

The Church Ethic 312: A Study of All Biblical Prayers



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Note 12 – Psalm 51:5, 10

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. 9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. 10 **Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.** 11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

There are two verses here that Calvinists might attempt to lay claim to.

First, verse 5 states, “I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Calvinists might suggest that this verse affirms the idea of original sin according to which at conception babies inherit a sinful tendency and sinful guilt from their parents even before the children themselves sin. However, a few items are worth noting. Number one, this verse does not actually comment on the idea that God exercises control over David’s will or decision-making. It merely discusses the extent of David’s experience with sin, which are by definition, actions contrary to God. Number two, if the Calvinist claims were correct, it would be no help to David to bring these facts up during his petition to God for mercy. If God was willing to condemn babies as guilty on the basis of their parent’s sin before the child his or herself actually sinned, certainly God isn’t going to be merciful to David who had himself committed adultery and murder. This leads us to our second point. Number three, the contents of verse 5 lend themselves quite easily to an appeal for mercy based upon mitigating circumstances. In other words, David is reminding God that he lives in a sinful world, surrounding by sinners from his earliest years. This type of argument is a logical appeal for mercy. It hinges on the idea that sin comes by influence and asks God to be merciful given the sheer volume of sinful influences that men must overlook in their lifetimes in order to remain completely sinless. It is a difficult task to say the least and so it makes perfect sense for David to appeal to God for mercy on this basis. Number four, it is not necessary that David intends this verse literally. There is an obvious hyperbolic relationship in which discussing the fact that one’s parents were sinners already when you were conceived illustrates the overwhelming, longstanding adversity the righteous face living in a world full of sinners and temptations.

Second, verse 10 states, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Here Calvinists might suggest that this verse expresses the process by which God puts into man a heart that desires righteousness. But it is noteworthy that nothing in the verse itself explicitly describes such a process. The verse does petition God to replace a guilty heart for a clean one and to renew righteousness in one’s spirit. But the surrounding context is filled with language for forgiveness and atonement. Verse 7 petitions, “purge me with the hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Verse 9 says, “Hide they face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.” This context makes it clear that the phrases “create in me a clean heart” and “renew a right spirit within me” likewise refer to God atoning or forgiving the heart of the sinner from the guilt of past sins. They have nothing to do with God causing a man to will or choose righteousness in the future.

Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that the phrase “take not thy holy spirit from me” in verse 11 is inherently contrary to the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints. This is yet another demonstration that the author of this Psalm is not writing from within a Calvinist point of view.

Note 21 – Psalm 141:13

The key phrases to analyze in this Psalm can be found in verses 3-5.

Psalm 141:3 Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. 4 Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties. 5 Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

In verse 3, the psalmist petitions God to “set a watch” before his mouth and to “keep the door” of his lips. Is the psalmist asking God to control what he says? Likewise, in verse 5 he asks God, “incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties?” Is the psalmist actually asking God to not to cause him to do evil? Such language raises essential questions about whether the psalmist believes that God controls human speech and human behavior in this way.

First, let’s pause for a moment to consider the implications if verse 4 was intended to express that God causes humans to choose or behave in certain ways by exerting some internal, irresistible influence on their decision-making faculties. Here, the psalmist asks God not to incline his heart toward evil to practice evil works or delight in sinful pleasures. It is noteworthy that this is not a depiction of irresistible grace compelling a man to believe and repent. Here the psalmist would be expressing his fear that God might cause him to desire evil and practice sin, so he petitions God not to do so. In short, if this Psalm is meant to reflect God exercising internal irresistible control over human will, it does so in

such a way as to make God the author of sin. Moreover, notice what this verse does to the founding pillar of Calvinism, the doctrine of total depravity or original sin. This doctrine states that because of Adam's sin, all men are conceived with not only Adam's guilt but also with a nature that will inevitably sin and which cannot incline itself toward faith and obedience. But verse 4 of Psalm 141 would depict that God, not original sin, is the cause of evil inclinations in man and, likewise depicts David as desiring not to have a heart inclined to sin.

Consequently, this Psalm does not support the Calvinist doctrines of total depravity or irresistible grace. It can only support a kind of internal, irresistible control that many Calvinists attempt to distance themselves from, one in which God is the author of sin.

Second, these factors force Calvinists into the same basic interpretation that a non-Calvinist is in with regard to verse 4. In order to avoid inferring that God causes evil inclinations in men, Calvinists must interpret verse 4 in terms of a petition for God to prevent the psalmist from having evil inclinations rather than the psalmist petitioning God not to cause evil inclinations. The difference is subtle but significant. If the psalmist is petitioning God to prevent evil inclinations, then the Calvinist can interpret God as conveying an irresistible grace. In other words, the psalmist would be interpreted as asking for grace to prevent him from doing evil instead of asking for God to relent from causing him to sin. In this sense, there is even hint of Jesus' famous "Our Father" prayer in Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4, which includes the familiar line, "lead us not into temptation." The notion, of course, is preventative. God does not cause the evil but he does sometimes bring the righteous to testing. The words of both Jesus and the psalmist are a request for God to prevent the person from coming into a situation of temptation. Once again, this is an image of God preventing the occasion for sin from occurring, not an image of God potentially causing man to choose sin.

Third, in the surrounding text we can find further confirmation that this psalm is a petition for God to prevent the psalmist from turning to evil. Verse 3 petitions God to "set a watch," which certainly suggests a positive measure to prevent something bad from occurring. And verse 4 actually ends with "let me not eat of their dainties," which again suggests that this petition is about God preventing the psalmist from doing evil rather than a fear that God might cause him to do evil.

Fourth, now that we have demonstrated that this psalm is a petition for God to prevent the psalmist from turning toward sin, we can openly ask the question of exactly how the psalmist expects God to accomplish this. Does the psalmist expect that God will prevent him from turning to sin by means of an internal control over his decision-making faculties? In order to arrive at that conclusion, the phrase "set a watch" would have to be taken as a metaphor in which the "watch" or "guard" represents God's irresistible grace acting to prevent a sinful choice. However, the phrase "set a watch" actually suggests a less internal and more external method of prevention. A "watch" here conveys the idea of another human being to keep an eye on you and protect you. In fact, we know from the context that the idea of a human guide is no mere metaphor. Verse 5 falls

immediately on the heels of verse 4, petitioning God, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me.” Here we have an overt request for God to bring a righteous person to correct the psalmist when he is about to do wrong.

Consequently, when looked at as a whole in concert with all of the details and internal logic, we can conclude from the context that Psalm 141 does not express an expectation that God exerts an irresistible influence upon the will of men. Rather, the Psalmist is praying for God to provide accountability to him, righteous men to correct him when he starts to turn down the wrong path.

Note 24 – Isaiah 63:17

There are 3 verses in Isaiah 63 that at first glance might seem supportive from a Calvinist perspective.

Isaiah 63:17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. 18 The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. 19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

First, there are some similarities here to the issues in Psalm 141. Like Psalm 141, if there is any indication here of God internally or unilaterally controlling human choices or inclinations, it is certainly not the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace compelling a man to believe and repent. Here the “thou hast made us to err from thy ways” would be identifying God as the cause of human evil desires and sin. In other words, when the Israelites depart from the Covenant of the Law of Moses, it would be because God caused them to do so. This could be construed as perhaps irresistible compulsion to sin, but certainly not irresistible grace. Likewise, notice what this verse does to the founding pillar of Calvinism, the doctrine of total depravity or original sin. This doctrine states that because of Adam’s sin, all men are conceived with not only Adam’s guilt but also with a nature that will inevitably sin and which cannot incline itself toward faith and obedience. But this passage of Isaiah would depict that God, not original sin, is the cause of evil inclinations in the Israelites.

Consequently, this passage does not support the Calvinist doctrines of total depravity or irresistible grace. It can only support a kind of internal, irresistible control that many Calvinists attempt to distance themselves from, one in which God is the author of sin.

Second, the reference to God hardening the Israelites certainly conjures up similar language with regard to Pharaoh during the Exodus (Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 14:4). However, other passages state with equal clarity that Pharaoh hardens his own heart and the Israelites harden their own hearts (Exodus 8:15, 32, 9:34, 2 Chronicles 36:13, Psalm 15:7, 95:8). Likewise, it must also be considered that the

hardening of Pharaoh against God's will was exacerbated by God speaking to Pharaoh harshly and demandingly through Moses and Aaron as well as the prophetic signs these men did. Certainly, when Israel was disobeying, God at times spoke in equally harsh and exacerbating tones to Israel through prophets like Isaiah. In both cases, God's action of speaking harshly to challenge those who were walking contrary to his will is an external factor that provokes the hard response from those he is speaking to. In neither case is God controlling men's hearts through some internal compulsion without regard for their will. Although more could be said in analysis of this issue, even a cursory examination of these passages makes it impossible to insist that the hardening of the heart is unilaterally the work of God acting in some internally compulsory way upon the decision-making processes within a man. It appears to be at the very least cooperative, not monergistic. (For a complete treatment of the issue of hardened hearts, see our full outline on Calvinism.)

Third, the hardening of the heart is connected directly with the preceding statement about erring from God's way. Consequently, the key question here regards the mechanism of exactly how God had acted to cause the Israelites to err from his way. We can assume the hardening of their hearts is in reference to the same divine work. And to be even more specific, is the mechanism that God uses to "cause" the Israelites to err internal or external? Is it God acting irresistibly and in unilateral fashion directly on their decision-making faculties? Or is Isaiah talking about something less direct, some outside event that impacts the Israelites without actually interfering with their decision-making faculties at all?

Our best answer for how to understand this passage comes from understanding how an Israelite would understand it. For this, we turn to established Old Testament precedent, which provides at least 2 related options.

Number one, Deuteronomy 13:1-4 describes how the Lord himself might from time to time allow a false prophet to arise and work a wonder in order to test the loyalty of the Israelites. Notice that like Isaiah 63, Deuteronomy denotes that the end result is to see if the Israelites will continue in God's ways. In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, Paul states that similar events will occur on a seemingly larger scale before the return of Christ at the end of the age and in verse 12, Paul describes this delusion being sent from God. It could be that Isaiah is referring to God causing the Israelites to err through such means as described in Deuteronomy 13. If so, the mechanism of causation would not be an internal action upon the will of the man directly. Nor would it be involuntary. Rather, it would be indirect and external by means of God sending a false prophet to test and see if the people will remain in his ways. If the people go astray from God's way because God brings a false prophet to test them, certainly Isaiah could ask, "Why have you caused us to err from our ways." This interpretation not only makes perfect logical sense, but it is derived from Israelite scriptural and cultural precedent and would have no Calvinistic inferences whatsoever. But there is perhaps an even better option.

Number two, we start by noticing that by this point in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah has already referred multiple times to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the subsequent exile of the Israelite kingdom of Judah. Chapter 39:6-7 declares, “Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and *that* which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Chapter 43:3-7 goes on to predict the eventual return of Judah from exile. In verses 5-6 God says, “I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.” Verses 26-27 of chapter 44 promise that Cyrus, the future king of the Medes and Persians, will restore Jerusalem and its Temple and that it will be inhabited again. The absence of inhabitants, of course, again infers the exile into Babylon mentioned in chapter 39. In chapter 49:21, Zion (see verse 14) is personified as mourning that, “I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro?” In verse 25, God comforts Zion with a promise that, “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.” These verses again speak of a sequence of Zion’s population being removed and then brought back. In chapter 54:7, God speaks of his previous wrath and promises to gather Judah back. Chapter 61:1-4 entails a proclamation of liberty to the captives including that wasted, desolated cities will be rebuilt and no longer empty of people. Chapter 62:4 promises that Zion will no longer be known as “Forsaken” and “Desolate.” (Notice the idea here that Jerusalem has become sort of a byword among the nations. This will become important momentarily.) Verses 10-11 speak of “preparing” a highway for the people and announcing “unto the ends of the earth” that salvation has come to the children of Zion.

From these passages, we know that the chapters leading up to Isaiah 63:17 directly address the historical reality of Judah’s exile into Babylon and eventual release from exile by Cyrus the future king of the Medes and Persians. But what does this have to do with Isaiah’s assertion in verse 17 that God had caused the Israelites to err from his ways?

The clue comes in verses 10-11. Here Isaiah mentions two key pieces of information. In verse 10 he denotes that the Jewish people had rebelled against God, which prompted God to act as their enemy. And in verse 11, Isaiah says that God, “remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?” Although this reference to Moses is certainly a positive image in which God is blessing the Israelites and delivering them, this verse also tells us that Isaiah is thinking about the words of Moses just a few short verses prior to verse 17. Now we can pull all of these pieces together starting with the fact that the exile of Judah did not happen in a vacuum or unexpectedly. In fact, God had predicted this exile as far back as Moses himself. We find this prediction recorded in two places in Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:36 The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. 37 And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.

Deuteronomy 28:63 And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. 64 And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.

As we can see, verse 37 predicts that God will make Israel into a byword among the nations, which seems to relate very well to Isaiah 62:4 where Jerusalem is nicknamed “Forsaken” and “Desolate.” But more importantly, verse 36 declares that God would take the Israelite king and the nation “to a nation which neither they nor their fathers have known” and “there they shalt serve other gods, wood and stone.” Verse 64 is equally explicit that the LORD would “scatter them among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other,” and “there they shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy father have known, even wood and stone.” It is interesting that the language in the first half of verse 64 is referenced in Isaiah 43:5-6, which says, “I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west. . .bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.” But the main point here is that twice God declares that His action to exile Israel would cause them to serve the gods of faraway lands where He exiled them.

With the preceding chapters of Isaiah as context, the clear reference to Moses in Isaiah 63, and the established prediction from Moses that Israel would serve foreign gods as a direct result of God exiling them, there is no doubt what Isaiah 63:17 is intended to refer to. Isaiah is referencing to the external act of exiling Israel as the mechanism and the means by which God caused them to stray from His ways and serve foreign gods. In contrast, there is no corresponding indication in either the immediate context or cultural, scriptural precedent to suggest that Isaiah has in mind an internal mechanism by which God acts directly on the human decision-making faculties to cause them to choose evil. Ultimately, both immediate and wider scriptural and historical context demonstrate that Isaiah 63:17 is not supporting Calvinist ideas, nor is Isaiah expressing a prayerful expectation that God controls the will of men. And in any case, as already mentioned above, the nature of the statement in Isaiah 63:17 refers to sinful behavior. Consequently, it does not refer to the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace and it directly contradicts the inherent concept of the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity.

Note 27 – Jeremiah 31:18-19

Jeremiah 31:18 I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself *thus*; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed *to the yoke*: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. **19** Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon *my* thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

This passages is hardly even worth noting in this study. It is questionable whether or not this is actually a prayer or just a dialog spoken by God for illustrative purposes. Still, if it is counted as a legitimate representation of a prayer, a Calvinist might find some appeal in the petition, “turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented.” Does this phrasing suggest an internal control that God exercises to irresistibly and unilaterally direct the decision-making faculties of men to cause them to repent?

The context argues simply and plainly against such a Calvinist interpretation. In the preceding chapters, God is discussing the impending destruction of Jerusalem and Judah and the deportation of its people into exile due to their sins. However, God also promises healing and restoration. (See Jeremiah 29:1-10 and 30:1-18, for example.) The “chastisement” mentioned in verse 18 of Jeremiah 31 is a reference to the disciplinary action of this destruction and exile. God was doing these things to correct Israel for its sins. But most importantly, it is the punishment comprised of the external events of war, destruction, and exile that act to “turn” the sinner and bring the sinner to repentance. Likewise, verse 19 specifies that it is “after” this punishment, this chastisement, that the sinner repents. In addition, verse 19 describes this as a process of instruction, as if the sinner learns from the experience of discipline. All of these are external means of correcting behavior. The idea of God causing repentance by exerting an internal, unilateral control over the decision-making faculties of men is completely outside the context and without warrant in this passage.

Note 30 – Mark 9:24 (and Luke 17:5-6)

In Mark 9:24, the father of a mute, demon-possessed boy asks Jesus, “help thou mine unbelief.” Although it is possible not to regard this categorically as a prayer perhaps in some technical sense, it is worth considering the implications. Is this man expressing a Calvinistic expectation that God puts faith into men so that the faith does not arise from human initiative or free will but unilateral divine endowment?

Mark 9:17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; **18** And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. **19** He

answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. 20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. 21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. 22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. 23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. 24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, **Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.** 25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. 26 And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. 27 But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. 28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? 29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

First, it is noteworthy that this man doesn't actually ask Jesus for faith. Instead, he asks Jesus to help him regarding his unbelief. Second, and more importantly, we see that the petition "help thou mine unbelief" is actually preceded by the phrase, "I believe." In other words, this man already has faith, at least in some measure, before he petitions Jesus to help him regarding unbelief. Consequently, we know that this man could not have perceived his own faith to result from God answering his request. In other words, this man clearly perceived that he already had some faith, which he did not attribute to God. Third, the actual request for faith is problematic for the Calvinist scenario because it would suggest that a faithless man can initiate the request for God to grant him faith. According to Calvinist principles, men are said to lack this ability to initiate or move themselves toward faith in such a manner.

Fourth, it is necessary to understand exactly what this man is petitioning Jesus for. In short, how exactly does he expect Jesus to help him with unbelief? What does he expect Jesus to do? To insert faith directly into his heart and mind through some internal, involuntary mechanism so that this man simply finds himself believing more strongly all of a sudden? The context suggest a far simpler mechanism. The man already has some degree of belief as evidenced by his own testimony and the fact that he has brought his son to Jesus' disciples in the first place. Jesus' disciples could not heal his son. No doubt the disciples' failure here hurt this man's faith. And contextually, any injury to this man's faith done by the disciples' failure, any doubts created by their failure, would be undone by Jesus actually healing his son. In fact, rather than verbally responding to this man's request for help regarding unbelief, Jesus responds simply by physically healing the boy. Either Jesus ignored his request, which seems unlikely. Or, Jesus perceived that healing the boy was a way to answer the man's request for help with unbelief.

The idea that seeing a miracle actually stirs up belief in men is really no surprise from a scriptural perspective. John 2:11 describes John's miracle at the wedding of Cana as the "beginning of miracles did Jesus" and that by this miracle he "manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." John 7:31 similar records how many of the people "believed on" explaining the basis for their belief by rhetorically asking, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" In John 10:32-42, Jesus declares, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father" and advises them, "though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe." John 11:37-45 recounts the Jesus resurrecting Lazarus and concludes, "many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." Likewise, John 12:10-11 summarizes that, "the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus."

Since there is a well-established relationship in which seeing a miracle triggers people to believe, the request of the man in Mark 9:24 really poses nothing problematic or even novel. The immediate context entailing Jesus' response to his request and the larger New Testament context makes it clear that his petition for help with unbelief was simply a request for Jesus to perform a miracle. There is no basis or hint at the idea that this man expected God to unilaterally place faith inside him or act upon him in some internal manner that controlled his rational or decision-making faculties.

At this point, we should also comment on a similar request in Luke 17. Here in verse 5, the apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith. Do they expect him to act on their minds in some internal way that unilaterally causes them to believe?

Luke 17:1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! 2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. 5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, **Increase our faith.** 6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. 7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

Once again we look to the way that Jesus responds as a clue to how they expected him to accomplish their request. Here Jesus immediately begins to expound the

amazing things that they will be able to do if they believe. This context suggests that Jesus was answering their request to “increase our faith,” by simple verbal encouragement and providing incentives to encourage them to believe. Here again, the relationship between verbal messages and faith is no secret in the New Testament.

Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. **14** How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and **how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?** **15** And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! **16** But **they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?** **17** **So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

Romans 10:13-17 asks, “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” and concludes with “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Notice here that Roman’s actually depicts the act of physically speaking the message of God as the trigger for belief. There must actually be a preacher. If this were talking merely about an internal act that God unilaterally performs on a man’s heart, the preacher would be unnecessary and Paul’s rhetorical question would fall flat. (After all, if faith comes by the word of God by means of God acting internally and unilaterally on a man’s mind, then the answer to “how shall they hear without a preacher?” is “simple, God speaks to them in their heart.”) But Paul is equally clear in verse 16 that not everyone who hears will believe. Some hear and believe. Others hear and do not. This is another proof that Paul is talking about actual human preaching rather than Calvinism’s internal, irresistible impartation of faith by God. If “preaching” or “hearing” referred to Calvinism’s divine impartation of faith, then all who heard such a “call” would believe and obey. Consequently, it is clear that Paul understands that declaring the truth to people can be the trigger that stirs some people to believe. Therefore, there is nothing mysterious about the disciples’ request in Luke 17. They ask Jesus to increase their faith and Jesus does so by physically speaking the truth to them and simply encouraging them with incentives about the benefits of believing. Like Mark 9, here again there is no hint or basis for inferring a Calvinist mechanism in which faith comes from God’s direct, internal action on the rational or decision-making faculties of men.

Note 31 – Luke 22:32

Luke 22:32 But **I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:** and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. **33** And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. **34** And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

On first glance, this passage might seem appealing to Calvinists because Jesus describes how he prays so that Peter's faith won't fail. Does this mean that Christians can expect God to cause people to have faith?

First, notice that this passage actually causes problems for Calvinist doctrines such as irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints. This stems from the fact that Jesus does not describe Peter as lacking faith. Nor does Jesus petition God to give Peter faith. Rather, Jesus describes Peter as already having faith, and Jesus petitions God so that the faith, which Peter already has, won't fail. Here we must ask the question, "how did this faith get into Peter?" The force of this dilemma becomes even more pressing in light of passages like Matthew 16:16-17. In Matthew, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and consequently, Jesus pronounces Peter blessed for this confession and plainly identifies the Father as the source of Peter's understanding.

For Freewill proponents, Peter's confession is readily explained by a chain of communication that originates with God's revelation to a prophet, specifically John the Baptist. The chain then continues by means of natural communication from John to one of his disciples named Andrew and from Andrew to his brother Peter. See John 1:34-42. While God is the origin of the information, Peter merits a blessing by believing God's word (which itself is notably a conditional act) and Peter's understanding is explained without any direct impartation of knowledge or faith by God into Peter himself.

But for a Calvinist, God unilaterally puts faith into men's hearts and men are entirely passive and uncooperative in this process. As such, the statements in Matthew 16 remove any wiggle room that might otherwise allow the Calvinist to suggest God had not yet imparted saving faith into Pete. Moreover, for Calvinists, God's act of imparting faith is supposed to be irresistible according to Calvinism so that no man who experiences it can decline it or fail to have faith. In addition, this irresistibility is the basis for the Calvinist insistence that the elect cannot fall away or lose their salvation. But here Jesus teaches that a man with faith can fail in his faith. This forces the Calvinists to either give up the idea that Peter's faith came directly by divine impartation or that God's impartation of faith is irresistible and automatically perseveres to salvation. But if Peter's faith is not from God, then by extension, the Calvinist loses the ability to insist that all men's faith comes from God. On the other hand, if somehow it is possible for a Calvinist to conceive of the idea that Peter's faith in Luke 22 is not divinely imparted faith, then the Calvinist still doesn't escape the dilemma. The next question becomes, "why would Jesus be concerned with bolstering Peter's faith if this wasn't the kind of faith that God values and the kind of faith that is critical to salvation?"

Ultimately, we are forced to conclude that Peter already has faith in Luke 22, that it is the kind of faith God values and is critical to salvation, and yet that faith was neither irresistible nor guaranteed to persevere. While these facts demonstrate that this passage is not depicting a Calvinistic expectation in prayer, it is still necessary to understand what exactly Jesus is petitioning God for. Is there some

basic expectation from Jesus that God will cause Peter to have faith, even if it is not irresistible or necessarily enduring faith?

Fortunately, the text presents an answer to this question. First, we should note that passages like John 8:28 and John 12:49-50 tell us plainly that Jesus neither did nor said anything except for what was given to him by the Father. John 12:49 states this plainly when Jesus says, "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak." It necessarily follows that Jesus did not give predictions without the Father's direction either. Second, in John 16:4 Jesus explains why he was giving the apostles certain information about events before they occur. He states, "these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." Specifically, Jesus is referring to persecutions that would come upon his disciples. In those difficult times, Jesus knew that his disciples would be comforted by the fact that he had predicted those things. How would that comfort them? It's no great mystery. When pressure came upon them to give up their faith, they would at that moment be face to face with predictions that provided yet another evidence that he was indeed the Messiah. In short, their faith would be strengthened by the evidence of the fulfilled prophecy. Jesus makes equally clear statements concerning the function of some of his predictions in John 8:28 and 13:19. John 13:19 is particularly explicit when Jesus predicts his impending betrayal, "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*."

In light of these considerations, it is important to consider what Jesus' says to Peter just 2 verses after his prayer in Luke 22:32. In verse 34, Jesus makes a prediction to Peter, saying, "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me." We can then fast-forward to what happens.

Luke 22:60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. **61** And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. **62** And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

In verse 60, Peter is well on his way into denying Jesus publicly. At that moment, the rooster crows and Jesus turns to look at Peter. Peter immediately remembers that Jesus' predicted these minute details down to the exact moment. And what happens? Peter's persistent, unhesitant denying Jesus is turned into regret for his behavior and the cessation from what Jesus' considered a very real, potential downward spiral. Is it unreasonable to conclude that it is the external evidence provided by Jesus' prediction that serves as the mechanism reaffirming Peter's faith in the midst of this external trial? This conclusion fits with precedent in John 16, with the proximity between Jesus' prayer in verse 32 and his prediction in verse 34, with the cause and effect chain presented in the overall episode, and it avoids the inherent contradiction this passage poses to the Calvinist idea that God causes men to believe. In the end, Luke 22:32 provides no coherent evidence for

the Calvinist expectation that God causes men to have faith or that we should petition God to input faith into people.

Note 32 – Acts 4:24-33

Acts 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: **25** Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? **26** The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. **27** For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, **28** For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. **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.** **31** And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. **32** And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. **33** **And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus:** and great grace was upon them all.

The context of this passage makes clear that the request is not for God to directly put an attitude of boldness into their hearts but to grant them healings and other supernatural wonders to make them bold.

First, this the pattern recounted in the narrative in the previous verses of chapters 3-4. It was after the man had been healed that Peter saw the response of the crowd and opened his mouth to boldly preach in the Temple (Acts 3:6-12). It was after the man had been healed that Peter speaks so boldly when questioned by the religious authorities (Acts 4:7-13).

(Certainly, Acts 3:8 notes that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke, but this would at most identify the Holy Spirit as the origin of his words in accordance with Jesus' promise in Matthew 10:19, Mark 13:11, Luke 12:11. It does not require that the Holy Spirit caused his boldness by directly placing that attitude in Peter. Second, Peter has been filled with the Holy Spirit since Acts 2 and remained filled when he healed the man in Acts 3. Consequently, it is very plausible that this verse intends to convey that Peter, now full of the Holy Spirit since Acts 2, was no longer cowering in fear like he was when he denied Jesus or when he remained in locked doors after Jesus' death.)

Second, since the moment when supernatural ability first came upon Peter (manifest at first by speaking in foreign languages to crowds from foreign lands) Peter was no longer afraid. With every supernatural work, Peter's boldness grew:

to speak before the crowds passing by, to speak in the Temple itself, and to speak in front of the religious leaders when they interrogated him. This larger pattern affirms that the prayer for boldness is not a prayer for God to put an attitude into them directly, but to give them supernatural power to prove His message, which in turn produced great confidence.

Third, verse 30 and 33 confirm that the prayer for boldness is really a prayer for supernatural miracles. Verse 29 begins with the phrase “grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.” But the verse continues with the explanation “by stretching forth thin hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done.” The word “by” is translated from the Greek word “en,” which here serves the function of designating the means by which the boldness would come. In other words, the disciples are plainly praying, “give us boldness by performing miracles.” There is nothing in this passage that suggests or necessitates an expectation that God directly puts godly attitudes into men’s hearts or minds.