



Second, as already mentioned, Paul believed that faith came by hearing a preacher (Romans 10:13-17). Likewise, in Matthew 9:37-38 and Luke 10:2 Jesus instructs his followers to pray for God to send forth laborers because the harvest was ripe. This implies that even when God sees that people are ready to believe and repent, the role of the messenger is critical. We see this play out directly in Acts 10:1-48, when God goes through the effort to orchestrate Peter being brought all the way from Joppa to Caesarea in order to preach to a household of Gentiles who had been faithful adherents to Judaism prior to Christ. In verse 6, Cornelius (the head of the house) is told to send for Peter and “he shall tell thee what though oughtest to do.” In verse 22, it is explained to Peter that Cornelius was “warned from God” and “to hear words of thee.” We can see in verses 37-44 that God waited until Peter preached Jesus to them before pouring the Holy Spirit out upon these eager converts.

Third, as we have already seen in part during our discussion of Acts 4:29-33, miracles were seen as a powerful evidence to convince people of the Gospel. This concept is also established in Mark 16:16-20, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Acts 4:22-33, and Hebrews 2:3-4. Hebrews 2 articulates this principle most clearly, describing how salvation “first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; 4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost.”

Notice that none of these actions are internal in the sense of direct divine action on the human will. They all involve external elements: God’s decision to send Christ to atone for sin, God’s choice to send laborers to preach so that specific people or larger regions could hear and believe the gospel, and God’s display of miracles among certain people as evidence to help convince them.

Since Paul is specifically praying for those who were hearing him on that particular occasion, we might rule out that Paul is praying for laborers. However, Paul has also been clear elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 3:6 that sometimes one preacher plants the seed and another preacher waters that seed. (In that same passage, Paul gives credit to God, which is to be expected if God is sending both preachers.)

Ultimately, we must take notice that there is no explicit mention of God acting internally on human decision-making faculties to cause belief in Acts 26:29. In fact, there is actually no description of how God would answer this prayer from Paul. Since we can establish that New Testament authors such as Paul readily identify several external divine actions that contributed to men accepting the gospel, we must ask exactly what detail in Acts 26 suggest that Paul is petitioning God to do anything other than to be willing to accept any of his hearers who might come to believe, to send additional laborers to preach to them after his is gone, or to perform miracles to further confirm his testimony and convince them. And, when it comes to the text of Acts 26, there is simply nothing that would fall outside of these established, expected patterns.

In light of these considerations, it becomes clear that Paul's prayer here in Acts 26:29 is simply a typical intercessory prayer in which one party mediates and petitions God to accept others, a type of prayer we see going all the way back into the Old Testament priests and prophets. Paul is praying that God would continue to be merciful and to take action for these specific individuals. Such a prayer does not require the idea that Paul expected God to irresistibly and unilaterally cause his hearers to believe.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Number one, Paul is crediting God in general for those things (sending Christ, sending messengers, providing miracles, etc.) that led to the result described in verse 17 but not for either of the particular items mentioned in verse 17, such as sin or obedience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our next prayer of thanks comes in 1 Corinthians 1:4.

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

Here Paul expresses a simple idea. God deserves credit and thanks for giving grace to the Corinthians. There is nothing about such a basic idea that suggests or necessitates anything more than the atonement of Jesus Christ. The context, however, makes reference to speech, knowledge, and confirmation by means of divine gifts. Consequently, if there is a need to be more specific about what Paul is thanking God for, once again it seems that the details reflect God's decisions to send messengers to preach and provide knowledge the gospel as well as miraculous confirmation of their message.

Paul goes on to express additional thanks in verses 14-17 of 1 Corinthians 1. However, Paul is very specific in his thanks in these verses.

**1 Corinthians 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you,** but Crispus and Gaius; 15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. 16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. 17 **For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel:** not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

Paul conveys his gratitude to God for the fact that he did not baptize most of the Corinthians. And, he explains that God did not command or commission him to baptize when God sent him forth to preach the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15 contains another expression of thanks. But again, the context identifies that the gratitude is specifically for the immortal resurrection of the body, which God provided through Jesus Christ and by which we overcome physical death.

**1 Corinthians 15:50** Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. **51** Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed**, **52** In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and **the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed**. **53** For this **corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality**. **54** So when **this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory**. **55** O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? **56** The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.**57** **But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Next, we move on to 2 Corinthians 2:14.

**2 Corinthians 2:14** Now thanks be unto **God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.**

In this passage, Paul is also fairly specific regarding his gratitude. He thanks God for causing Christians to triumph. And he thanks God for making the knowledge of God known in every place by means of “us.” “Us” could either refer to Christians in general or it could refer to Paul and his traveling companions. In either case, it is simply a thanks for God sending laborers. Concerning the gratitude for triumph, typically Christian triumph is depicted as triumph over the world (John 16:33, 1 John 4:4). In either case, as far as Calvinist notions are concerned, at best this is far too vague to lend any support to the idea that Paul expected God unilaterally and irresistibly acted on the decision-making faculties or attitudes of men. At worst, the general implication that this triumph is “over the world” shows that our triumph pertains to external forces and factors, such as persecution such as Romans 8:35-39, rather than internal forces such as doubt or sin. Romans 8:35-39 similarly declares that the faithful are “more than conquerors” over external factors such as ungodly angels, persecution, famine, poverty, and the sword. Moreover, it would also have to be shown whether or not this triumph is conditional on characteristics such as faith and whether or not faith is within a man’s own power of choosing. None of these critical details are discussed in this passage, leaving Calvinists with no support for their very particular interpretation.

We find Paul also giving thanks in 2 Corinthians 8.

**2 Corinthians 8:16** But **thanks be to God, which put (G1325) the same earnest care (4710) into the heart of Titus for you**. **17** For **indeed he accepted**

**the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you.** 18 **And we have sent with him the brother**, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; 19 **And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace**, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: 20 Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: 21 Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 22 **And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent (4705) in many things**, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you. 23 Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.

The word for “put” here is “didomi” (G1325) and it can denote the idea of “assigning” someone a role or job in the sense of “to commission” or “appoint to an office” as indicated in the lexicon. Likewise, the word “earnest care” is “spoude” (G4710), which means, “haste.” The word “heart” is “kardia” (2588), which can denote the actual, physical organ but in this case clearly refers to something like “the understanding,” which is also common usage. Consequently, the vocabulary expresses thanks that God assigned or commission Titus to act with haste or due diligence regarding the Corinthians.

The rest of the passage bears out that this statement is about assigning a task rather than God unilaterally inputting an attitude or willingness into Titus. The passage even specifies when and how this happened. Moreover, it specifies that Titus cooperated in this commission. Verse 17 states that Titus “accepted the exhortation.” It goes on to state that Titus “of his own accord” even went beyond the exhortation. Verse 18 defines the “exhortation” as the church “sending” Titus. Verse 19 confirms this by stating that Titus was “chosen of the churches” for this task. And verse 22 states that this selection was conditional, explaining that the churches chose Titus because he had already proven diligent in many things in the past. Notice that the word for “diligent” in verse 22 is “spoudaios,” (4705) the adjective related to “spoude” (4710) in verse 16.

We also know that the Spirit was thought to be active in the decisions of the apostles and elders, directing them especially as they set aside men for certain tasks as seen in Acts 1:20-26 and Acts 13:1-3. Consequently, this is no inner, irresistible, or unilateral work whereby God put “haste” into Titus’ heart for this task. Rather, it is by means of the Holy Spirit directing the church to commission Titus for this work, who of his own accord accepted the task with the same diligence that he’d shown in the past and for which the church chose him in the first place. Paul’s thanks are that God directed the church to select such a faithful man as Titus. And the mention of Titus’ acceptance of the task demonstrates that Paul perceived that Titus was within his own power to accept or reject God’s effort to assign to him this task.

**2 Corinthians 9:11 Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.** 12 For the administration of this

service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; 13 Whiles by the experiment of this ministration **they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men;** 14 And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. 15 **Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.**

Here Paul speaks of thanks being given to God by one local church for the fact that other churches give a generous financial gift to help with their needs.

First, this chapter begins with a clear proof that Paul does not intend to convey that God is acting irresistibly on the decision-making faculties of the Corinthians to unilaterally cause them to give. Rather, Paul regarded the Corinthians as completely within their own power of choosing to give or not. We see this in verses 2-7.

**2 Corinthians 9:2 For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. 3 Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: 4 Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. 5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness. 6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. 7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.**

These verses pose several obstacles to any Calvinist interpretation of verses 11-15. First, most explicitly, verse 7 states that the Corinthians were giving as “each man purposed in his heart.” Paul does not say, “as God purposed in their hearts” but states that the purpose comes from the individual man. Second, in verse 7 Paul goes on to encourage them to give based on the axiom that “God loves a cheerful giver.” Notice this implies that God’s love in this matter is conditional. It hinges upon their action of giving, which was just identified as coming from each man’s own purpose. Third, in verses 2-5 Paul says that he has boasted of their generosity and willingness to give. But, Paul also finds it necessary to take steps in order to prevent the Corinthians falling short of his boasting about them. This potential for real failure would not be possible if the Corinthians’ generosity resulted from God irresistibly causing them to give. Furthermore, so long as Calvinists define God’s efforts as always producing their desires’ outcome, then the potential for failure automatically requires that the impulse to give stems from the Corinthian’s themselves (not to mention that Paul is boasting about traits that they have of their own volition). Consequently, if we read verses 11-15 in context, we know that Paul’s understanding is not compatible with any model in which the Corinthians

decide to give because God acts internally, unilaterally, and irresistibly on their decision-making faculties.

Second, there is also the issue of thanks given to God “for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ.” The word “for” here could denote that God was the cause of their subjection, in a Calvinist sense. But the Greek word “epi” denotes “upon” and in that sense is could simply denote the “reason for” or the “occasion upon which” the people gave thanks. In other words, Paul would be saying that their submission to God’s commands to give created the occasion upon which people gave thanks to God. In other words, the verse wouldn’t identify what people were thanking God for but instead it would identify the occasion that prompted people to be thankful. This seems to be confirmed by the first half of the verse, which in the NIV reads, “Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves.” This phrasing denotes that it was “because” of the Corinthians charity that people were thanking God. What we have here is a series of parallel phrases explicitly emphasizing the concept. It was not that God was causing the Corinthians to give through some unilateral action upon their wills and that those in need were thanking God for unilaterally causing men to give. Rather, it was that the Corinthian’s giving created an occasion upon which people praised and thanked God.

Third, the question remains as to what the recipients of this gift are thanking God for? In other words, what are they crediting God for doing? As the early church writers reflect, the earliest Christians believed that in Christ’s teachings God had replaced Moses’ prescription of tithing to provide for the poor with Christians making all of their goods available to provide for one another. In that context, those in need could thank God for instituting such a generous system without implying that God was directly and unilaterally responsible for causing men to give.

#### **Justin Martyr –**

THE FIRST APOLOGY OF JUSTIN

CHAP. XV. ...**And that we should communicate to the needy, and do nothing for glory, He said, "Give to him that asketh, and from him that would borrow turn not away;** for if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what new thing do ye? even the publicans do this.

#### **Irenaeus –**

AGAINST HERESIES, BOOK IV, CHAP. XIII.

CHAP. XII. 5. ...**the Lord, exposing his covetousness, said to him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast, and distribute to the poor; and come, follow me;" promising to those who would act thus, the portion belonging to the apostles (apostolorum partem)...**But **He taught that they should obey the commandments which God enjoined from the beginning, and do away with their former covetousness by good works,**(9) and follow after Christ. But **that possessions distributed to the poor do annul former covetousness, Zaccheus made evident, when he said, "Behold, the half of my**

**goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one, I restore fourfold."**(1)

CHAP. XIII. 3. And for this reason did the Lord, instead of that [commandment], "Thou shalt not commit adultery," forbid even concupiscence; and instead of that which runs thus, "Thou shalt not kill," He prohibited anger; **and instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [He told us] to share(7) all our possessions with the poor;** and not to love our neighbours only, but even our enemies; and not merely to be liberal givers and bestowers, but even that we should present a gratuitous gift to those who take away our goods.

CHAP. XVIII. 2. And **for this reason they (the Jews) had indeed the tithes of their goods consecrated to Him, but those who have received liberty set aside all their possessions for the Lord's purposes, bestowing joyfully and freely not the less valuable portions of their property,** since they have the hope of better things [hereafter]; as that poor widow acted who cast all her living into the treasury of God.(1)

CHAP. XXX. 1. **For in some cases there follows us a small, and in others a large amount of property...and to those who have not, does not each one of these [Christians] give according to his ability? ...3. For, because He knew that we would make a good use of our substance which we should possess by receiving it from another, He says, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."(2) And, "For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink; I was naked and ye clothed Me."(3)**

Lastly, as indicated by verses 10, 14-15, God was seen as the one who provided the material goods to the Corinthians and others who were doing the giving. In order to credit God and thank God, it would not be necessary to see God as the source of people's choice to give. It would only be necessary to see God as the source providing the giving party with material provisions in the first place.

Next we turn our attention to Ephesians 1 where we again find Paul giving thanks.

**Ephesians 1:15** Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, **16 Cease not to give thanks for you,** making mention of you in my prayers; **17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead,** and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*.

On the one hand, Paul doesn't necessarily identify exactly what he is thanking God for concerning the Ephesians. It could very well be the case that he is

thanking God for general, established things such as God's decision to send Christ for atonement, the extension of offer of atonement and forgiveness to the Gentiles in general and the Ephesians in particular, the decision to send missionaries like Paul to preach to the Ephesians so they could hear the message and believe, or the common provision of miracles as evidence confirming the message.

On the other hand, the context suggests that Paul has frequently petitioned God over an extended period of time to provide wisdom and knowledge to the Ephesians, particularly regarding topics like the inheritance in the kingdom and the power of God that produces resurrection from the dead. Since Paul has been praying this for some time, it stands to reason that he felt God had already provided some knowledge of these things to the Ephesians. In which case, we can conclude that Paul is thanking God for those things he petitions God for here. It should also be noted that there is good reason to think that the first century Christians were accustomed to visitation from angelic messengers (1 Corinthians 12:10, 13:1, 1 John 4:1-3, Hebrews 13:2). And consequently, even the petition for God to give "the spirit of wisdom" would not imply an internal, irresistible, unilateral work on the decision-making faculties of men. Such a petition could easily be fulfilled by God sending men in the power of the Holy Spirit or sending angels to speak to the church.

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

Here again we have Paul expressing thanks to God with regard to a group of Christians, in this case the Thessalonians. But is Paul crediting God for unilaterally causing the Thessalonians to come to faith by irresistible, divine action on their decision-making faculties? As we have noted previously, it was God's decision to send Christ to atone for men, to extend that opportunity for atonement and divine acceptance to the Gentiles in general, to send missionaries like Paul to the Thessalonians in particular, and to no doubt provide the customary miraculous proofs alongside the preaching to such peoples. All of these things would suffice as reasons for Paul to credit and thank God for the fellowship of the Thessalonians. In fact, these ideas are not absent from the passage. When we look at the verses which follow, we see that in verse 5 Paul immediately refers to his

missionary journey to preach the Gospel to them and the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit to confirm his testimony. There is nothing in this passage that would hint or necessitate the idea that Paul had in mind an internal, irresistible, unilateral work of God on the decision-making faculties of the Thessalonians.

The second chapter of 1 Thessalonians also contains a prayer of thanks.

**1 Thessalonians 2:6** Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. **7** But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: **8** So being affectionately desirous of you, **we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only**, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. **9** For ye remember, brethren, **our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable (1912) unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.** **10** Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: **11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,** **12 That ye would walk worthy of God,** who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. **13 For this (5124) cause (1223) also thank we God without ceasing, because (3754), when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.**

Again, we must ask what Paul is thanking God for here? Is he thanking God for causing the Thessalonians to receive the Gospel and to receive it so zealously that it produces good works? And, how do the verses leading up to verse 13 relate to this expression of gratitude?

In verses 6-9, Paul goes to great lengths to explain how they did not “charge” the Thessalonians for their labor among them in the Gospel. The Greek word for “chargeable” in verse 8 is “epibareo” (1912). It occurs in 2 Thessalonians 3:8.

**2 Thessalonians 3:6** Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. **7** For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; **8** Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought **with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable (1912) to any of you:** **9** Not because we have not power, but **to make ourselves an ensample** unto you to follow us.

As we can see, in 2 Thessalonians 3, “epibareo” is contextually defined in relation to Paul working with his own hands so that the Thessalonians wouldn’t have to pay to support him. And, in 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul also describes his efforts along these lines as a deliberate example that he set forth for the Thessalonians to follow. Likewise, here in 1 Thessalonians 2, we see Paul connecting “epibareo” to his “labouring night and day.” Consequently, the similar context of 1

Thessalonians 2 would suggest that Paul is thanking God for the provision that allowed him to earn a living for himself and not charge the Thessalonians.

And why would Paul be so thankful to God for this provision? More importantly, how could God's provision relate to the Thessalonians receiving their preaching as the word of God and not the work of men, as stated in verse 13?

The explanation comes from the connective words that join the various component phrases. Notice that Paul begins his statement of thanks in verse 13 with the words, "For this cause." The Greek phrase is combined from the word "touto" (5124), which is a pronoun meaning "this or that," and the preposition "dia" (1223), which means "through" in the sense of the "ground or reason by which something is or is not done, on account of." In short, Paul is saying, "on account of this, we thank God."

Theoretically, this could relate in a forward-thinking way, as if Paul was saying, "Here is something else that we are thankful for" and then proceeds to identify the items for which he is grateful. However, the phrase could also work to connect backward to the previous comments in the chapter. In other words, Paul could be reminding the Thessalonians in verses 8-12 that he worked with his own hands to provide for himself when he preaching among them and then say, "And for that we thank God." In other words, because of the use of "touto" and "dia" in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, it is reasonable to conclude that the expression of thanks refers to the things described before rather than the things described after these Greek words. In this case, the things that follow could very well be Paul identifying the benefits that resulted from being able to provide for himself.

It is easy to see how such a thing might impact the Thessalonians. If a man comes preaching some new ideas in order to make a living, the Thessalonians might automatically suspect that this was merely a human endeavor. But, if Paul paid his own way and took nothing from them, it might very well give Paul credibility and objectivity in the eyes of the Thessalonians.

The fact that the Greek words "touto" and "dia" are meant to refer backward, rather than forward is confirmed by the use of the word "hoti" (3754) immediately after the phrase "we thank God." "Hoti" means "because or since." And consequently, it would seem that "touto dia" is meant to relate Paul's thanks to his previous comments and "hoti" is meant to relate his thanks to the comments that follow. The full chain depicted here displays a connection between Paul providing for himself, thanking God for that provision, and then listing the benefits that resulted from God's provision. Ultimately, Paul isn't crediting God with an irresistible, unilateral, inner action on the Thessalonian's decision-making faculties. He is crediting God for external, material provision because that external support helped Paul win over the Thessalonians and generate a good example for them to follow.

**1 Thessalonians 2:17** But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, **endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with**

great desire. 18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20 For ye are our glory and joy. 3:1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2 **And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:** 3 **That no man should be moved by these afflictions:** for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. 5 **For this (5124) cause (1223), when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.** 6 But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: 7 Therefore, brethren, **we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress** by your faith: 8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. 9 **For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;** 10 **Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?** 11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. 12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: 13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Chapter 3:9 once again expresses Paul's thankfulness to God in regard to the Thessalonians. But several relevant details are clear from the context.

First, in chapter 3:3 and 5, Paul expresses that he is motivated out of fear that the Thessalonians might "be moved" by the afflictions, be tempted by the devil, and his labor to preach to them would be in vain. This context makes it clear that in Paul's eyes, the faith of the Thessalonians was far from secure or guaranteed to persevere. This is clearly not compatible with the Calvinist idea of God acting irresistibly to cause men to believe and endure. And these details make it impossible to conclude that Paul is crediting and thanking God for any sort of irresistible, internal action on the decision-making faculties of the Thessalonians to cause them to believe.

Second, Paul desired to come and visit the Thessalonians again. We see this as early as chapter 2:17-18. Third, the reason Paul desires to see the Thessalonians again is because their faith encourages him in his work. This is clear as early as chapter 2:19-20. The idea of seeing the Thessalonians standing among the redeemed when the Jesus returns motivates Paul to labor with joy and to endure difficult moments, such as being separated from those he loved. This makes simple sense. Everyone that labors for any purpose finds not only joy but further encouragement in his efforts when he sees positive results from them. Fourth, Paul was unable to visit the Thessalonians as we see in verse 18. So, he sent

Timothy in his stead as can be seen in chapter 3:2 and 6. Fifth, one reason that Paul was eager to visit (and ultimately decided to send Timothy to visit) was so that the afflictions mentioned in verses 3-5, and 7 wouldn't discourage their faith. Sixth, chapter 3:2 and 6 make it clear that Timothy's purpose was to further teach, remind, and establish the Thessalonians in Christian doctrine. Seventh, it is clear in verse 10, that Paul's petition is to see the Thessalonians again. (Notice that Paul also asserts that Paul's presence as a teacher would bring further "completion" to their faith. This is perfectly in compliance with Romans 10:13-17, which emphasizes external factors like preaching in process of conversion to belief, rather than internal, irresistible forces acting unilaterally on human decision-making faculties.)

These factors bring clarity in two ways.

Number one, this overall contextual thrust is important to identifying what Paul is expressing thanks for in verse 9. Paul has already visited the Thessalonians. He wants to see them again. He has tried to visit them but was unable. He wants to know the status of their faith. He is desperate to find out and to send comforters to encourage their faith so they won't fall away. And news that they are continuing in faith gives him joy that his hard work to preach to them was not wasted and encourages him to continue on despite his own troubles.

Number two, Paul's mention of preaching in this context itself provides corroboration that Paul has his opportunities preaching in mind as he gives thanks. But beyond that, Paul's mention of past preaching in verse 5 provides 2 other indications regarding his sentiments. First, Paul's fear that his labor for them might be in vain contrasts strongly with his relief and thankfulness. Instead of feeling that his preaching was wasted, he is thankful for having the opportunity to preach to them. Likewise, Paul's acknowledgement that he had difficulty being able to visit them in chapter 2:17-18 also contrasts with his thankfulness. The more rare opportunities to see them became, the more it would make sense that Paul would be thankful for the past opportunities that God had opened for him to preach to them.

In this larger context, it is reasonable that Paul's thankfulness in verse 9 is for either his past visits with the Thessalonians (which first brought them into fellowship) or more generally for God's external efforts to reach and save the Thessalonians. These external efforts include God's decision to send Christ to atone for men, to extend that opportunity for atonement and divine acceptance to the Gentiles in general, to send missionaries like Paul to the Thessalonians in particular, and to no doubt provide the customary miraculous proofs alongside the preaching to such peoples. All such things would properly credit God for His work to bring the Thessalonians to faith while still necessarily reconciling with the very real possibility that the Thessalonians could fall away from the faith as expressed so emphatically here by Paul.

Lastly, it is necessary to consider the meaning of Paul's prayer in verses 12-13.

**1 Thessalonians 3:12** And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: **13** To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Here the question is “how does Paul expect God will work to increase the love of the Thessalonians?” Does he expect that God will act unilaterally to irresistibly cause them to love more or to establish their hearts as blameless? Again, the context makes the meaning of this petition quite clear. First, Paul’s fear that his labor might be in vain prevents us from thinking that Paul saw God’s efforts, whatever the mechanism, as irresistible and unilateral. Second, verse 10 states that “night and day,” Paul prayed to be able to visit them so that by his visit he “might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.” Clearly, Paul believed that it was by means of his (and Timothy’s) preaching and teaching that the Thessalonians might be encouraged to increase in love and good works.

As we can see, there is neither any mention nor any necessity to speculate about God accomplishing these things by means of an irresistible, internal action on human decision-making faculties, a notion that is incompatible with Paul’s explicit fear that that the Thessalonians might fall away from the faith.

**2 Thessalonians 1:2** Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **3** We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; **4** So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: **5** Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: **6** Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you... **11** Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power: **12** That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1 really doesn’t present any new issues that we have not already seen in other passages.

First, as with other passages that we’ve examined, in 2 Thessalonians 1 there is no specific identification by Paul of how God acted to bring about the Thessalonians’ faith and love in Christ. Freewill credits God with multiple, substantial actions to bring men to salvation. As stated previously regarding similar verse, any of these divine actions would suffice as a basis for thanking and crediting God without requiring any Calvinist, unilateral mechanisms.

Second, the Greek word for “because” is “hoti” (3754), which we have already seen means, “because, since.” It is not clear whether Paul is using “because” to identify the item he is thanking God for or to identify the occasion that prompted

him to thank God. In practical terms, Paul could be thanking God for the growth of the Thessalonians' faith and love. Or, recent reports or experiences of the Thessalonians' love and faith in action might be prompting Paul to thank God for sending preachers to such noble-minded and generous people and bring them into the church.

Third, this thanks for the Thessalonians doesn't occur in a vacuum. We have already seen Paul thanking God for sending him to preach to the Thessalonians, for making a way for him to go there, and for providing material supplies to Paul while he was among them because these things facilitated bringing the Thessalonians into church fellowship. Since Paul has already specified in a previous epistles what things he thanked God for concerning the Thessalonians, it is likely that Paul intended to simply carry over those things here to an audience who was familiar with his past comments.

Fourth, it is clear that verse 4 moves on from things that Paul is thanking God for to things that bring Paul and his coworkers spiritual reward and, in some sense, credibility. Verse 4 begins, "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." What is so relevant about this comment is that here Paul is taking credit for the patience and faith of the Thessalonians. From this, we can learn something critical about what Paul means when he credits someone for a result. Clearly, Paul did not understand his own actions toward the Thessalonians to be unilateral or irresistible. Consequently, for Paul to thank God (and by extension give God credit) for certain results would not imply or necessitate that Paul saw God's actions toward the Thessalonians (or any others) as unilateral or irresistible.

Fifth, the prayer in verses 11-12 is a petition that God will continue to "count you worthy." This is simply a typical intercessory prayer for God to continue to extend gracious forgiveness and mercy toward someone. We know from passages like Matthew 18:23-35 that God's forgiveness is not necessarily permanent toward those whose debt He forgives. So, praying for God to continue in grace and mercy toward someone doesn't entail that God is causing them to respond correctly to that grace and mercy. To the contrary, the fact that Paul feels it is necessary to petition God to continue to count them worthy, shows that Paul did not see their perseverance as divinely guaranteed or irresistible. Nor did Paul see any guarantee that God would complete his good pleasure toward them or the intended goal of faith. (Moreover, it should be noted that Paul's use the phrases "that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God" in verse 5 and "count worthy of his calling" in verse 11 disproves the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election.)

Sixth, we might also take a moment to examine the petition that God would "fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power." Number one, there is nothing in this phrase that differs substantially from the basic intercessory prayer that God would continue to extend forgiveness and mercy. (Again, we note that Matthew 18 and elsewhere reveal that continued forgiveness isn't guaranteed.) Number two, it is also worth examining the way this phrasing is

rendered in other translations. The NIV translated this portion of the prayer as “that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.” Rather than potentially conveying that God would fulfill his every desire (as if the Thessalonians’ choice was irrelevant), the emphasis in the NIV conveys that God is simply bringing success to the good desires and faithful deeds that the Thessalonians already have. Such phrasing would petition God to complete the desire of the Thessalonians, not to cause them to desire or believe anything. Ultimately, there is nothing in the phrasing of this prayer that would demand Calvinism’s unilateral, irresistible, divine action on the decision-making faculties of man.

**1 Timothy 1:11** According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. **12** And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for (3754) that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; **13** Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: **but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

Although this passage begins with an expression of thanks, the items that follow the thanksgiving are not only incompatible with Calvinism but they contain proofs against Calvinism.

First, Calvinism teaches conditional election in which God unilaterally selects who to irresistibly cause to believe and repent without regard for any traits, past, present, or future, in the man himself. But here Paul says that Christ put him into the ministry because he “counted” or “esteemed Paul faithful.” Although this isn’t general election to salvation, only election to a ministry position, it does show a conditional election. The Greek word here is “hegeomai” (2233), which can mean “to be a leader” but it can also mean “to deem, account.” In the first sense, it is translated as “Governor,” “he that is chief,” or “chief men” in passages like Matthew 2:6, Luke 22:26, and Acts 15:22. But given the context, it is more likely that Paul means “hegeomai” here similar to how he uses it in Acts 26:2, 2 Corinthians 9:5, Philippians 2:3 and 6. In Acts 26:2, Paul says, “I think myself happy” and the word “think” is “hegeomai.” In 2 Corinthians 9:5, Paul says, “I thought it necessary” and the word “thought” is also “hegeomai.” Philippians 2 uses “hegeomai” as the word “esteem” in the phrase “let each esteem other better than themselves” in verse 3 and as “thought” in reference to Christ in the phrase “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” in verse 6. In all of these occurrences, Paul clearly uses “hegeomai” to refer to a value or quality perceived or accredited to someone or something.

Second, in verse 13 Paul’s comment seems to overlap with general election when he describes his sinful status before his encounter with Christ and says, “I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” Calvinism teaches that not only election but also guilt are unconditional because each offspring inherits Adam’s guilt and condemnation at the moment of conception long before that individual himself or herself sins. It seems that if both guilt and election were not conditioned upon anything in us, it would prohibit the entire idea of God accepting certain excuses, such as ignorance, for sins. Such things would be irrelevant. When Paul presents his ignorance as a relevant basis for God extending

mercy, he demonstrates that God's mercy and forgiveness are not unconditional. These are depictions of a cooperative dynamic in which God forgives in response to certain traits posed by particular individual sinners.

The fact that Paul's conversion is simultaneous with Christ's initial commissioning of Paul to the ministry (Acts 9:3-6, 15, Acts 22:6-10, 13-15) makes it all the more impossible to distinguish these comments in verses 12-13 from Paul's election to salvation. In this light, it is clear that Paul says he received mercy conditionally, because his sins were performed in ignorance. Paul does not feel he would not have obtained mercy if he had performed these sins in full knowledge. Consequently, this passage contains two assertions that Paul's election was conditional upon his faithfulness and the fact that his sins were done in ignorance. While this does not speak directly to Calvinist teaching that God unilaterally and irresistibly causes men to believe by acting inwardly on their decision-making faculties, it does demonstrate that this passage is not compatible with Calvinism in general.

Next, we can consider to what extent the thanks offered here corresponds to Calvinist concepts. First, in addition to demonstrating the conditional nature of election, verses 12-13 also specify what Paul is thanking God for. He is thankful for at least two things. Number one, he is thankful that God counted him faithful for the task of ministry. Number two, he is thankful that he obtained mercy. Since these two items are both conditional upon traits within Paul, such thanks does not infer that God irresistibly or unilaterally put these traits into Paul. Paul isn't thanking God for the trait of faithfulness any more than he is thanking God for the trait of ignorance. Rather, he is thanking God for the act of esteeming Paul as faithful on the basis that his wrongdoing was done in ignorance.

Second, it might be argued that the phrase "enabled me" in verse 12 is also something that Paul is thanking God for. There are two facts that dispel any Calvinist implications to this phrase. Number one, the phrase "who enabled me" is closely associated with the phrase "for that he counted me faithful." Consequently, there is no reason to insist that the "enabling" was also conditioned upon Paul's faithfulness. In fact, the Greek word "for" here is "hoti" (3754), which means "because, since." In short, this phrase reads, "who has enabled me because he has counted me faithful."

Number two, we can consider the meaning and usage of the word "enabled." The phrase "enabled me" is the Greek word "endunamoo" (1743), which comes from the Greek word "dunamoo," (1412) and ultimately "dunamis" (1411).

### 1743 **endunamoo**

from 1722 and 1412; TDNT-2:284,186; v

AV-be strong 3, strengthen 2, increase in strength 1, enable 1, be made strong 1; 8

1) to be strong, endue with strength, strengthen

2) to receive strength, be strengthened, increase in strength

3) in a bad sense

3a) be bold, headstrong

“Dunamis” is commonly associated with miracle-working in the New Testament (Matthew 7:22, Matthew 11:20-23, 13:54-58, Mark 5:30, Mark 6:2-5, Mark 9:39, etc.). And, “dunamis” is also commonly associated with apostolic ministry, including by Paul in such passages as 2 Corinthians 12. In fact, 2 Corinthians 12:12 describes the characteristics of an apostle as “signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” The Greek word for “mighty deeds” is “dunamis” (1411). Consequently, it is clear that here in 1 Timothy 1:12, Paul is not speaking of a Calvinistic enabling that irresistibly leads a man to believe and repent. Instead, Paul is talking about God giving him miracle-working power as part of God commissioning him to be an apostle.

From start to finish, in 1 Timothy 1:12-13 Paul is not thanking God for irresistibly and unilaterally enabling him to believe and convert. He is thanking God for esteeming his traits of faithfulness and ignorance as a worthy basis for forgiveness, apostolic commission, and miracle-working power.

2 Timothy 1 provides another example of Paul’s thanksgiving.

**2 Timothy 1:2** To Timothy, *my* dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. **3 I thank God, whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;** **4** Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; **5** When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. **6** Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

In this prayer, Paul specifically and plainly identifies what he is thanking God for. He states that he is thanking God that he “has remembrance without ceasing” of Timothy in his prayers. However, reminding people is an established role of the Holy Spirit according to Jesus’ teaching in John 14:26. Of course, there is nothing irresistible in such an action. After all, friends, family, coworkers remind us of things all the time and it isn’t irresistible or guaranteed that we will follow through on those things they remind us of. Consequently, nothing in the act of reminding suggest an irresistible or uncooperative action performed on us by God.

**Philemon 1:1** Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, **2** And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: **3** Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,** **5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;** **6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.** **7** For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. **8** Wherefore, **though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee**

**that which is convenient, 9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee,** being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. **10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus,** whom I have begotten in my bonds...

If we were to abbreviate this verse somewhat, Paul's comments could be rendered simply as, "I thank God hearing of thy love and faith toward Jesus and the saints." Three questions arise. Is Paul thanking God for Philemon's love and faith? If so, by what means or mechanism does Paul assert that God brought about this love and faith? And lastly, does the phrase "thy faith may become effectual" imply that God is unilaterally or irresistibly not only the cause but the guarantee of faith achieving its intended result?

First, verse 8-10 continue Paul's reference to Philemon acting in love but here three times Paul "enjoins" or "beseeches" Philemon to act in love. Clearly, Paul did not consider Philemon's love to be irresistibly guaranteed by God, nor did Paul consider this love to be unilateral on God's part. Instead, Philemon had a voluntary and cooperative role and was capable of failing in that act of love, which in turn, was such a real possibility that Paul thought it was necessary to write specifically in the effort to admonish Philemon to continue in it. Whatever degree of credit Paul is giving God and whatever mechanism Paul perceives God to use in this regard, it is clearly cooperative and resistible.

Second, the two verses on either side give insight into the meaning of verse 6. Number one, verse 5 brings up how Paul has heard of the love that Philemon has exhibited toward Jesus and the church. And verse 7 expresses that hearing of Philemon's love has brought great joy and comfort to Paul and his companions. The intervening phrase in verse 6 also relates to Philemon's love and faith toward Christ and the saints.

Number two, the word "that" is the Greek word "hopos" (3704), which means "how" or "that" and typically conveys the purpose of a thing. In Matthew 2:8, "hopos" is used in Herod's command to the wise men "when you have found him, bring me word again that (hopos) I may come and worship him also." In Matthew 2:23, "hopos" is used to describe how Jesus "dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that (hopos) it might fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets." In Matthew 5:45, "hopos" is used in the phrase "let your light shine before men, that (hopos) they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." In all of these cases, "hopos" essentially means "in order to."

Number three, if we read verses 5 and 6 as a single thought, Paul's comments convey that he has heard of Philemon's love and faith toward Jesus and the church and that the purpose of Philemon's love and faith is to make his faith effectual in every good work. In this light, Philemon 1:5-7 is similar in sentiment to James 2:14-26, Titus 3:8, and Romans 4:9-11. James 2:17 states that "faith, if it hath not works, is dead." Titus 3:8 states that "they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." And Romans 4:9-11 says that Abraham's faith was "sealed" when he performed the act of circumcision. The Greek word for "sealed" is "sphragis"

(4973), which means “confirmed, proved, or authenticated.” The New Testament teaches that in order to be effectual, our faith must become evidence in our works and lifestyle. Verses 5-6 of Philemon simply recount the report that Paul had heard concerning Philemon. Paul had heard how Philemon had acted in love and faith toward Jesus and the saints so that his faith would be effectual in every good work. The word “effectual” here does not necessitate a reference to God’s actions or to an outcome God guarantees, but to Philemon’s motivation for acting in faith and love in accordance with general New Testament teaching about the relationship between saving faith and good deeds. Consequently, nothing in verses 5-7 necessarily relates to the thanks or the prayer in the preceding verses, except for the fact that they are various components of Paul’s opening greeting.

Third, this leaves only the question of what Paul is thanking and crediting God for in verse 4. But since Paul doesn’t specify, it is unclear what about this text would necessitate anything a Calvinistic irresistible or unilateral action on Philemon’s will, especially given that Paul goes on to beseech Philemon, affirming Philemon’s voluntary participation and potential not to comply. In the absence of more specifics related to the prayer itself, we might conclude simply that Paul is thanking God for the gracious forgiveness and peace that Philemon had already been given and for the blessing of Philemon’s fellowship in general. But, it is unclear why there isn’t a sufficient basis for such thanks given God’s decision to send Jesus to teach and provide atonement, God’s decision to accept the Gentiles through Christ, God’s decision to send missionaries like Paul to preach repentance to the Gentiles, or God’s decision to provide miracles through missionaries as further evidence to convince people. There is no reason to suppose that beyond all these actions from God, this thanks for the blessing of Philemon’s fellowship also requires that God must have irresistibly caused Philemon to believe and love by acting unilaterally on Philemon’s decision-making faculties.