

The Church Ethic 312: A Study of All Biblical Prayers



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Note 34 – Romans 1:8-12, 6:17-23, 7:24-25, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, 1:14, 17, 15:57, 2 Corinthians 2:14, 8:16-19, 9:11-15, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3, 2:6-13, 2:16-3:13, 2 Thessalonians 1:2-4, 11-12, 1 Timothy 1:12-14, 17, 2 Timothy 1:2-5, Philemon 1:3-4,

Romans 1:8 First, **I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all**, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world...11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.

What is Paul thanking God for here? This segment will deal with this passage and a series of related passages that all express “thanks” to God for certain items. In particular, giving thanks suggests that God deserves credit or is responsible for something. Here in Romans 1, we might ask, “Does this imply that Paul believes that God deserves credit for the salvation of the Romans?” If so, does this require that Paul believes God caused the faith of the Romans by means of a Calvinistic internal mechanism that irresistibly controls human decision-making faculties?

First, freewill theology of course gives God credit for human salvation. This cannot be skipped over too quickly. It is not as though freewill theology denies that God deserves credit. The difference from Calvinism is that freewill theology also assigns responsibility to humans to voluntarily cooperate with God and freewill theology identifies different divine actions as the means of God’s involvement. So long as freewill does openly give God credit for human salvation, there is nothing incompatible with this verse, especially since the verse says nothing to identify the specific means or mechanism by which God takes action. Conversely, thanking or crediting one responsible party does not logically or linguistically rule out credit to or cooperation by other parties.

Second, the means of God’s involvement is critical. Freewill theology identifies God’s role in terms of external events such as the decision to send the Word into the world to proclaim God’s messages to men throughout all of history, the decision for the Word to become incarnate, die, and rise again, the decision to extend forgiveness and make forgiveness possible by means of atonement, the miracles God has performed throughout history to confirm his Word and deliver men from various kinds of suffering, and God’s selection of messengers or laborers sent forth and empowered to preach his Word to others. In short, you don’t need an irresistible internal compulsion from God in order to explain God’s

role in human salvation or to give God viable credit or thanks for the salvation of others.

Lastly, Paul's prayer in verse 11 that "ye may be established" is sufficiently explained as a function of the encouraging power of miraculous confirmation of God's Word, which is also mentioned in the same verse by means of the phrase "spiritual gift," including the simple possibility of Paul exercising the spiritual gift of prophetic exhortation, which is essentially preaching. Throughout this segment, we will continue to see more evidence of the use of miracles as evidence that helps establish or strengthen conviction.

Romans 6:17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. 19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. 20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. 21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. 22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

First, it isn't clear whether Paul is thanking God himself or whether he is instructing the Romans to thank God. Second, contextually we again see the possibility here that Paul is thanking God for the atonement and for doctrine being sent to them (in contrast to, for example, being withheld from them). Third, contextually it is also possible that all of verses 17-23 are to be read as a single line of thought describing that for which Paul was expressing his thankfulness. If so, it is ultimately God's provision of immortality through the resurrection of Jesus, rather than the Roman's initial reception of the Gospel message, for which Paul may be expressing gratitude. Let's consider these second and third possibilities for a moment.

There is good reason in the text to be careful how we break up this sentence and connect its various components. Notice that the first thing to follow the phrase, "God be thanked" is the phrase "that ye were the servants of sin." No one would suggest that Paul is thanking God or giving God credit for the sin of the Romans. The next phrase is connected to "servants of sin" with a "but," which suggests that these two phrases function as a unit. Consequently, if Paul is not making God responsible for the sin of the Romans, then Paul is also not stating that God is the cause of the obedience of the Romans. Where does this leave us? The next phrase is "Being then made free from sin." It seems there are several options here.

Number one, Paul is crediting God in general for those things (sending Christ, sending messengers, providing miracles, etc.) that led to the result described in

verse 17 but not for either of the particular items mentioned in verse 17, such as sin or obedience.

Number two, Paul is thanking God for “freeing” the Romans “from sin” in verse 18. This easily conforms to crediting God for providing atonement and forgiveness of sins through Jesus. It does not necessitate any kind of Calvinistic mechanism.

Number three, verse 19 specifies that verses 17-18 were, in essence, a metaphor comparing humanity to someone in servitude. This metaphor begins right after the phrase, “God be thanked.” And since the metaphor continues through verses 19-23, it is sensible that we should look to the end of this metaphor for the ultimate result that Paul is so thankful for. We find that conclusion in verse 23, in which Paul identifies the final outcome as “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In this sense, Paul may be thanking God, not for the sin or the obedience of the Romans, but for the promise of immortality that God made available by His decision to send Jesus to die and rise again for our forgiveness and resurrection.

In fact, we see this conclusion confirmed in chapter 7:24-8:2 where Paul specifically identifies that he is thanking God for deliverance from mortality and from the condemnation of the law of Moses, which mandated death to sinners. Notice that the language of Romans 7-8 continues the theme of being “made free” that we saw in chapter 6. Paul is continuing the same basic, overall topic.

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! **who shall deliver me from the body of this death?** **25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.** So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh **the law of sin.** **8:1** *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. **2** For **the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.**

(Incidentally, it is impossible to argue that Paul is referring to deliverance from sinful tendencies and choices due to the fact that verse 23 describes the war between the law of sin and the law of God. If Calvinists argue that such phrases refer to God unilaterally causing us to cease from sin, then it would be obvious that the term “war” implies no such cessation, and therefore, no such unilateral, irresistible divine action in the first place.)

Number four, as we continue forward with Paul’s ongoing discourse on this topic, we see in Romans 8 that the hope of resurrection is described as a powerful motivator for repentance and endurance in the faith. (See also Hebrews 6:17-20).

Romans 8:11 But if **the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead** dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead **shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit** that dwelleth in you... **23** And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even **we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.** **24**

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

And consequently, crediting God directly for the resurrection would also indirectly credit God with all that follows from it (although not necessarily in a unilateral sense). If God makes a promise that gives hope and publicizes that promise to the nations and if humans hear that hope and choose to act on it, then God's actions lead to the human response in much the same way as children when their parents promise a reward or punishment. The parents aren't unilaterally determining how each child will respond, nor are they acting internally and irresistibly on the decision-making faculties of the child. Nevertheless, when the children obey, the parents can be credited for their wisdom and good parenting.

Whether Paul is thanking God for those things that led to their repentance, for the atonement, for the hope of immortality, or for all those things that follow directly or indirectly from God's actions, nothing in this verse necessitates or mentions the Calvinist concept of an internal, irresistible, unilateral action by God on the decision-making faculties of men.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. **2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;** **3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;** **4** Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. **5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;** as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. **6** And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. **7** So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. **8** For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

Here again we have Paul expressing thanks to God with regard to a group of Christians, in this case the Thessalonians. But is Paul crediting God for unilaterally causing the Thessalonians to come to faith by irresistible, divine action on their decision-making faculties? As we have noted previously, it was God's decision to send Christ to atone for men, to extend that opportunity for atonement and divine acceptance to the Gentiles in general, to send missionaries like Paul to the Thessalonians in particular, and to no doubt provide the customary miraculous proofs alongside the preaching to such peoples. All of these things would suffice as reasons for Paul to credit and thank God for the fellowship of the Thessalonians. In fact, these ideas are not absent from the passage. When we look at the verses which follow, we see that in verse 5 Paul immediately refers to his missionary journey to preach the Gospel to them and the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit to confirm his testimony. There is nothing in this passage that would

hint or necessitate the idea that Paul had in mind an internal, irresistible, unilateral work of God on the decision-making faculties of the Thessalonians.

Note 36 – Romans 15:13

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that (1519) ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. 14 And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. 15 Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, 16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. 17 I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. 18 **For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, 19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God;** so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

The prayer articulated by Paul in verse 13, including the phrase “through the power of the Holy Ghost” is simply a petition for God to work miracles among the Romans, as we will now demonstrate. This will also be able to explain the initial portion of the prayer in which Paul asks that God would “fill” the Romans “with all joy and peace” and the relationship these things have to miracles.

First, we notice the Greek word for “that” in the phrase “that ye may abound in hope.” This is the Greek word “eis” (1519), which means “into, unto, towards, or for.” Here we have the basic concept of some action or thing in the direction toward something else. In this sense it can refer to intended purpose of an action or thing. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul is praying for God to fill the Romans with joy and peace but he is not asking God directly to make them have hope. Instead, Paul believes that hope will result indirectly if God answers Paul’s prayer to provide joy and peace.

Second, for additional insight on Paul’s train of thought, we turn to Jesus’ teaching in John 15.

John 15:3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. 4 **Abide in me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: **He that abideth in me, and I in him,** the same bringeth forth much fruit: for **without me ye can do (4160) nothing (3756) (3762).** 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 **If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.** 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As

the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 **If ye keep my commandments**, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 **These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.**

Notice that the content of John 15 is centrally focused on Jesus' disciples remaining faithful to his teaching as indicated plainly in verses 3, 7, and 10. In verse 7, Jesus also plainly states that his disciples' ability to ask and receive from God depends on their remaining faithful to his commandments. And, according to verse 11, the result of these things will be "that your joy might be full." But, this reference to "asking and receiving" also entails the ability to work miracles.

Number one, the phrase "ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" in verse 7 is conceptually parallel to verse 5, which says "without me you can do (4160) nothing (3756) (3762)." Note the Strong's Concordance numbers behind the key words. Consider this phrase, "you can do nothing" alongside similar phrasing in elsewhere in John. John 9:32-33 comments on Jesus miraculously healing a blind man and says, "If this man were not of God, he could do (4160) nothing (3762)." As we can see from the Strong's numbers, the phrases are nearly identical. However, it is clear from John 9, that this phrase is being used in reference to the miraculous healing. But, we can also compare this phrasing to John 14:12-17.

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do;** because I go unto my Father. 13 And **whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 **If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.** 15 **If ye love me, keep my commandments.** 16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 **Even the Spirit of truth;** whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

As indicated in verses 12 and 15, John 14 already contains the emphasis on remaining in Christ's commandments that is thematic in chapter 15. Chapter 14 also contains the theme of "asking" and God doing or acting in response to our request that we have seen in chapter 15. However, chapter 14 is clear that such language pertains to Jesus miraculous works as can be seen in verse 12, which says "the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these." And, verse 17 even references the Holy Spirit as part of this discussion. This isn't surprising, however, given Paul's description of the Holy Spirit as the facilitator of miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

Number two, notice that not only do John 14 and 15 connect Christian joy with staying in Christ's teaching and with God performing miracles for us (and through us), but chapter 14:12 connects this to remaining in "belief" in Jesus Christ. Moreover, this connection between miraculous works and belief in Jesus in John 14:12 is itself synonymous with phrases like, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you," which are also repeated in these chapters. The phrase "in

believing” in Romans 15:13 serves the same purpose. Paul isn’t asking God to unilaterally or irresistibly cause the Romans to believe. He is petitioning God to work miracles among them because they were “in faith,” in accordance with Jesus’ promise that God would do miracles for those who believed in Him.

Number three, if we read just a few verses farther, we see that Paul confirms that his intention is in reference to miraculous gifts. In Romans 15:18-19, Paul refers back to “those things which Christ hath not wrought by me” among the Gentiles “through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.” Here the phrase, “power of the Spirit of God” is clearly a reference to miracles. As such, we should interpret this same phrase just six verses earlier in Romans 15:13 in the same manner in reference to miraculous power.

Consequently, when Paul petitions that God would “fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that (1519) ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost,” we know that he is merely reiterating the instructions of his Teacher, Jesus Christ, in John 14-15. There is nothing in this prayer that is meant by Paul to infer that God would directly, internally act on the minds of the Romans by the Holy Spirit to irresistibly and unilaterally cause them to feel things like joy and peace or to have hope. Instead, in verse 13 Paul is petitioning God to do miracles among the Romans by the Holy Spirit. And, of course, the natural result of such external evidence of God’s love and power will be to increase the Romans’ joy, peace, and hopeful assurance of divine deliverance. This is a petition for God to continue to provide additional external evidence, not a petition for God to irresistibly cause any man to feel or to believe anything.

Note 38 – Romans 16:24-27, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, Jude 1:24-25, and Ephesians 3:12-21

Romans 16:24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. 25 Now **to him that is of power (1410) to stablish (4741) you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, 26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: 27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

The noteworthy phrase in this petition occurs in verse 25, when Paul describes God as “him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” Does the word “stablish” here refer to God acting inwardly and unilaterally on the decision-making faculties of an individual to irresistibly cause them to accept the Gospel?

First, the word “stablish” is the Greek word “sterizo” (4741), which means “to make stable, strengthen, confirm.” We will discuss the implications of this term in greater detail momentarily.

Second, this epistle isn't written to unbelievers as an evangelistic device intended to convert pagans to Christianity. As such, it would be unnatural to conclude that Paul is intending to describe a conversion mechanism here, something by which God brings people to accept the Gospel. He is likely talking about a mechanism that strengthens people who have already accepted the Gospel. But, if Paul feels the need to pray so that the Romans will be strengthened in the faith, this strongly suggests that Paul does not perceive their "establishment" in the gospel to be a foregone conclusion.

Third, this action of establishing is connected closely with Paul's gospel and "the preaching of Jesus Christ." It is possible, that the means or mechanism of "strengthening" people comes entirely by means of the external act of hearing additional Christian preaching. After all, in Romans 10 Paul has established the general need for an external preacher in order for people to hear, and in turn by means of hearing, come to believe the Gospel. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 14 Paul goes to great lengths to emphasize that it is better to speak to someone in a language they understand than in a foreign language they don't understand. During this segment, Paul repeatedly argues that someone can be edified or encouraged when they comprehend. Given these comments from Paul, it would be perfectly natural to conclude that Paul believed ongoing teaching was likewise a means of strengthening existing faith. Moreover, human beings both persuade and encourage one another to do all kinds of things (good and bad) all the time by means of verbal discourse. So, there is nothing inherently irresistible or unilateral about the process of external communication as a means to strengthen conviction.

Fourth, it is interesting here that this word "sterizo" is coupled with the Greek verb "dunamai" (1410), which means, "to be able, have power."

Number one, "dunamai" is also closely related to the noun "dunamis" (1411), which is derived from it and denotes, "strength, power, ability" including "power for performing miracles." Although often used more generally, "dunamai" and "dunamis" (1411) are normal New Testament words used in reference to miracle-working ability. "Dunamai" is used in Matthew 9:27-28, when two blind men request that Jesus miraculously heal them and restore their sight. It is similarly used in Matthew 17:14-15 when a father petitions Jesus to heal his son and states that Jesus' disciples were "unable" to heal him. In Mark 1:40, it is used when a leper declares that Jesus is able to miraculously heal him of leprosy. In Mark 6:5 uses "dunamai" when stating that Jesus could not do mighty works in a particular place, except healing a few sick people. In John 3:2, Nicodemus uses "dunamai" when describing Jesus' ability to do miracles. And we see similar uses also in John 9:16, 33, 10:21, 11:37.

Number two, consider the concepts described in the following passages.

Mark 16:20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and **confirming (950) the word with signs** following. Amen.

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 (950) 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?

1 Corinthians 1:6 **Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed (950) 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 (950) you unto the end,** that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of these passages asserts that God confirmed the teaching or testimony about Jesus with signs, such as miracles and supernatural gifts. There are two important points worth noting. First, although the Greek word “confirm” is “bebaioo,” not “sterizo,” the two terms overlap significantly in meaning. As can be seen from the definitions below, “bebaioo” means “to make firm, make firm, establish” and “sterizo” likewise means “to make firm or confirm” and is translated as “stablish” here in Romans 16:25.

Strong's G950 - bebaioō

Part of Speech: verb

1. to make firm, establish, confirm, make sure

Strong's G4741 - stērizō

Part of Speech: verb

1. to make stable, place firmly, set fast, fix
2. to strengthen, make firm
3. to render constant, confirm, one's mind

Second, it should be noted that in Mark 16:20, Hebrews 2:3, and 1 Corinthians 1:6, it is the testimony or teaching of Christ that is confirmed, whereas Romans 16 specifies that it is the people who are “stablished.” However, 1 Corinthians 1 actually uses “bebaioo” twice, once in verse 6 where it applies to the testimony of Christ and again in verse 8 where the same word is applied to the Corinthians themselves. Moreover, the close-proximity usage of “bebaioo” in verses 6 and 8 make it clear from the context that the actions are related directly to one another. In other words, it is the confirming of the testimony of Christ by means of the miraculous gifts (such as described in 1 Corinthians 12-14) that confirm, or strengthen, the conviction of the Corinthians. (Of course, this is the result we would naturally expect when someone witnesses external evidence, and it does not require any Calvinistic notions.) More importantly, this dual-application of “bebaioo” in 1 Corinthians 1 demonstrates that the application of “sterizo” to the people in Romans 16:25 does not mean Romans 16 is discussing a different concept than 1 Corinthians 1, Mark 16, and Hebrews 2.

Ultimately, there is good biblical precedent supporting the conclusion that the “strengthening” described in Romans 16:25 is occurring either by further preaching or by means of further miracles among the Romans. A prayer for either

of these does not in any way entail the expectation that God would cause the Romans to persevere in the faith by unilaterally and irresistibly acting on their decision-making faculties. And, identifying this prayer as a reference to God sending teachers (or giving wisdom to teachers) or providing miracles is certainly more suitable than interpreting this prayer in reference to Calvinistic mechanisms, which are already contradicted by Paul's perception that the Roman's perseverance in the faith cannot be assumed.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brethren, **stand fast (4739)**, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. **16** Now our **Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father**, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, **17** **Comfort your hearts, and stablish (4741) you in every good word and work.**

The Greek word for "stand fast" is "steko" (4739), which means "to stand firm" or "persevere." Not only is this literally a command from Paul placing the responsibility to persevere within the Thessalonians power, but it also acknowledges that it was possible for them to fail to do so, which is why Paul felt it was necessary to admonish them in this regard. Moreover, as we can see from the Strong's Concordance Number, the word "steko" (4739) is related to "sterizo" (4741), the word translated as "stablish" in verse 17. "Steko" and "sterizo," (along with "stereo," 4731) are all considered derivatives of the word "histemi" (2476), which means to cause to make stand. This use of related words more than suggests a cooperative process in which both God and the Thessalonians must participate but are able to voluntarily not participate, which in turn is what prompts Paul to petition both God and the Thessalonians to do their respective parts.

Third, we still have to ask an important question. What does Paul indicate that God's part is in this process as designated by the word "stablish" in verse 17? (We might take note that the same word is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:3, although it may not necessarily be considered a prayer.)

2 Thessalonians 3:3 **But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish (4741) you,** and keep *you* from evil.

Because the use of "sterizo" in 2 Thessalonians 3 follows only 3 verses after the use of "sterizo" in 2 Thessalonians 2:17, it is clear that whatever is meant by verse 17 is also intended in chapter 3:3 as well. So, by resolving the meaning of one we can resolve the other also.

On this question, we simply need to draw upon a trend we have already established. Earlier in this section we noted the similarity in meaning between "sterizo" and "bebaioo," both meaning "to make firm," "confirm," or "establish." We also saw how "bebaioo" was used in passages like Mark 16, Hebrews 2, and 1 Corinthians to denote how both the message and the conviction in the recipients are confirmed by means of the external evidence of miracles. In addition, we might note that the full phrase in verse 17 is "stablish you in every good word and

work.” This, too, affirms the connection to miracles as confirmation of the message. The phrase “stablish you in word” suggests either that the word of the preacher would be confirmed among them or perhaps that preaching itself would be the means of strengthening them, as we have already discussed above based on Paul’s remarks in Romans 10. Likewise, the phrase “stablish you in every good work” seems quite parallel to the phrase “the testimony of Christ was confirmed (950) in you: So that ye come behind in no gift” from 1 Corinthians 1:6-7. In the context of the New Testament, “good works” would naturally include both natural and supernatural works. In 1 Corinthians 12:6, 10-11, Paul uses the Greek the verb “energeo” (1754) as well as the noun “energema” (1755), which is derived from it. In fact, he uses each word twice.

1 Corinthians 12:6 And there are diversities of operations (1755), but it is the same God which worketh (1754) all in all...10 To another the working (1755) of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: 11 But all these worketh (1754) that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

“Energeo” comes from the adjective “energes” (1756), which is comprised from the Greek preposition “en” (1722) and the noun “ergon” (2041). “Ergon” happens to be the same word translated as “work” in 2 Thessalonians 2:17. In simple terms, here in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is describing miracles as a “work,” particularly a work of the Holy Spirit using Greek words directly related to the term used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2. So, not only do we have the conceptual similarity between 2 Thessalonians 2:17 and the “gifts” that “confirm” the “testimony of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 1:6-7, but we also have miraculous gifts described as “works” in 1 Corinthians 12 using language similar to 2 Thessalonians 2. These contextual details provided a solid basis for concluding that Paul is petitioning God to continue to strengthen the Thessalonians by means of external preaching (equivalent to sending laborers or giving wisdom to local leadership) and miraculous works. An alternate, Calvinistic mechanism that acts internally, irresistibly, and unilaterally on the decision-making faculties of the Thessalonians is neither directly mentioned nor necessitated by the text.

Another passage that contains this type of prayer is Ephesians 3.

Ephesians 3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. **13** Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. **14** For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **15** Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with **might (1411) by his Spirit in the inner man;** **17** That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** **May be able to comprehend** with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; **19** And to know the love of Christ, which **passeth knowledge,** that (2443) **ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.** **20** Now unto **him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the**

power that worketh in us, 21 Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

This passage includes a petition for others to be “strengthened with might by God’s Spirit in the inner man.” It’s clear that what is being strengthened is the inner man. With that much all parties will readily agree. The question pertains to exactly how, by what mechanism, God acts to strengthen the inner man. Does God act directly, unilaterally, and irresistibly on the inner man causing it to have more faith, etc.? Or does God take some external action that has the potential to strengthen conviction?

Two things are noteworthy about the details of this passage.

First, the Greek word for “might” is “dunamis” (1411), a word we have repeatedly seen used to refer to miracles, which we know are the work of the Holy Spirit from passages like 1 Corinthians 12:3-11.

Second, notice the outcome of this strengthening as described in the subsequent verses of the passage. No sooner does verse 16 say, “strengthened with dunamis by his Spirit” than verses 17-18 state, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” and “that ye” may “be able to comprehend” and “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” It seems very much that the result of the Holy Spirit’s effort here comes in terms of belief and knowledge of God’s love.

But are these results anything different than what we’ve seen in the New Testament pattern so far regarding strengthening by means of miracles? After all, what results from the Holy Spirit performing miracles? Miracles deliver the sick and the needy, thereby demonstrating God’s love for men and compassion for the plight of mankind. And miracles confirm the gospel message, thereby bolstering peoples’ confidence that the gospel is true. In short, when the Holy Spirit provides the external evidence of miracles, the result is belief in the gospel and seeing first-hand how much God loves us.

There are two places in Ephesians where we get confirmation that the central mechanism here entails miracles.

First, there is verse 20 of Ephesians 3.

Ephesians 3:20 Now unto **him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask (154) or think, according to the power (1411) that worketh (1754) in us**, 21 Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Number one, notice the connection here between “the power that worketh in us” and Christians asking. The depiction here is one in which God is acting in response to a request for help initiated by Christian prayer. To take the idea of God “working in us” as a unilateral, unconditional action would be against the grain of this context.

Number two, notice that the word for “power” in verse 20 is “dunamis.” We have already seen the connection between “dunamis” and miracles. In fact, we see “dunamis” translated as “miracles” in connection to the same Greek word for “worketh” in Paul’s comments on supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12:10 To another the working (1755) of miracles (1411); to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: 11 But all these worketh (1754) that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

We have also already examined the connection between miracles and asking in John 14.

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, **the works (2041) that I do shall he do also; and greater works (2041)** than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. **13 And whatsoever ye shall ask (154)** in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14 If ye shall ask (154) any thing in my name, I will do it.**

Number three, we should note that the Greek word for “ask” used twice in John 14 is the same word for “ask” used in Ephesians 3:20, as denoted by Strong’s number 154 behind each word. It is the word “aiteo.” We might also note the conceptual parallel between Ephesians 3:30 and John 14 conveying the superlative nature of such miraculous works. John 14 refers to works that are even greater than those miracles performed by Jesus. No wonder when Paul refers to miracles in Ephesians 3, he describes God’s ability as exceeding our petitions and imaginations.

And number four, the word “works” that appears in John 14 is also familiar to our study. It’s the Greek noun “ergon” (2041), from which the verb “energeo” (1754) is derived. “Energeo” is the Greek word translated as “worketh” in Ephesians 3:20.

From this remarkably similar vocabulary, it is clear that Paul’s comments in Ephesians 3:20 are meant in reference to Christians petitioning God for miracles and to God’s miracle-working power at work among them. But most importantly, the most natural application of this fact is to conclude that the same meaning is intended with regard to “dunamis” just 4 verses earlier in Ephesians 3:16. In both phrases, Paul is referring to God’s power to produce miracles, external phenomena that provide objective evidence to help strengthen their conviction. There is simply no warrant and no hint at a Calvinistic divine work acting directly, unilaterally, and irresistibly on the inner man to cause belief, repentance, or any other attitude or response.

Second, we can look slightly earlier in Ephesians 3.

Ephesians 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: 7 Whereof I was made a minister, **according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working (1753) of his power (1411).** 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, **that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;**

Here we see Paul referring to the gift God had given to him, which he describes as “by the effectual working of his power.” The word for “working” is the Greek noun “energeia” (1753) and the word for “power” is, of course, “dunamis” (1411). “Energeia” is also derived from “ergon.” It would be fair to translate this as the “working of miracles,” which Paul then directly connects to his preaching among the Gentiles. As we have already mentioned, the New Testament description of miracles as confirmation accompanying the preaching of the Gospel is well established in such passages as Mark 16:16-20, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, and Hebrews 2:3-4. It is clear that Paul’s mention of “dunamis” throughout Ephesians 3 is intended as a reference to miracle-working power that provides external evidence to corroborate Christian doctrine, not any kind of internal action that God take directly on the human heart or mind to irresistibly cause men to believe or repent.

Third and lastly, we should consider the meaning of the phrase, “that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” We find this in verse 19 of Ephesians 3 as part of Paul’s prayer.

Ephesians 3:16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with **might (1411) by his Spirit in the inner man;** 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 **May be able to comprehend** with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which **passeth knowledge**, that (2443) **ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.** 20 Now unto **him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,** 21 Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

We have already firmly identified the references to God’s power in verse 16 and 20 in reference to the external evidence of miracles. But doesn’t the phrase “filled with all the fullness of God” at least convey some sort of Calvinistic divine compulsion toward God’s righteousness?

First, we note Paul’s use of the Greek word “hina” (2443), which is translated as “that” at the start of this phrase. “Hina” means, “in order that” or “so that.” In

short, Paul is asking God for miracles in verse 16 but this phrase in verse 19 describes one of the items that Paul hopes will result if God does perform miracles. In other words, Paul isn't petitioning God to fill the Ephesians with all the fullness of God. He is petitioning God to perform miracles in order that the Ephesians might be strengthened in their faith and, consequently, receive the fullness of God.

Second, what does this phrase "fullness of God" refer to? The Greek word for "fullness" is "pleroma" (4138). It is used in Ephesians 1:23.

Number one, in Ephesians 1:22-23, it is used in the phrase "the church, which is his body, the fullness (4138) of him that filleth (4137) all in all." We can see that the verb "filleth" is closely related as indicated by the Strong's numbers.

Number two, "pleroma" is associated immediately in the very next verse in Ephesians 2:1 with the phrase "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins." The King James includes the phrase "hath he quickened" near the start of this verse but in italics designating that it is an interpolation by the translators and does not actually appear in the Greek manuscripts upon which the King James was based. But either with or without the idea of "quickening," the proximity and connection between these phrases strongly suggests that the filling has to do with the resurrection from the dead. This phrase that Christ "fills all in all" is parallel to 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, which declares that "by man came also the resurrection of the dead" and "in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

Number three, verses 19-20 begin with the phrase, "And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." The word "dunamis" is not used in the phrase "working of his mighty power" in verse 19. But it is used in the preceding phrase "the exceeding greatness of his power (1411) to us-ward" in the opening of verse 19. Incidentally, the word "working" is "energeia" (1753) and "wrought" is "energeo" (1754).

In this context the church is seen as Christ's body and in this sense he is depicted here as the "head" or prototype for what will happen to the saints. Just as Christ was resurrected from death and exalted to authority, so also will those who are members of his body. And how will this resurrection be accomplished? Paul's understanding is obvious. God has supernatural power. Miracles are a foretaste of that supernatural power at work. But the ultimate dispensing of that supernatural power occurs in the resurrection of the dead, a work that Paul describes as "filling" us (or perhaps enveloping or bathing us) in God's supernatural power. When we apply this earlier precedent to Ephesians 3, we see the entire picture emerge. Paul is petitioning God for miracles to confirm the gospel among the Ephesians so that they will be reassured by such external evidence and, having been strengthened in their faith in this manner, will endure in faith till Christ's return at which point they will receive the resurrection. That is what Paul means by the phrase, "that ye might be filled with the fullness of God."

Summary Regarding Calvinist Prayer

Although we have only provided a sample of our analysis, the full set of notes on each of the 70 passage that Calvinists might appeal to can be found in the Addendum to this study. However, this sample set of notes demonstrates that when contextual details and historical precedent are allowed to inform us about the meaning of each phrase and prayer, the fast, isolated, façade of any Calvinist scenario melts away. Out of 986 passages in scripture containing any form of communication from men to God or even instruction about prayer, even the 7% that Calvinists might have found appealing to their doctrines have now been debunked. Consequently, we can firmly conclude not only that Augustine was incorrect when he petitioned God to “grant what thou dost command,” but more importantly that the prayers found from Genesis to Revelation do not contain or express Calvinist expectations for God to control human choices, behavior, or character by means of any unilateral or irresistible exertion from God directly and internally on the decision-making faculties of the human mind. Therefore, we should endeavor to also remove such casual or convenient petitions or expectations from our prayers as well and instead confine ourselves to the types of petitions and expectations expressed by the prayers of saints as recorded in the Bible.

Survey Conclusions

As we conclude our study surveying prayer in the bible, we can summarize our findings as follows.

First, the bible emphasizes that God hears those who seek and obey him. Because we are sinners, our righteous standing before God depends on Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. But, as we have seen, Jesus also clearly teaches that our asking and receiving from God depends on our staying faithful to his commands.

Second, we have also seen a great deal about the composition of prayers in scripture. Biblical prayers are not times for diary-like personal reflection or contemplative exploration of topics. They center on requests for specific needs, thanksgiving, or worship of God. Narrative prayers are limited, always describing our situation only as a way to succinctly drive toward and lay the groundwork for a specific, immediate prayer request. And they do not need to be lengthy. When it comes to prayers for which the actual words are recorded for us in scripture, the average prayer would only take about a minute and a half and the longest prayers, which are much rarer, are only about five minutes. On that same note, biblical prayers are always thoughtfully composed and strategic. They are not comprised of “filler material” to make the prayer longer or to function as placeholders while we collect our thoughts (no matter whether that placeholder is a simple syllable like “um” or the habitual repetition of divine titles or names like “Father” or “Lord”). And last but not least, the bible underscores all these issues by

emphasizing the need to maintain a reverent awareness when speaking to God, to remember that we are talking not just to a casual “TV dad,” but to a powerful King who has adopted us into His very large family, to a Father who both loves us and has the authority to discipline us, who is as much concerned with conforming us to His right moral character as He is with our needs.

Third, prayers in the bible reflect the understanding that God is not going to cause or control human behavior. At times He might send angelic or human messengers to help us or provide guidance, wisdom, and knowledge. At times, He might send rain or provide food or sustenance. At times, He might send miracle-working power or perform a supernatural event. And at times, He might send an army of angels to defeat a political enemy. But prayers that petition God for someone to “make the right decision” or to “become Christians,” or any such prayer expecting God to directly cause someone to be or to do something, are foreign to the prayers found in the bible and should be avoided.

While following the exhaustive examples and numerous instructions about prayer found in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is not a guarantee that we will get what we are requesting, it is the best way to ensure that what we ask for will be the kind of thing that God is at least generally inclined to do. And, more importantly, it is the best way to ensure that whether He grants the prayer or not, our prayers will be pleasing to God, our Father and our King.