of God using an external event to either to strengthen our resolve or to reveal that our faith is of the sort that fails.

Third, notice that in verses 13-14 Peter places the choice and the responsibility to persevere squarely onto his audience when he says, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." Notice the specific encouragement for them to maintain their hope "to the end." According to Peter, it is in their power to choose to endure in faith and hope to the end or not. According to these verses, it is the Christians who "fashion themselves" not according to ungodly lusts but according to obedience. Verse 22 even states, "ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit." It is clear that the Spirit has a part in this process. (After all, Jesus taught that after his ascension, it would be the Holy Spirit who convicted the world by speaking through the apostles and the church, who enabled them to remember all of Jesus' teachings, and who confirmed Jesus' teaching by means of miraculous evidence. See Matthew 13:11, John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7-11, Mark 16:16-20, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Acts 4:229-33, and Hebrews 2:3-4.) But it is equally clear that Peter gave the Christians credit for "purifying themselves" by means of their obedience.

Through and through, this passage demonstrates that Peter viewed Christian perseverance in faith as cooperative, as uncertain, and not as unilateral. Christians were not merely passive in it, but could and should exercise their own power of choosing to continue in faith. There is nothing in this worshipful blessing that suggests or necessitates Calvinistic irresistible, unilateral, internal mechanisms causing men to have faith or persevere in it.

#### Note 46 – 1 Peter 5:10

**1 Peter 5:5** Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for **God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.** **6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:** **7** Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. **8** Be sober, be vigilant; because **your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:** **9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.** **10 But the God of**

**all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.**

We should take note of verse 9, which refers to the “afflictions” experienced by Christians elsewhere. These afflictions are connected directly to the phrase “after that ye have suffered a while” in verse 10. Since we now that Peter’s audience was undergoing some suffering, the context is perfectly compatible with “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you,” referring simply to God restoring them in the present age after they suffer. The phrase “make you perfect” is the Greek word “katartizo” (2675), which means “sound, complete” but here it appears to be a remedy for their current, physical suffering. In other words, the context provides good evidence that Peter isn’t petitioning for spiritual perfection or eternal salvation at all here. Peter is praying for God to restore them physically and comfort them with good things in the present. Consequently, if Peter isn’t referring to spiritual perfection in this prayer, then the details of this passage simply do not warrant the Calvinistic notion of internal, unilateral actions by God on the decision-making faculties of men to bring them to salvation.