



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

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

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

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

Number two, we start by noticing that by this point in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah has already referred multiple times to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the subsequent exile of the Israelite kingdom of Judah. Chapter

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

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

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

**Deuteronomy 28:36** The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and

there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. 37 And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.

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

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

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

**Note 25 – Jeremiah 10:23**

**Jeremiah 10:23** O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; *It is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

In this verse, the prophet declares that the “way of man is not in himself” and that “it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” For the Calvinist, perhaps this might sound like an assertion that God controls man’s choices by exerting some irresistible, influence over man man’s decision making faculties.

However, the context of the surrounding chapters tells us that this was not Jeremiah’s intended meaning. Jeremiah 3:17 condemns the people of Israel saying that they “follow the dictates of their evil hearts.” We find similar language in Jeremiah 7, 9, and 11. Jeremiah 7:23-24 describes the people of Israel, saying, “This is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.” Notice that once again here we have the idea of following the “counsels and dictates of their own evil hearts” in contrast to obeying what God has said. Jeremiah 9:14 similarly describes how the people, “walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them.” Again, this verse refers to the idea of the people of Israel following “the dictates of their own hearts.” Perhaps even more explicitly, Jeremiah 11:8 likewise criticizes the people, saying, “they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done.” Notice that like chapter 7:23-24, here we have a direct contrast between obeying the commands of the Lord and his covenant or following the dictates of your own heart.

This phrase, “the dictates of his own heart,” also bears a similarity to other passages outside of Jeremiah. Deuteronomy 12:8, for example, commands the Israelites that, “You shall not at all do as we are doing here today – every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes.” And Judges 17:6 and 21:25 both record that, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

As we can see, the Israelites had an established concept in which individuals sometimes determined right and wrong, not by what God had said, but by his own opinion, the dictates of his own heart, what seemed right in his own eyes. And these other chapters in Jeremiah specifically define the phrase “following the dictates of one’s own heart” in contrast to obeying God’s instructions. Consequently, when we read Jeremiah say that “the way of a man is not in himself, it is not in a man to direct his own steps,” we ought to interpret such language in terms of these other nearby and previously establish Jewish concepts. Jeremiah’s point is not that God controls the decisions that men make, whether good or evil, which would again make God the author of sin. Rather, Jeremiah’s point is that if men want to be rightly guided, they must not look within themselves to either own opinions and surmising but to what God has said in his

Word. And this is why Jeremiah follows verse 23 by asking God to correct him in verse 24. This entire set of verses is about looking to God for instruction and acknowledging that your own opinion is not sufficient.

Moreover, since verse 23 is clearly intended to identify the source of truth as God's Word rather than man's opinions, there is no reason to suppose a reference to Calvinistic monergism in which God exerts irresistible, internal influence over the decision-making faculties of men. Jeremiah is simply not asserting that whatever way a man takes in life, it is God who controls the decisions that lead him along that path. This isn't about "whatever path we take" being God's choice, it is about the one correct path being a matter of God's Word rather than human opinion.

### **Note 26 – Jeremiah 13:22-23**

**Jeremiah 10:22** And if you say in your heart, "Why have these things come upon me?" For the greatness of your iniquity Your skirts have been uncovered, Your heels made bare. 23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

It should be noted up front that it is not entirely clear that these verses are a prayer at all. They may very well be a declaration from God himself rather than a prayer from Jeremiah. However, it is worth commenting on their contents just in case.

If this is a prayer, the potentially Calvinistic inferences stem from verse 23. The Calvinist doctrine of total depravity asserts that each human being is guilty from the moment of conception because we have inherited Adam's guilt and that, insomuch as our own free will is concerned, we are also inherently incapable of turning from sin or inclining ourselves toward God in any way. The Calvinist might interpret verse 23 as a support for this utter inability for a human being to repent from evil to good of his own voluntary will.

However, there are a few noteworthy pieces of evidence worth considering.

First, the Hebrew word translated as "accustomed to" is "limmuwd" (03928), which means, "taught, learned, disciple." Here we have our first incompatibility with the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. As we have said, total depravity asserts that men inherit our sinfulness and inability to incline ourselves toward God from Adam at the moment of our conception. But this verse isn't talking about something inherited. It is clearly talking about learned behavior, a state or condition that people have come to by means of being taught and practiced in it. Yet, if someone needs to be taught something in order to be accustomed to it, then it is evident they are not naturally or automatically inclined or destined to do it from birth. Teaching and discipling pertain to behaviors that are new and that need to be developed, but which were not present at first. If they were naturally or automatically inclined to it, there would be no need for teaching to make them

accustomed to it. So, in this way, this passage actually contradicts Calvinism's doctrine of total depravity.

Second, the Hebrew word translated as "do good" in verse 23 is "yatab" (03190), which means "to be good, be pleasing, be well." It is noteworthy that elsewhere in Jeremiah, "yatab" is used to express God's command for the people to be better. In Jeremiah 7:3, God says, "Amend (yatab, 03190) your ways and your doings." And chapter 7:5 says, "if ye thoroughly amend (yatab, 03190) your ways and your doings." Since elsewhere in Jeremiah, God expresses the possibility that the people can be good despite their current state of sin, it seems overreaching to insist that the use of "yatab" in Jeremiah 13:23 is meant to absolutely declare that men are utterly unable to change their behavior. It would seem at least more reasonable to infer a moderate scenario in which men are sometimes able to change their sinful ways and at other times are not, depending on the circumstances including how thoroughly steeped in sinful habits they are. The longer and more deep the habit, the more practically impossible it becomes for man to change his own ways. But this is a matter of pragmatism impacting probability. It is not a matter of inherent impossibility or absolutes dictated by inheritance at conception as Calvinism teaches.

Third, we should note that this verse does not speak to all men, but only regarding certain sinful men, in this case a good majority of the people of the nation of Judah. Jeremiah, for example, is not included in the group condemned here. Obviously other prophets and righteous saints of the past are not meant to be included either. Consequently, this verse is not capable of supporting the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, which by necessity pertains to all men, not just some. The maximum that this verse could attest to is that some men are incapable of turning from sin. But that wouldn't affirm very much about the how's or why's that create this dilemma. And while Calvinists might assert that godly men like Jeremiah are made exceptions by virtue of irresistible grace, there is likewise nothing in this passage that touches on such a concept. It is a simple fact that this verse says absolutely nothing whatsoever about the extent to which other men, such as Jeremiah, who were perhaps not so steeped in sinful habits, are capable of repenting and doing good. This means that in addition to the problem posed by the use of the word "limmuwd," there is also a lot that Calvinists have to assume into this verse beyond anything mentioned in the content of the verse itself.

Fourth, while "yatab" can convey the idea of "doing" and is sometimes translated in that way (see Genesis 4:7 and 32:12 for example), it is adequately translated as "being" good in the sense of being "pleasing" or acceptable (see Genesis 34:18, 41:37). Consequently, it would be equally valid to translate the last half of verse 23 as, "Then may you be pleasing [in God's sight] who have learned to do evil." Here we have added the phrase "in God's sight" which we believe is inherently implied by the text. If the Israelites are deemed good or not, it is in the eyes of God and not some other party that the prophet is describing. More importantly, since this word "yatab" can refer to what someone "is," or in other words what state or condition they are in as seen in God's eyes, another interpretation becomes apparent. Blemishes, spots, and dark stains are established metaphors for

sin in Israelite culture. We see this connection clearly in 1 Peter 1:19, where he describes Christ as a lamb “without blemish and without spot,” which of course refers to Christ being without sin. In 2 Peter 2:1 and 13, Peter describes the wicked behavior of false teachers and describes them as “spots and blemishes” among the Christian community. Jude 1:12 is very similar. 2 Peter 3:14 goes on to instruct Christians to “be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” 1 Timothy 6:14 commands, “keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing.” By contrast, whiteness was a symbol of purity. Isaiah 1:18 declares, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Daniel 11:35 describes how some shall be tried “to purge and to make them white.” Similarly, Daniel 12:10 goes on to say, “Many shall be purified and made white.” Consequently, this passage from Jeremiah may simply convey that the Israelites were stained with sin and were as unable to remove their stain as a man is unable to remove pigment from his skin or leopard the spots in his fur.

Although the shift in meaning from “doing good” to “being pleasing” may at first seem subtle, it makes a significant difference. If Jeremiah merely means to refer to the stain of sin in contrast to being pleasing or acceptable in God’s eyes, then Jeremiah 13:23 refers to nothing more than the need for atonement. It would affirm that humans cannot atone for themselves but need God to provide a means of forgiveness. Such concepts, of course, do not in any way infer Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity, which only potentially arise if “yatab” is translated in the strictest, inherent absolute sense of not being able to “do” righteousness after sin.

Fifth, the fact that Jeremiah is talking about atonement is further confirmed by verses 26-27 of the same chapter. Here God speaks of “uncovering” the sins of Jerusalem, which seems similar to the idea of guilt as a stain or a spot in full view of the world. And God goes on to ask, “O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?” Like spots and blemishes, the idea of being “made clean” refers to the idea of being atoned for or forgiven. 2 Samuel 22:21 records, “The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands.” Job 11:4 reflects similar sentiments, saying, “My doctrine is pure, And I am clean in your eyes.” Job 17:9, declares, “Yet the righteous will hold to his way, And he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger. Psalm 51:2 and 7 petition God, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin...Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Isaiah 1:16 declares, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.” Not only does Isaiah confirm that such language pertains to men’s condition “in God’s eyes,” but it also affirms that God saw it as possible for men to turn from sin. And, of course, all of these verses demonstrate that the idea of being made clean pertains to forgiveness and atonement. Consequently, the reference to Jerusalem being made clean in Jeremiah 13 once again confirms that Jeremiah is talking about God providing atonement, not about the inability of sinners to repent of their own free will.

Sixth, the fact that Jeremiah is talking about atonement is further confirmed a second time in chapter 18, when Jeremiah himself petitions God, saying, “forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight.” This idea of blotting again presents the essential analogy in which the guilt of sin is a stain or a mark and atonement is removing or covering over that stain or mark.

Seventh, Jeremiah 6:19-20 declares that God was determined to bring calamity upon his people as punishment and would not accept sacrifices to atone for them on this occasion. Likewise, in Jeremiah 11:14, God tells Jeremiah not to pray to intercede for the people. Likewise, in chapter 14:11-12, God again instructs Jeremiah not to pray for the Israelites only this time he specifies a reason, saying, “Do not pray for this people, for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.” It is clear from these comments that God is refusing to accept the divinely prescribed sacrifices for atoning His people. These statements provide a backdrop that further removes any contextual need to suppose that Jeremiah’s point in chapter 13:23 is that sinners are incapable of repenting. Instead, this backdrop further corroborate that Jeremiah’s point was simply that sinners could not atone for the stains of their sin due to the fact that God was no longer providing or accepting atonement for them.

In summary, the use of “yatab” elsewhere in Jeremiah shows that God expected it was possible for sinners to change and become “yatab,” which rules out the idea of absolute or utter impossibility. The use of “limmuwd” in Jeremiah 13:23 already reveals that this verse is incompatible with the idea of total depravity in the first place. And the established concepts of stains and blemishes, whiteness, and cleanness in connection to atonement from God demonstrate that the Ethiopian and the leopard are not references to an inherited inability to repent but to the fact that only God can provide atonement. Therefore, we ought to instead simply translate Jeremiah 13 as a reference to the established, cultural concept of the need for God to provide atonement to remove the guilt of sin rather than the unnecessary and incompatible Calvinist doctrine that men are utterly unable to do righteousness from birth as a result of Adam’s sin or to change their behavior away from sin.

### **Note 27 – Jeremiah 31:18-19**

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

This passages is hardly even worth noting in this study. It is questionable whether or not this is actually a prayer or just a dialog spoken by God for illustrative

purposes. Still, if it is counted as a legitimate representation of a prayer, a Calvinist might find some appeal in the petition, “turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented.” Does this phrasing suggest an internal control that God exercises to irresistibly and unilaterally direct the decision-making faculties of men to cause them to repent?

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

#### Note 28 – Lamentations 3:37-39

**Lamentations 3:37 Who is he *that* saith, and it cometh to pass, *when* the Lord commandeth *it* not? 38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? 39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?**

For a Calvinist, the wording of verses 37-39 may suggest that all things happen by God’s unilateral control. For example, when verse 37 asks, “Who is he that saith, and it come to pass, when the Lord commanded it not?” a Calvinist might interpret this to mean that no man can say or do anything other than what the Lord has decreed to occur. Likewise, when verse 38 asks, “Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?” a Calvinist might interpret to mean that all things, whether good or evil, have been decreed by God.

However, a close examination of the context reveals that Calvinists would be superimposing their own ideas into the text.

First, the historical context is one in which the Israelites have sinned and as a consequence for their sin, God has punished them with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and sent them into exile. We find these things referred to directly here in verses 47-49, which refers to “Desolation and destruction” and “the destruction of the daughter of my people.” Verse 51 clarifies “the daughters of my city,” no doubt a reference to Jerusalem. In fact, chapters 1 and 2

repeatedly mention Jerusalem and Zion by name and describe their destruction (see chapter 1:7-8, 13, 18 and chapter 2:1, 4-6, 22.) In particular, chapter 2:17 describes the destruction of Jerusalem as something that God devised and “commanded in the days of old.” No doubt, this is a reference to the ancient prophecy of Deuteronomy 28:35-36, 41, 49 in which God promised that if Israel sinned, he would smite them and bring them and their king into exile in a foreign nation. In addition, chapter 1:8 explains “Jerusalem has grievously sinned, therefore she is removed.” Even verse 39 of chapter 3 informs us that verses 37-38 are referring to God’s punishment for sins.

Second, the preceding book of Jeremiah recounts the many prophetic warnings that God gave concerning this impending destruction and concludes with the destruction of the city and Temple. Throughout the book, Jeremiah has to contend with false prophets. We see this in chapter 5:31, 11:21, 14:14-16, 23:16, 25-26, 32, 27:10, 14-16, and 29:9, 21. Jeremiah’s message was one predicting the coming destruction. But these false prophets gave a contrary message, claiming that there would be peace. Chapter 14 provides an excellent example. We’ll start in verse 11 with the Lord’s word to Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah 14:11 Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for *their* good. 12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. 13 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. 14 Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. 15 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. 16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.**

What impact does this context have on the meaning of Lamentations 3:37-38? Notice that the language of Lamentations 3:37 parallels God’s description of the false prophets in Jeremiah 14:14. Lamentations 3:37 says, “Who *is* he *that* saith, and it cometh to pass, *when* the Lord commandeth *it* not?” Jeremiah 14 describes the false prophets saying things that God “commanded not, neither spoke unto them.” Consequently, Lamentations 3:37 is not a sweeping assertion that in order for any (and every) event to occur in history that event must be unilaterally decreed by God. Rather, it is a highly narrow assertion that prophecies alone do not come to pass if the prophecy does not come from God. This verse make no claims whatsoever about all events in history. It only reaffirms an ancient standard given in Deuteronomy 18:21-22, which delineates for the Israelites the difference between true prophets and false prophets: a prophecy that is not from

God does not come to pass. More specifically, in light of Deuteronomy 28, this verse is also asking how sin and unfaithfulness could lead to peace, when God had commanded that sin would lead to destruction and exile? In short, this verse is only about prophecies. For Calvinists to apply this to every event in history and every human choice is completely unnecessary and overreaching wishful thinking.

Why is Lamentations mentioning false prophecies here? First, no doubt the lament over the destruction of the city was puzzling to many who had listened to those prophets who predicted peace, contrary to Jeremiah's message. It makes sense that Lamentations would address the failure of this erroneous expectation. Second, we might also notice from Jeremiah 14, that God specifically promises to these prophets that, "By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword." In other words, their false prophecies contributed to God's decision to destroy the city and the people. So, in that sense, it is quite relevant for Lamentations to mention their false prophecies in the immediate context of verse 39 which explains that God punished them for their sins. The false prophecies (and belief of the false prophecies instead of the true prophecies) were some of the sins that resulted in punishment.

These historical and contextual considerations also provide perfect clarity concerning the meaning of verse 38, which says, "Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?" Once again, this language is not in reference to all events of human history. Rather, it is a reference to God acting as a judge issuing decrees from his mouth concerning the deeds of his people. Here again we see the author of Lamentations has in mind Deuteronomy 28, which we mentioned earlier. Deuteronomy 28 is comprised of 68 verses outlining two possible scenarios. It proclaims the blessings God set forth for the Israelites if they would obey. And it proclaims the curses and punishment that God set forth for the Israelites if they would disobey and turn away from him. When Lamentations asks, "Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?" it is rhetorically reminding the Israelites that God is their judge and, as a judge, He is capable of rewarding them with good things or punishing them with bad things. Or in other words, why should they be surprised that God punished them given the fact that God had decreed both good and evil in passages like Deuteronomy 28? Like verse 37, we see that verse 38 of Lamentations 3 is not meant to apply to all events and human choices in history. Rather, it is meant to refer to specific occasions and actions of God's judgment. The fact that God is not universally or always judging and bringing about consequent events is demonstrated by the lengthy period of time that God gave to Israel to repent before bringing this destruction and the paramount, singular nature of the destruction itself. Israelites would not have seen this as a constant activity of God, but rather an occasional one, thereby leaving the great majority of other events and occasions undetermined by divine decree.

Lastly, we should note that this passage is describing an inherently conditional process. For Calvinists, the idea that God is responding conditionally may seem

absolutely heretical. It undermines their version of God's sovereignty, which goes beyond jurisdictional authority to judge and punish to include the extraneous notion that all of God's choices must be free from any outside influences such as human choices. But, as we noted, verse 39 clearly depicts God's actions as a response to sin, not as the cause of sin. (This underlying contextual theme is repeated again in chapter 4:11-14, 22.) God is acting conditionally based upon whether or not men (and specifically Israel as a nation) chose to sin or be faithful.

(In addition, in the KJV, NIV, and NASB the immediately preceding statements in verses 32 describe the Lord as "not willingly" or not desiring to cause grievous punishment to men or crush the land's prisoners. Although it may be possible to translate these verses in an alternate way, these common translations indicate that God did not want to punish Israel. He would have preferred something else, but ultimately His judgment was mandated by their choice to sin. If these translations are correct, it would provide additional support to verse 39, which already establishes that God is acting conditionally in response to men in Lamentations 3, rather than unilaterally and unconditionally.)

**Lamentations 3:32** But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. **33** For **he doth not afflict willingly** nor grieve the children of men. **34** To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, **35** To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, **36** To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

### Note 29 – Lamentations 5:21

**Lamentations 5:21 Turn (07725) thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned (07725); renew** our days as of old.

The critical phrase in verse 21 reads, "Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old." Is the author of Lamentations here referring to God imparting an irresistible grace as described by Calvinism that acts on the inner decision-making faculties in the minds of men and unilaterally causes them to turn toward God? Does the word "renew" in the following phrases refer to a renewal of the heart caused by this kind of irresistible, inward direction from God?

First, we should notice that there isn't even a mention of words or concepts like "heart" or "spirit" in this verse. It simply says, "Turn thou us" and "we shall be turned." Second, the author does specify what he wants God to "renew," only he identifies it as their "days" rather than any reference to their minds, wills, hearts, or spirits. The use of the term "day" suggests something entirely different from the Calvinistic unilateral renewal of irresistible grace.

And third, the Hebrew word translated as "turn" is "shuwb" (No. 07725). It means "to return, turn back." It is used frequently throughout the Old Testament in the sense of literally moving from one physical location to another. (See Genesis

14:7, 17, 15:16, 24:5, Exodus 4:19, 13:17, etc.) In particular, Jeremiah 46:27 uses this same Hebrew word when God declares, “I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return (07725), and be in rest and at ease.” Likewise, Jeremiah 50:19 uses this same word again, saying, “And I will bring (No. 07725) Israel again (No. 07725) to his habitation.”

Fourth, when God brought the people out of Egypt, He told Moses that He would dwell with them in the Promised Land and it would be holy. He also told Moses that the older, doubting, sinful generation of Israelites could not enter into that Promised Land specifically because God was going to dwell there and make the land holy. Specifically, in Numbers 14:21-23, 31-32 God says that the older generation would not enter the “land” (0776) he promised them because the “land” (0776) would be filled with his glory, or his presence. In Israelite thinking, to be expelled from the land of Israel was to be cast out away from God and from the place of the Temple, God’s “house” (Isaiah 2:3, Jeremiah 35:4, Ezekiel 10:19) where God had dwelled. Conversely, to be brought back into the land from exile was to be brought back to God.

Consequently, in the context where the author is lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah to a foreign land, the connotation is a very natural or physical return. The author is looking to God to bring them back to the Land of Israel. In short, there is simply nothing in this verse that necessitates any reference to a change of the will or repentance. The context is perfectly suited to the idea of God physically bringing back the exiles to the land of Israel.

### **Note 30 – Mark 9:24 (and Luke 17:5-6)**

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

**Mark 9:**17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; 18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. 19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. 20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. 21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. 22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. 23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. 24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, **Lord, I believe; help thou mine**

**unbelief.** 25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. 26 And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. 27 But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. 28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? 29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

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

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

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

Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.” Likewise, John 12:10-11 summarizes that, “the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.”

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

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

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

Once again we look to the way that Jesus responds as a clue to how they expected him to accomplish their request. Here Jesus immediately begins to expound the amazing things that they will be able to do if they believe. This context suggests that Jesus was answering their request to “increase our faith,” by simple verbal encouragement and providing incentives to encourage them to believe. Here again, the relationship between verbal messages and faith is no secret in the New Testament.

**Romans 10:13** For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and **how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?** and **how shall they hear without a preacher?** 15 And how shall they preach, except they be

sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! 16 But **they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? 17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

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

### **Note A – Luke 11:13**

This particular notation is labeled with a letter instead of a number in order to designate its unique status. So far, this document has examined prayers that Calvinists might misconstrue as supportive of Calvinist doctrine. But this prayer in particular is problematic for Calvinism. Consequently, it is worthy of some attention but needs to be identified distinctly from other prayers that we have analyzed so far.

**Luke 11:13** If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: **how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?**

The dilemma created by this prayer is that it depicts men as petitioning God for the Holy Spirit before they have the Holy Spirit. This is all the more troublesome given the inherently salvific role that the Holy Spirit plays in the New Testament and with regard to the regeneration in particular. Within a Calvinist scenario, the doctrines of original sin and total depravity assert that all men are inherently sinners from conception and, as such, incapable of preparing, moving, or turning

themselves toward God or in any other way initiating a saving relationship with God. Consequently, for a Calvinist, regeneration comes when God unilaterally imparts the Holy Spirit to a sinner who is entirely passive in this process and has not taken any steps to trigger God sending the Holy Spirit to him. Consequently, Calvinism teaches that God must first impart the Holy Spirit to unilaterally cause any man to be enlightened and to seek God or have faith in God for anything. In short, in a Calvinist scenario we should not expect a man to be able to turn to God for anything unless he already has the Holy Spirit. Simply put, if a Calvinist rendition of regeneration were true, the scenario depicted here by Jesus would seem to be impossible even to conceive of. Conversely, if we accept Jesus' teaching here straightforwardly, it would seem that men who do not have the Holy Spirit are entirely capable of having faith in God and petitioning God for even something as inherently salvific in nature as the Holy Spirit himself. Therefore, this statement about prayer from Jesus would disprove the Calvinist doctrines of total depravity and irresistible grace.

### Note 31 – Luke 22:32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Note 32 – Acts 4:24-33

**Acts 4:24** And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: **25** Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? **26** The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. **27** For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, **28** For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. **29** And **now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,** **30** **By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.** **31** And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. **32** And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. **33** **And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus:** and great grace was upon them all.

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

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

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

Second, since the moment when supernatural ability first came upon Peter (manifest at first by speaking in foreign languages to crowds from foreign lands) Peter was no longer afraid. With every supernatural work, Peter's boldness grew: to speak before the crowds passing by, to speak in the Temple itself, and to speak in front of the religious leaders when they interrogated him. This larger pattern affirms that the prayer for boldness is not a prayer for God to put an attitude into them directly, but to give them supernatural power to prove His message, which in turn produced great confidence.

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