

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



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### **Note 8 – Job 21:19-21**

This passage is arguably not a prayer at all. But given that Job does tend to jump back and forth between addressing God and simple conversation with his friends, it is worth analyzing. Here, Job states in verses 19-21, “It is said, ‘God stores up the punishment of the wicked for their children.’ Let him repay the wicked, so that they themselves will experience it! Let their own eyes see their destruction; let them drink the cup of the wrath of the Almighty. For what do they care about the families they leave behind when their allotted months come to an end?”

It should be noted that there is no prayerful implication here that God might inwardly control the choices or desires of men’s minds. However, it might be suggested that the text corroborates the Calvinist doctrine that children bear the guilt of their parents. It should be noted that this is similar to a false interpretation that had apparently arisen among the Israelites based on a perversion of passages like Exodus 20:5, which says, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” According to Jeremiah 31:29-30, some Israelites had wrongly developed the idea that, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Jeremiah corrects this misperception and says the days would come when people would no longer say this but everyone will instead recognize that, “everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.” Ezekiel 18:1-2 likewise identifies this false teaching that “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” and corrects it. The Lord goes on to explain in verses 3-4 that, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel... The one who sins is the one who will die.” Then God proceeds to go into great depth giving examples of generations of fathers and sons who are alternately righteous or unrighteous and explicitly stating that the sinning generation alone would die for their own sins, not their children.

The real meaning of statements like we find in Exodus 20:5 can be found in Genesis 15:16 in which God explains to Abraham that he would not case out the current inhabitants of the land at the present time. God declares that, “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” Consequently, this assertion that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children in the fourth generation deals with God giving a nation time to repent before he punishes the nation. He does

not destroy a nation in the first generation of sinfulness but waits three or four generations to give the children time to turn away from or continue in their parents' sins before punishing them.

This is also clearly Job's intention as well. Notice from Job 21:19-21 that God is not punishing the first generation. Rather he is "storing up" their punishment "for their children." Job wishes instead that "they themselves will experience it!" This is clearly not the Calvinist model in which Adam sins and then both Adam and each generation of his descendants bear his guilt and punishment automatically before they even sin themselves. Instead, this is clearly a model in which the first generation is not suffering the punishment but God is waiting two or three generations or more before punishing anyone. Job's central complaint here is that the first generation goes unpunished and, therefore, it is obvious that Job is not talking about inheriting guilt shared by parents but punishment postponed from parents to give the children time to repent just as explicitly in Genesis 15 and Ezekiel 18. In short, there is no automatic inheritance of guilt in Job's remarks only the postponement of punishment to give merciful time for repentance.

#### **Note 9 – Psalm 19:1-14**

In verse 13, the English reads, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins." This phrase raises a question. Is David praying that God would prevent him from sinning? And does that infer that David expected God to control his will?

First, we might note that God could restrain a man from sinning by other means than controlling his will or decision-making. God can warn a man or confront him to deter him from sin. The idea of being warned by God in order to avoid sin is mentioned just 2 verses earlier in verse 11. And this would make even more sense if we accept the English rendering of the word "presumptuous sins." This could easily reflect the idea of sins that men commit in ignorance in which case David's petition would express the desire for God to warn him so he doesn't error based on a lack of knowledge.

Second, scripture is not devoid of occasions in which God kept men from sinning by appearing to them to stop them. In Genesis 12:11-19, God plagues Pharaoh and his household which reveals to Pharaoh that Sarai is Abraham's wife and prevents Pharaoh from sinning by taking Sarai to be his wife. The same thing happens in Genesis 20:2-6 in which God warns King Abimelech in a dream that Sarah is Abraham's wife and not to touch her. In verse 6, God says to Abimelech, "I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me; therefore suffered I thee not to touch her." Here God is clearly referring to his warning in verses 3-4 in which God appeared to Abimelech to warn him before he had come near to Sarah. Similar types of events occur with Balaam, whom the Angel of God visits in Numbers 22 and warns in order to prevent him from overstepping and saying more than he should or cursing Israel. And famously, we also have the account of Paul who God knocked to the ground on his journey to Damascus, deterring him from completing his

intended mission to persecute Christians. These are accounts of God preventing men from sin, even presumptuous sins, but not by controlling their internal decision-making process. Rather, these men remain free to choose but God simply ups the stakes by taking overt external action to dissuade them, particularly through fear and the warning of serious consequences.

Third, after all if David was petitioning God to keep him from sinning, why not mention all sins? Why only ask God to prevent him from committing presumptuous sins? This suggests that David isn't asking about sin.

Fourth, the word "sin" here does not actually appear in the Hebrew. Furthermore, the word translated as "presumptuous" is "zed" (02086), which occurs 13 times. All 12 other times apart from Psalm 19:13, it is translated to refer to "the proud." In other words, this Hebrew word refers to people who are arrogant, not arrogance itself as a trait and not arrogant sins. Given the fact that deliverance from wicked men and not keeping company are familiar themes in the Psalms, it is likely that Psalm 19:13 is a petition for God to either deliver David from the proud or the keep the proud out of David's company or court. The very next phrase in this verse is "let them not have dominion over me." This could be either literal in the sense of wicked men conquering David or it could be figurative in the sense of wicked companions having sway or influence over David. In either case, it corroborates that David is asking for deliverance from wicked men, not for God to internally control his choices to prevent him from sinning. David concludes this verse with the phrase "then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Here again, this is quite compatible with a petition for God to keep wicked men out of his court or company of inner cohorts. Companionship with the wicked is depicted as a primary avenue into sinful behavior from the very first words of the Psalms. Chapter 1:1 begins, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." The first Psalm also describes how it is unfitting for "sinners" to stand "in the congregation of the righteous." Likewise, Psalm 26:4-5, 9-10 say, "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked...Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes." Certainly, there is a theme in Psalms that keeping company with sinful men is undesirable and can lead men into sin. And David at times prays that God will not allow him to fall into company with evil doers. There is nothing in Psalm 19, including verse 13, which would suggest anything other than this familiar notion.

#### **Note 10 – Psalm 33:15**

In the New King James' translation, the English rendering of verses 14-15 read, "'From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works.'" The phrasing here raises the question of whether David means to infer that God shapes men's

hearts and whether this, in turn, is meant to infer that God controls men's decisions.

First, the Hebrew word for "fashion" here is "yatsar" (03335) and it can refer to the formation of individuals such as at conception or creation. The word "alike" in Hebrew is "yachad" (03162), which means in "union" or "unitedness." It seems plausible that this phrasing is similar to Paul's declaration in Acts 17:26-28, which states that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." Both Paul and Psalms 33 seem to refer to God's collective creation of mankind when He made Adam and Eve. After all, Psalm 33:6 and 9 recount how God created everything in heaven and earth, which by necessity recalls the creation of mankind as well. And the surrounding context in both Acts 17 and Psalms 33 pertains to the fall of kingdoms and peoples by God's design and God's judgment of the works of the nations. This comparison suggests that Psalm 33 is simply discussing the original creation of mankind and connecting God's ability to create with his right to judge them and to destroy them or forgive them as seen in the last half of verse 15 as well as verses 16-19.

Second, it is important that the idea of God "fashioning" or shaping men's hearts can simply denote God giving men counsel or instruction. The Hebrew word for "hearts" here is "leb" (03820), which also conveys the "understanding." Consequently, this phrasing in Psalm 33 does not need to infer that God is causing men to make decisions. It can easily refer to God simply counseling mankind. In fact, verse 11 of this same chapter reads, "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." Likewise, verses 4, 6, and 9 serve to remind us of the reliability of God's word. It certainly seems like contextually, David is speaking about God's instructions to mankind, not God's control over the decisions of mankind. In this sense, the reference to "yachad" speaks of the fact that all men had sufficiently received God's instructions. No man and no nation were without excuse. Here again, this Psalm seems reminiscent of sentiments from Paul, particularly in Romans 1:16-2:1. Ultimately, David seems to be connecting God's right to judge and either destroy men or have mercy to the foundational facts that God created mankind and that the knowledge of God, the wisdom and the judgments of God, were all provided to all mankind from the beginning of creation.

Third, the context of this chapter is incompatible with the idea of God controlling men's decisions and actions. Verse 13 states that God "beholdeth all the sons of men." Verse 14 says that "He looked upon all the inhabitants of the earth." And verse 15 says that, "He considereth all their works." It is one thing to say that God can know every detail of a man's thoughts by the power of His omniscience, His ability to see and perceive all things. This would be perfectly compatible with the idea of God "looking" on all men and "considering" their works. But it is another thing to say that God already knows every detail of man's thoughts because He is the cause of their decisions and inclinations. As the cause of their decisions, He

would already know their guilt or innocence and every detail of their works and thoughts. He would not have to “look upon” them or “consider all their works.” The fact that God is describe as “looking” and “considering” suggests that, although He has the capacity to detected and perceive every detail of the human mind, this Psalm is not depicting God as already aware of such details. Consequently, this Psalm is not compatible with the idea that God controls the decisions of the human heart.

As we can see, nothing in Psalm 33 requires or contextually supports the idea of God controlling men’s thoughts or decisions.

### **Note 11 – Psalm 37:23**

Verse 23 of Psalm 37 reads, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” The Hebrew word for “ordered” is “kuwn” (03559), which can mean “to be stable or established” or “prepared” or even “directed aright.”

A literal interpretation of this entails that God seems to protect the righteous as they go about their business. He prepares the path to make it firm so that they do not fall. Only if we assume a figurative meaning is there even the possibility of a Calvinist inference in which “preparing” or “establishing” a man’s path no longer refers to their literal journeys but to their spiritual journey. But even this is not enough. Even the staunchest opponents of Calvinism can agree that God lays the foundation and prepares the paths for walking in righteousness. (For instance, God established the Law of Moses to direct the Israelites how to live before him.) The only way that even this figurative interpretation becomes Calvinistic is if we further assume that God overrides the will of a man and causes him to take the right path. But there is nothing in the verse that necessitates or even hints at such an idea.

Lastly, in support of the more literal interpretation, it is noteworthy that chapter 38:16 petitions God for help in a time of sickness and adversity, saying, “Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me.” Here we seem to have the opposite scenario from Psalm 37:23. In Psalm 37, God establishes the steps of a righteous man. Here, David confesses his sin in verse 18 and speaks of his enemies rejoicing when his foot “slips.” The idea of his foot slipping seems to express the idea of trouble, even the slightest of trouble befalling David, such as stumbling along the path. It is clearly meant as hyperbole, but nonetheless does refer to literal, physical peril rather than something figurative. Moreover, the fact that Psalm 38:16 presents the opposing scenario of Psalm 37:23 provides another striking proof against the Calvinist interpretation of Psalm 37:23. After all, if David meant by Psalm 37:23 that God causes a righteous man to choose righteousness, how could it be that David (himself formerly righteous) was now “slipping?” Had God not “established” David’s steps in the path of righteousness? Had David somehow thwarted what God had established as his path and swerved outside of God’s

determined course? Neither of these alternatives is compatible with Calvinism, but they would be necessitated since Psalm 38 should be interpreted consistently with Psalm 37. So, once again we find another contextual proof ruling out any Calvinist interpretations.

Moreover, as long as we are considering more figurative applications of this phrasing, there are other alternatives.

First, as we have seen, the Hebrew word “kuwn” can mean “direct aright.” If this verse intends to convey something more than the idea of God protecting the righteous, it most likely conveys the familiar theme that God instructs the righteous and the righteous follow God’s instructions. Thus, God directs the righteous by means of instruction and once again the idea that God directs men by exerting internal control of their decision-making is completely extraneous to this verse.

Second, this language could also suggest that God works to bring to pass the plans of the righteous. As we have seen in earlier analysis of 1 Chronicles 28-29, David put a lot of effort into planning and preparing for his heart’s desire, to build a Temple for God in Jerusalem. And when he spoke of these plans, he expressed his desire that God would help him make these preparations and bring these plans to pass. For comparison, in Psalm 20:4 David pronounces a blessing on his audience that God would “fulfill all thy counsel.” The word for counsel means “purpose,” so David is praying that God will fulfill or bring to pass the purposes of godly men. It’s quite likely that David is expressing this sentiment here in Psalm 37 in which case the phrase “God establishes the steps of a good man” would simply convey God’s efforts to bring about the plans of the righteous.

Third, along with many other Psalms, this Psalm declares how God will “uphold the righteous” against the attacks of the wicked (Psalm 37:17). Similarly, verse 29 speaks of how the “righteous shall inherit the land,” while verse 28 says that “the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.” This wording is reminiscent of Joshua 1:3 in which God explains to Joshua concerning the upcoming conquest of the land of the Canaanites, “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.” If David is referencing this scriptural precedent, verse 23 would simply affirm that God will establish the victory of the righteous over the plans of their enemies.

Ultimately, there are several themes that emerge from Psalm 37:23, none of which bear any hint of Calvinistic compulsion and all of which have more contextual and linguistic support than the suggested Calvinist alternative.

### **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 13 – Psalm 64:9-10**

There is some minor language in this Psalm that deserves some brief discussion. Verse 9 declares “And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing.” Verse 10 similarly states, “The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and shall trust in him, and all the upright in heart shall glory.” Do these verses imply that psalmist expects God to cause “all men” to fear and declare his works by exercising some sort of internal control over the decision-making of men? Do these verses imply the expectation that God causes the righteous to rejoice in him and trust him by an inward mechanism that controls their wills?

A close look at this Psalm reveals that it is a petition from David asking God to deliver him from his enemies and for God to come against and scatter those enemies. It is clear from the Psalm that it is these external actions that David describes as prompting all men to fear God and declare his works and as prompting the righteous to rejoice and trust in God. There is no depiction or expectation of an internal control that God exerts on men’s decision-making faculties. Rather, David is laying out a general if-then scenario as part of his petition to God. He is giving God reasons to act on his behalf. In short, David is saying to God, “If you deliver me and overcome my enemy, others will see you do this and declare it. Those who hear it will consider what you have done. And the righteous will be encouraged and refreshed by seeing your deliverance.” There is neither any internal compulsion nor any involuntary or absolute guarantee of the outcome.

### **Note 14 – Psalm 72:1-20**

This Psalm is a prayer by David for his son Solomon who would rule after him. In general, it is a statement of faith that David professes with rejoicing in regard to what God will do for Solomon. And, of course, this is based on promises that God has specifically made concerning David’s son (see 2 Samuel 7:8-19).

Consequently, David is not expressing expectations that God will do such things for men in general. This is an exceptional case based on a particular promise to a unique family and an important historical dynasty.

In particular, there is only one phrase in this Psalm that might appeal to Calvinist arguments. In verse 1, David says, “Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king’s son.” The only way this verse could have Calvinist implications is if David intended here to express the expectation that God would

cause Solomon to choose to live righteously by controlling Solomon's internal decision-making faculties.

However, the reference to God giving his righteousness to Solomon could be a preemptive petition for God to forgive and atone for Solomon's sins. David himself was acquainted with sin and had to petition God for forgiveness during his own reign. It would make perfect sense for him to pray that God would both make known his judgments to Solomon so that Solomon could establish justice and for him to pray that God would forgive his son for any future sins.

Moreover, the language of God's "judgments" and "righteousness" lends itself quite nicely to familiar imagery used in reference to God's instructions and wisdom. The Law of Moses was described as God's righteous judgments and God's instructions for his people. The Hebrew word for "righteousness" here in Psalm 72:1 is "tsadaqah" (06666), which means "justice" particularly in reference to a "judge, ruler, king, or law." For example, Deuteronomy 33:21 describes the tribe of Gad, saying, "he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel." The word for "justice" is "tsadaqah." It is used in reference to a "lawgiver" and the "heads" or rulers of the people. And it is here coupled with the same word for "judgments" that is used in Psalm 72:1. The word for "judgments" in Psalm 72:1 is the Hebrew word "mishpat" (04941) and it is used in reference to God's commands and instructions in the Law of Moses in Leviticus 18:4-5, 18:36, and 19:37 for example. Moreover, Psalm 119 is comprised of 176 verses many of which are a direct petition for God's instructions in his word, statutes, and judgments (04941), etc. (see Psalm 119:30 for example.) Verse 40 mentions God's righteousness (06666) and immediately connects it with God's precepts. Likewise, verse 142 also connects God's righteousness with God's "law" being "the truth." This tells us that praying for God to give knowledge of his judgments is a well-established theme and that "judgments" and "righteousness" are indeed used in reference to God's commands and instructions, etc.

What follows after David's initial petition for God to grant Solomon knowledge of his judgments and justice in verse 1 are David's arguments for why God should give his son wisdom and knowledge concerning God's righteous judgments. If God does so, David argues, the king will rule righteously, establish justice and defend the poor, righteous people will prosper, and all people will fear judgment for doing wrong. These are not things that God will cause Solomon to choose. Rather, these are things that will result if God gives wisdom and knowledge of his righteousness and his judgments to Solomon. And, we can see that God did indeed do both of these things for Solomon, giving him wisdom to make good judgments and establish justice (2 Kings 4:29-30) and for the sake of David God was merciful toward Solomon despite his sins (1 Kings 11:11). It makes perfect sense to interpret David's prayer for Solomon as a petition for such things that we know historically God did give to his son Solomon. With wisdom and atonement so well established in Jewish culture and relate so directly to the language used in this Psalm, there is simply no reason to expand the language of this Psalm to the superfluous idea that God might cause Solomon to choose righteousness.

**Note 15 – Psalm 80**

**Psalm 80:**17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. 18 **So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.** 19 **Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.**

While this Psalm mentions the idea of being “saved” several times, from a Calvinist perspective the most explicit language comes in verses 18-19. In these verses, the psalmist asks God, “quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” For the Calvinist, such words might suggest the idea that the psalmist is asserting that God “quicken” men before they turn to him and before they come to salvation. This “quicken” could then be associated with Calvinist doctrines of irresistible grace. However, there are several textual details that prohibit the Calvinist understanding of these verses.

First, the idea of salvation here is simply the idea of deliverance from one’s immediate earthly enemies. Verse 6 refers to strife with the neighboring countries and how the Israelites’ enemies laughed at them. Verses 12-13 speak metaphorically of how nations travel through the land, plucking and devouring Israel. Verse 16 speaks of how Israel is burned with fire. In this context, the psalmist’s petition for “saving” is a simple prayer for deliverance from the present distress. Larger-scale concepts of eternal salvation are not in view in this petition.

Second, in this context which refers to the injuries that Israel has suffered from her earthly enemies, the notion of “quicken” clearly refers to healing of those present injuries most likely including things like damage to cities, property, or crops as well as death, physical harm, and other physical suffering among the Israelites stemming from enemy military action. It would be entirely unwarranted to connect this “quicken” to a supernatural transformation of the soul, the will, or the mind as described in Calvinist doctrine.

Third, we can also identify the psalmist’s intended meaning in the phrases “So will not we go back from thee” and “we will call upon thy name.” The phrase “so will not we go back from thee” is a reference to how God was correcting Israel by means of this suffering at the hands of her enemies. This correction was intended to teach Israel not to turn “back from” or away from God. By the phrase “and we will call upon thy name,” the psalmist means to say that the people will worship God if he delivers and restores the wrongs done to them. After all, this was God’s intent. He allowed Israel’s enemies to harm her in order to teach her not to betray him and so the psalmist is saying that this has been accomplished. Consequently, with God’s purpose now accomplished and the correction received, the psalmist is petitioning God that if he removes the punishment and restores Israel, they will walk uprightly and worship only him. Most importantly, notice here that it is the painful punishment that corrects the people back to serving God, not an impartation of grace as taught in the Calvinist scheme. Since the context is still

entirely about God punishing for correction, God restoring the harm done to Israel during the punishment, the people being corrected by the punishment, and the people being thankful for the restoration, there is no warrant for asserting Calvinist notions of irresistible direct action from God on the will or soul of the people in order to cause them to turn to Him.

Fourth, notice the order of events in this prayer. The petition comes before the quickening and before the anticipated “calling upon God.” This is contrary to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity which states that sinners are incapable of choosing God or inclining themselves even a little toward God in preparation for salvation. This doctrine of total depravity is logically anticipatory of the necessarily related Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace. In short, this Psalm cannot be asserting that God causes men to repent and believe through an impartation of irresistible grace, quickening, or enlightenment acting directly on their souls because the entire Psalm begins with the psalmist already seeking God and petitioning Him to save them before the quickening even potentially occurs.

#### **Note 16 – Psalm 119:73, 80,133**

Psalm 119:73 declares, “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.” Although Calvinists might vaguely try to lay hold of the phrase “thy hands have made me and fashioned me,” there is no apparent or necessary Calvinist implication here.

First, this passage can be taken literally in reference to the physical formation of the author’s body. It was normal to give God general credit the formation of one’s body. (See for example Job 10:11-12, Job 33:4-6, Psalm 139:13-16, and Jeremiah 1:5. Notice that Job 33:6 demonstrates that such language is intended to credit God for the formation of each individual person primarily by indirect extension due to God’s formation of Adam. Otherwise, we’d be forced to conclude that Job is saying God formed him separately in a creation even parallel to Adam’s creation in Genesis 2.)

Second, this passage can be taken as a metaphorical reference to God’s attempts to instruct mankind in general and any instructions given to a particular individual. In fact, this Psalm frequently mentions that God’s word has been a guide and petitions God to continue to give guidance in the future. Not only does the second half of verse 73 petition, “give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments,” but phrases like “teaching statutes” (v. 64 and 68), “teaching good judgment and knowledge” (v. 66), or “that I might learn thy statutes” (v. 71) occur 4 times in the surrounding verses.

A couple points are worth making in regard to the idea of God providing guidance in this Psalm.

First, petitions like these obviously imply that the Psalm’s author did not regard God’s continued guidance as guaranteed or automatic. It is noteworthy here that

the psalmist not only prays for guidance but also for mercy (v. 76-77), which demonstrates that the psalmist did not consider his own forgiveness to be guaranteed or assured either. These facts rule out any correspondence to the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints, which asserts that God will always continue His effectual grace toward the elect without fail until the end.

Second, in Calvinist teachings, God's steering and controlling of human decision-making is by definition universal and constant. Even when Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, Calvinists assert that God not only allowed this evil act but rather that God unilaterally caused Joseph's brothers to conceive of the act and to irresistibly carry it out. (Regarding Genesis 50:20, the freewill interpretation simply has God allowing the evil act initiated by the independent freewill of Joseph's brothers.) The Potter's clay metaphor is also typically interpreted by Calvinists to mean that God not only makes the good man good, but the evil man evil. (A freewill interpretation of this sees God as exerting effort to correct all men, but since the freewill position does not insist that God is irresistible, the wickedness of men is contrary to God's efforts. And consequently, God sets aside the wicked for undesirable ends due to their resistance.)

In contrast, God's act of "making and fashioning" here in Psalm 119 is not guaranteed to be constant or exerted upon every man. Consequently, it is clearly not equivalent to Calvinism's monergistic, unilateral direction of all human choices.

Third, the fact that the author of this Psalm is petitioning God for guidance so that he might better walk in God's commandments contradicts Calvinist doctrines of total depravity, which denies that man is capable of voluntarily initiating any movement toward God. On the other hand, if this "mercy" doesn't refer to saving grace, then the Calvinist may avoid any direct contradiction. However, the Calvinist would be forced to either pick and choose in a highly selective manner which parts of this Psalm to cite and which to avoid. And ultimately, the psalmist would provide further reason not to think this Psalm is affirming Calvinist doctrines at all.

Fourth, we must ask what the psalmist is thinking when he write these verses. In order for this Psalm to be consistent with Calvinism, God would have to be causing the psalmist to petition God to continue to guide his decisions. Not only does God direct all human decisions but particularly all righteous human decisions such as prayer and especially those human decisions that incline us toward God's mercy and truth. And as we have said, this petition is necessarily based on the presumption that God's guidance might not continue. But it seems self-contradicting for God to be dispensing grace that causes a man to doubt that God's grace will automatically continue. And it also seems self-contradicting to have a scenario like this in which a Calvinist doesn't realize God's grace toward him would automatically persevere or that his prayer itself is proof that God's grace was continuing to act upon him. After all, if the psalmist had a Calvinist perspective as he prayed this prayer, he would not have had any occasion or reason to even ask these things in the first place because God's guidance would be

unavoidable, because his desire to pray would be proof itself that God was already granting the request, and because the doctrine of perseverance would demand that God could never cease from doing these things that He had already begun to do for the psalmist. Consequently, the thoughts expressed in this Psalm indicate that the psalmist was not writing or thinking from within a Calvinist perspective. Rather, he was writing from a perspective in which men prayed and inclined themselves toward without God's grace causing it in any internal sense and in which God's grace toward men was neither guaranteed nor universal to all men. And if the psalmist himself is not a Calvinist, then it is utterly flawed interpretative methodology to insert Calvinism into the psalmist's words. That would be text book eisegesis.

Moving on, we can also examine verse 80 of Psalm 119.

**Psalm 119:80** Let my heart (03820) be sound (08549) in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed (0954).

The critical phrasing in this verse is "let me heart be sound in thy statutes." To the Calvinist, this phrase might suggest a petition for God to make a man's heart inclined to righteousness.

However, if that were true, it would imply either that the psalmist does not already have a sound heart or that the psalmist does not believe his heart would necessarily continue in soundness. The first option would disprove Calvinism's doctrine of total depravity because it would require that the psalmist is inclining himself toward God before God has made his heart sound. The second option would disprove Calvinism's doctrine of perseverance of the saints because it would imply that any previous action God had taken to make the psalmist's heart sound was not guaranteed to continue.

Moreover, when we examine the vocabulary here, we see that the Hebrew word for "heart" is "leb" (03820), which can mean, "inner man, mind, will, heart, or understanding." The Hebrew word for "sound" is "tamiym" (08549), which means "complete, whole, or entire." Given this vocabulary, it is very reasonable to conclude that this Psalm is expressing a petition for God to give him wisdom and knowledge so that he will have a complete understanding or complete knowledge of God's statutes. Asking God for wisdom or information is a common theme in prayers and in no way requires Calvinist concepts. Consequently, there is nothing in verse 80 that corroborates Calvinism.

Next, we turn to verse 133 of Psalm 119.

**Psalm 119:133** Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

Here we can examine the phrase, "let not any iniquity have dominion over me." It might be tempting for a Calvinist to take this phrase as a plea for God to prevent us from sinning or being servants to sin. Of course, in this sense, the term

“iniquity” would be a reference to the concept of sin or wrongdoing as a general type of action.

However, there are at least two other valid interpretations. First, this phrase could easily be a petition for God to forgive sin. Without God’s atonement or forgiveness, sinners will be subjected to death and kept from God’s eternal fellowship.

Second, and perhaps more accurately, this phrase is likely a petition for God to keep the psalmist from being under the authority of wicked men. The very next phrase in verse 134 corroborates this meaning. Verse 134 asks, “Deliver me from the oppression of man.” Other nearby verses also comment on this theme. Verse 121 asks, “leave me not to mine oppressors.” Verse 122 asks, “let not the proud oppress me.” In this immediate context and with such explicit precedent in the very same chapter, it is clear that verse 133 is most likely a petition for God to simply deliver the psalmist from wicked men, not a petition for God to keep him from sinning or cause him to choose righteousness.

### **Note 17 – Psalm 131:3**

Verse 3 of Psalm 131 states, “Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and for ever.” While it is possible that a Calvinist might suggest this is a petition for God to cause Israelites to trust Him by means of an internal influence on the decision-making of men, such a conclusion is not warranted. First, even if the psalmist is petitioning for God to cause Israel to trust Him, this verse does not speak of the mechanism by which this is accomplished. God could simply be causing Israel to trust Him by continuing to provide, protect, and deliver Israel, all of which are external actions and none of which require the idea that God causes men to choose things by acting internally on their decision-making faculties. Second, this verse is most likely instructional as are other portions of the Psalms. Consider Psalm 129:1, which says, “May Israel say,” which is an encouragement for Israelites to make this confession. Likewise, chapter 127:1 states, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain.” This is clearly a proverb intended to pass along understanding to men, not a petition to God. Lastly, Psalm 122:6 instructs people to, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” This is quite obviously not a petition for God to pray for Jerusalem. In other words, Psalm 131:3 is meant to instruct hearers (or readers) to trust in the Lord. In this sense, it is not a petition to God at all. Consequently, there is no expectation here that God will cause Israel to trust him.

### **Note 18 – Psalm 132:9**

In Psalm 132:9, we find the phrase, “9 Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.” The previous verse begins with “Arise, O LORD,” which implies that verse 9 is a petition addressed to God and

asking God to clothe his priests with righteousness and to cause his saints to shout for joy. Does this imply that the psalmist believes and expects that God internally acts upon the decision-making faculties in the mind of people to cause them to behave righteously or to be joyful or give praise?

First, let's start with the second phrase, which says, "let thy saints shout for joy." It is clear that the psalmist is praying for God to fulfill his promises to David. One of the promises in view here concerns God dwelling in the habitation that David intended to make for Him in Zion. We see this promise invoked at length in verses 2-8, which concludes with a petition for God to "Arise into His rest" along with the Ark of the Covenant. This is clearly a reference to God dwelling in either the tabernacle or the permanent Temple building where the ark dwelled within the innermost room. We see this promise again mentioned in verses 13-14, which say, "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." In fact, God goes on to say in verse 16, "I will also clothe her priest with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy."

In this context, it is clear not only what is causing the people to rejoice but also how God is bringing about this rejoicing. The psalmist is effectively petitioning God to fulfill His promise to David to dwell in Zion in the midst of His people. And the psalmist asserts that if God does come to dwell in Zion, the people will rejoice. Thus, it is God's action of coming to dwell with the people that causes the people to rejoice. This is an external event. There is no connotation here that God uses an internal or irresistible influence on the decision-making faculties of men to bring about the rejoicing described in this Psalm.

Second, what can we say concerning the righteousness of the priests? Here again we find plausible alternatives in biblical precedent that have nothing to do with Calvinist notions of an internal, irresistible influence causing men to choose righteousness.

Leviticus 16, God speaks to Moses after Aaron's two sons die for making offerings inappropriately before God in the tabernacle. God's instructions mention the mercy seat upon the ark (verse 2), God appear in the tabernacle shrouded in a cloud (verse 2), the priest purifying himself in a bath before putting on holy clothing when he approach God in the tabernacle (verse 3), the priest making an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people (verses 5-10), the priest offering a bullock to atone for the sins of "himself" and "for his house" (verse 11), the priest making atonement for the people after his own house has been atoned for (verse 15), and various other provisions for making atonement involving the ark, the holy place, and the altar (verses 13-18).

Given the fact that Psalm 132 is centrally concerned with God dwelling among His people in the Temple made in Zion, it is not surprising to find language here pertaining to the priests and their atoning rituals, including their clothing. In particular, it is relevant that Leviticus 16 specifically instructs the priest to make atonement for himself and his family before making atonement for the people. It

is also relevant that Leviticus 16 begins with a reminder of two priests (Aaron's two sons) whom God did not accept but killed. In this context, it can easily and naturally be concluded that the psalmist is praying for God not only to come and dwell at His temple in Zion but also that God will accept the offering to atone for the priests themselves, thus accepting the priests as righteous. Once the priests have been accepted by God, then they are able to perform their intercessory role on behalf of the people. The psalmist is poetically petitioning God to accept atonement for the priests. Moreover, the psalmist petitions God to accept the priests by reminding God that He has already made an oath and promised to do so as can be seen in verses 11-16. It is by accepting the atonement at the hands of the priests that God makes the priests righteous. Overall, the psalmist is essentially asking God, "Dwell here just as you promised you would. Accept the atoning work of the priests, just as you promised you would. And when the people see you do these things, they will rejoice in you." Only if we ignore established cultural precedent and the central rituals related to tabernacle and Temple worship is it possible to mistakenly insert Calvinist notions of God causing men to choose righteousness by means of an internal, irresistible influence on their decision-making faculties.

#### **Note 19 – Psalm 138:8**

Psalm 138:8 states, "The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: they mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands." Certainly, these words express the psalmist's faith that God will not turn away from the mercy God has shown him in the past. But do they convey that the psalmist understands God's mercy in terms of a guaranteed perseverance of the saints, as Calvinists suggest? Clearly, the end of this same verse equally expresses the psalmist's apprehension that God could possibly forsake the works of His hands, that works which God had begun, God could also cease working on. The psalmist's apprehensive petition at the end of the verse prevents us from concluding that the psalmist perceived God's continued mercy as guaranteed. While he expresses his faith that God will continue to be merciful toward him personally, he is equally clear that God did not necessarily do so in all cases. This makes this Psalm untenable as support for Calvinism's doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

#### **Note 20 – Psalm 139:13**

Verse 13 declares that God "hast possessed my reins." The English word "reins" can refer to the leather straps used to direct horses and other animals. However, the Hebrew word here is "kilyah" (03629), which means, "kidneys." While it can have a figurative meaning in reference to the "seat of emotions," it is clearly not a reference to the idea of a device used to control animals. The Hebrew word translated as "possessed" is "qanah" (07068), which can either mean "to acquire" or "to create." Here it is noteworthy that this psalmist is describing his formation from conception in his mother's womb. In fact, verse 13 refers to the "mother's

womb.” Verse 14 describes how he was “wonderfully made.” Verse 15 describes how his “substance was not hid” from God when he was being “made” in this secret or unseen place within his mother’s body. Verse 16 also describes how all of his “members” or parts were “fashioned.” Clearly in this context, the opening half of verse 13 is not a statement about God controlling the psalmist like a man controls an animal. Rather, it is about acknowledging God’s credit for the formation of his body and oversight of the whole process, including his kidneys and other organs and parts. (We see similar sentiments in places like Jeremiah 1:5.) There is no hint here of Calvinist doctrines of irresistible grace controlling men’s decisions.

### **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 22 – Psalm 143:8-12**

The key phrases to analyze in this Psalm can be found in verses 8 and 11.

**Psalm 143:8** Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. 9 Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. 10 Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. 11 Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. 12 And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.

The term “quicken” in verse 11 might appeal to Calvinists as a potential synonym for the impartation of irresistible grace. And the same might be true for the requests in verse 8 for God to “cause me to hear thy lovingkindness” and to “cause me to know the way wherein I should walk.” But in order to arrive at Calvinist conclusions, we must first make some unnecessary assumptions.

First, Calvinist interpretations of this Psalm require assuming that the word “hear” in verse 8 necessarily conveys the idea of “obeying.” So long as it conveys the simpler concept of hearing sounds or speech in a normal, literal way, there is not Calvinist implication whatsoever. We often use the word “hearing” to convey the idea of “complying,” but it is not by any means required. For example, if you yell in your roommate's ear early in the morning, you will cause him to hear your wakeup call. But that does not mean he will get out of bed. Likewise, God could speak to the psalmist audibly or prompt a prophet to do so and we could readily and accurately describe this as causing the psalmist to hear God's appeal by the mere fact that the psalmist's ears audibly pick up the sound of the words. We have to assume the critical component in which hearing becomes irresistible. Otherwise, this verse remains merely a petition from the psalmist for God to provide reminders of His word, to set reminders in his path early in the day.

Second, similar conclusions are applicable concerning the phrase “cause me to know the way wherein I should walk.” This phrase could have been phrased, “cause me to walk in the way wherein I should walk.” But it isn't. This tells us that the psalmist isn't asking for God to cause his compliance, but merely asking God to provide knowledge and reminders of the truth. This conclusion is confirmed in verse 10 in which the psalmist requests for God to “teach me to do they will.” We have to assume that the “leading” at the end of verse 10 or the “hearing” in the beginning of verse 8 are irresistible, internal influences exerted by God on men's decision-making faculties. But the Psalm itself does not require the irresistible control. It merely reflects a request for God to provide teaching, knowledge, wisdom, information, and reminders of his truth. The psalm simply does not specify by what means God will provide such instruction, whether by a

Calvinistic internal, irresistible impulse or by external factors such as delivering a message by means of a prophet or sending a teacher like Philip who was sent to the Ethiopian eunuch and to Azotus in Acts 8:26-40. In short, the text does not prove or require Calvinist notions. It makes simple, perfect sense without them.

Third, we can also address the meaning of the term “quicken” in verse 11. The Hebrew word here is “chayah” (02421), which means “to live, remain alive, sustain life, restore to life or health, etc.” We should also consider the immediate textual details. The end of verse 11 petitions, “bring my soul out of trouble.” And verse 12 asks God to “cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul.” It is clear that by this time in the Psalm, the psalmist is no longer talking specifically about God teaching or providing knowledge. Instead, he has turned to a familiar theme in the psalms pertaining to his actual life being in physical danger. Consequently, there is no basis for insisting that the word “quicken” is a reference to God imparting an irresistible grace given the fact that literally preserving his physical life from harm is immediately in view.

In short, this Psalm does not prove or require Calvinist notions. It makes simple, perfect sense without them.

### **Note 23 – Proverbs 30:8**

In Proverbs 30:8, a man identified as Agur the son of Jakeh petitions God, saying, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.” Should this request be understood as a petition for God to remove vanity and lying from his heart and his desires? The context argues against such a proposition.

The second half of the verse entails a very similar plea in which the speaker requests that God will not provide him with too much wealth. Wealth is not an internal thing that God removes from the heart of a man. It is an external thing that the speaker is asking God to keep out of the external circumstances that surround him. The fear is that being surrounded by wealth will be a temptation that might lead him into sin. We can similarly interpret the request in the first half of the verse as a request for God to keep the speaker away from certain external influences that can corrupt a man. Here the speaker is petitioning God to keep lies and vain things away from the circumstances of his daily life. Just as he desires for God to keep excessive wealth away from him, he desires for God to keep vain activities and deceiving people and false wisdom away from him.

Consequently, this petition does not reflect an expectation for God to remove sin from his heart or his desires or his choices, but instead a petition for God to keep his external situation free from distractions and temptations. In fact, this kind of petition inherently tells us that the speaker did not perceive God could or would remove a man’s own wicked appetites or choices from him. After all, if the speaker expected that God would simply remove wicked desires or choices from his heart, there would be no need for God to withhold riches from him since no

amount of wealth would be sufficient to lead him into evil or distraction after God had cleansed him from wicked inclinations.